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From the Editors

Shannon Harman

To begin our ninth year of publication at the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, we have collected together for our readers a set of articles focused on new and diverse topics explored by both graduate and undergraduate student authors. Many of these authors pursue avenues of inquiry and research on genres that have gone unexamined in past issues of the *GWRJ*, genres such as the alter egos of roller derby skaters and the documents produced during peer review. The variety of research methods undertaken by our authors highlight the complexities of genres and of doing genre research and provide valuable models for our readers wishing to research their own literate activities. Moreover, the genres these authors interrogate span various media and modes, illustrating the pervasiveness of literate activities in our lives and furthering the *GWRJ*'s dedication to exploring genres and literate activity wherever they occur. Because of this dedication, our editors and authors put significant time and effort into this issue, and we hope our readers truly enjoy it and learn from it as we did.

To begin issue 9.1, the first three articles analyze how different media make certain literate activities possible. **Elizabeth Cerullo** uses CHAT to examine the variety of literate activities that surround the game of quidditch, and she concludes that communication using a variety of media is the key to successfully creating and maintaining quidditch teams and organizing tournaments. Next, **Michael Haley** explores the concept of remediation and using it to explain how the popular TV show *Project Runway* helped him edit and complete the novel manuscript he was writing, as comparing the two genres helped him break down the editing process. Then, **Colleen Keefe** talks about the mourning process she went through after the passing of a friend, using CHAT to discuss how social media as a metagenre helped her and others grieve while also making it possible for her create a fundraiser in her friend's memory.

The next two articles examine the spaces that we live and write in. **Nina Jang** walks readers through Stevenson Hall to explore the different decorations people put up on their office doors, and she uses CHAT to demonstrate that office door decorations function as a genre of writing dedicated to self-expression. Similarly, **Su Yin Khor** walks readers through the city of State College (nicknamed "Happy Valley") where she currently lives and attends school, and she details the concept

of translingualism, demonstrating that places can function translingually given the variety of cultural influences on them.

The following four articles focus on writing identity and research identity. **Dakota W. Zientek** takes readers through his own process of writing, and he examines differences and similarities between how he writes for the genre of Twitter and how he writes for the genre of academic essays, noting that his writing identity similarly shapes the writing that he produces in both genres. **Charles Woods** then focuses specifically on writing academic essays, particularly on getting instructor feedback on those essays; he analyzes the different types of feedback that instructors provide and illustrates how such feedback significantly impacts one's writing-research identity. Then, **Tiffany Bishop** tackles the tough issue of writer's block, and she uses CHAT to consider the activities that help her overcome writer's block, offering advice for others to also use CHAT to help them analyze their writing identity and figure out how to tackle their own writer's block. Finally in this section, **Elizabeth Calero** explores the role that emotion plays in her writing, particularly in the genre of her posts on Instagram, and she tracks the responses to some of her more emotional Instagram posts to see how her audience responds to that emotion.

The next three articles examine intriguing new genres of writing. First, **Danielle Smith** uses CHAT to argue that a wall covered in gum in her hometown actually functions as a type of writing and a text in the ways that it is taken up by the audience and functions communicatively among people. Next, **Hayden Sanborn** walks readers through the process of peer editing, using CHAT to demonstrate how editing itself can function as a form of writing and impact other texts. Then, **Amber Laquet** takes on the topic of roller derby alter egos, and she uses CHAT to explore the variety of literate activities that go into the production and distribution of an alter ego, claiming that the author of an alter ego loses control of that text to the audience, whose reception determines how that text ultimately functions.

Finally, the last two articles in this issue are unique and somewhat non-traditional. The first is a brief vignette of a video article by **Sara Koziol**, who takes readers through her process of creating the video, which is available on the ISU Writing Program's website. The final article is a transcript of an interview conducted by **Cristina Sanchez-Martin** of **Jared Alcorn,** owner and manager of Waiting Room Records in Normal, Illinois. In the interview, Cristina and Jared talk about the literate activities that Jared's job entails and that ultimately make Waiting Room Records possible.

As with our past issues, at the end of this issue we have included our "Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*" in hopes that interested readers will become future writers for the *GWRJ*. As we work in our ninth year

of publication, we anticipate continuing to receive new and interesting articles from a variety of writers exploring the literate activities that intrigue them, and we hope to work with these writers to further our collective understanding of how genres work in the world and how literate activities shape us and those around us. We deeply enjoy working with writers, and we are constantly learning from them and their research and being inspired by their creativity and dedication to providing the readers of the *GWRJ* with new perspectives on writing and research in action. We look forward to continuing sharing these unique perspectives with our readers!

Hold that Broomstick: Quidditch Isn't Just for Nerds

Elizabeth Cerullo

In this article, Elizabeth Cerullo examines the relatively new sport of quidditch through a CHAT lens. She describes what the sport is and how the communication surrounding the sport relates to the CHAT process of production, distribution, socialization, reception, and ecology.

For those who are not familiar with quidditch, it is a fictional sport created for the Harry Potter book series by the author J. K. Rowling. This book series focuses on the adventures that witches and wizards go through at a magical school called Hogwarts. At this school, the characters play quidditch by flying on brooms. Once I tell people I play this sport, I get a billion questions, and these are the answers to the three most common ones:

1. No, we don't fly.
2. I'll explain how the snitch works, don't worry.
3. Yes, I have seen the skydiving video on Facebook.

As the questions I get demonstrate, most people only associate quidditch with Harry Potter and do not realize that it's a sport people actually play now. But we're working on making it a more common sport. And how do we work on making this a serious sport? Communication! Communication is how we get our message across. It's not just talking to our teammates during the game. It's how we find teams that we want to play against. It's how we become knowledgeable about other teams when getting ready to

play them. It's how the volunteers running media for the game can spread quidditch's message beyond the field. Without communication, this sport would be nothing. It would not have expanded to over 500 teams globally. Quidditch is more than Harry Potter. It is a sport. It is a lifestyle. It is a love. And communication is what makes the sport possible and is the glue that holds it all together.

How Do We Play?

You may be asking yourself, "What is this crazy Harry Potter nerd sport that this author loves so much?" Well, hold on to your hat, and let me give you some insight into how the sport is actually played, then I will use the ISU Writing Program's approach to **CHAT** (**cultural-historical activity theory**) to explain the communication that makes quidditch possible.

Figure 1 below is a chart created by an ISU quidditch player, Lexi Bedell, that explains the basics of the game. The goal of the game is, first,

Figure 1: The rules of quidditch. Image created by ISU quidditch player Lexi Bedell.

to score points by putting the quaffle (a volleyball) through the hoops (nets at the end of the field), and, second, to catch the snitch, a person with a ball who enters the game after 18 minutes of play. Once a team catches the snitch, the game is over, and whichever team has more points wins. There are seven players on a team: a keeper, who is essentially a goalie guarding the hoops; three chasers, who try to score with the quaffle; two beaters, who try to stop the other team by using bludgers, which are dodgeballs they can throw at the other team; and one seeker, whose job is to find and catch the snitch. Additionally, one of the most unique aspects of the game that the diagram doesn't really touch on is the brooms. The brooms we use are not let's-clean-the-house brooms, but simple PVC pipes that all players must hold, which you can see in video clip links I have provided at the end of this article. So, quidditch is pretty complex, and looking at Figure 1 you can see that there are a lot of different people and tools involved. The players use the tools to engage in what CHAT would call the **activity system** of quidditch. An activity system is really just all of the players, tools, and other objects that interact to achieve a goal, which is playing quidditch in this case. There is also a lot of communication going on as part of this activity system that you can't see in the diagram. All of this constant action, between players on each team, between the two teams, and with the observers could all be considered aspects of the constant **socialization** that is going on during a quidditch game, which refers to all of the constant interaction among people, ideas, beliefs, and so on that make quidditch possible.

The physical environment and the effect it can have on the game is also important; since quidditch games have to be played outdoors, the physical environment could be considered an **actor** in the activity system, just like the players and the tools. Sometimes it can even be the deciding factor in who wins the game. Rain can make it difficult to see, for example. But one of the most important aspects about the sport (in my opinion) is how physical it is for the players. This is a full contact sport where tackling is essential. Males can tackle females and vice versa. There also is a rule called the gender maximum rule where "each team is to have a maximum of four players who identify as the same gender in active play on the field at the same time" according to the United States Quidditch (USQ) organization rule entitled "Title 9 and ¾." This rule works to promote equality between the genders people identify as because it prevents one gender dominating the sport. This rule influences what CHAT would consider to be **reception**, which is how an audience receives, uses, and thinks about a text (or quidditch, in this case), because the multi-gender nature of the sport makes it more interesting and attractive for more players.

How Do We Organize Tournaments?

One of the most complicated aspects of communication involved in playing quidditch doesn't take place on the field. Instead, it takes places through the tools and messages used to organize tournaments. Tournaments are basically the only way for us to play games. Teams travel far and wide to play against each other in various states. Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, Kansas, and Missouri are just a few of the places the ISU team travels to. We spend all day outdoors, playing four or five games in one day, in addition to bracket play (finals) if we make it there. Tournaments typically last one day and happen once a month if we are lucky. That is what makes these tournaments so elaborate, but so necessary, since otherwise we wouldn't have a chance to play competitively. And how do we organize these tournaments, you ask? Communication. In particular, the **production** and **distribution** of that communication.

So what is the best way to produce and distribute this communication to hundreds of college students across the country for these tournaments? Technology, right? What kind, though? Social media is ever expanding, and it is difficult to find one platform that people consistently use. That's where Facebook comes into play. Facebook provides a social aspect in uniting teams by something simple, such as "friending" others on the site. Also, it allows for mass communication, such as in the creation of event pages and different group pages for an organized discussion about quidditch matters. However, it is not enough to just examine where this communication occurs or how it gets distributed; we must also consider the production of the text circulating on Facebook. Production is how we create a text and the tools we use to do so. In other words, production is how those posts on Facebook are formed. So, in this case, someone in the quidditch community has an idea for a tournament. They find a date and a place that works with them, usually months in advance, from the day they are thinking of hosting it on. Then to Facebook they go. The president of the team (whether it be the team hosting or the president of

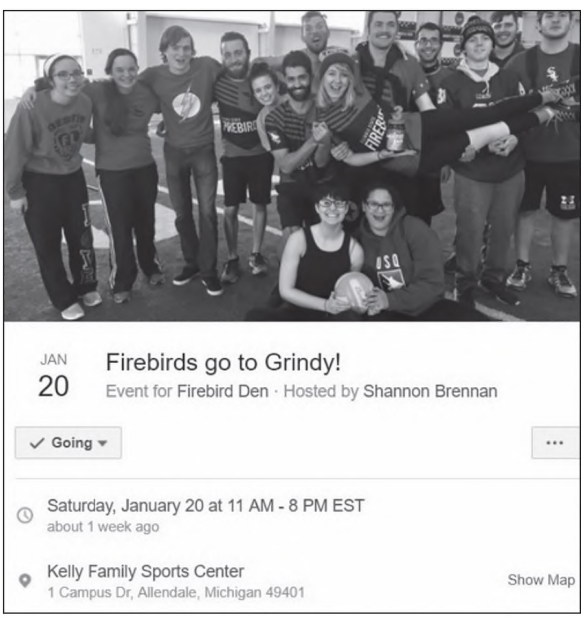

Figure 2: Image of Facebook event page for Grand Valley State University tournament.

our team) creates an event page where they put any valuable information that would be for the tournament. That valuable information typically is the address of the fields, the time the tournament starts, and the date. Also, it is an excellent place to keep the team updated as the events unfold throughout the day, such as if there are any schedule changes. The fact that it is communicated via Facebook makes it even easier to distribute to everyone because the notifications go right to their phones. With this said, technology is key in producing the information on any tournament page. A phone, computer, or tablet makes life a whole lot easier when trying to get the message out through Facebook.

Once the message has been produced, it also gets distributed via Facebook. Distribution is about who gets these messages, why they're getting these messages, and how they're getting the messages, and how all these things interact to shape that message and affect the meaning of that message. In this case, once the event is created by the host team and shared to the friends of that individual creator of the page, everyone who was invited can see it. The message gets passed along very quickly from person-to-person, team-to-team. The president of a team clicks on the event page and says if the team is interested in participating in that tournament. BOOM! Instant feedback on whether the tournament is good to go. By doing it this way, every team can be easily invited through communication over Facebook. So, whether a team from Kansas gets invited or a team from Ohio, everyone can be involved. Once the invite reaches everyone, it's easy to keep track of which teams want to participate and which don't. This feature is of utmost importance to the hosting team because that way the coordinator of the tournament can plan for a certain number of teams to arrive. So, thank you Facebook. Thank you for allowing for these tournaments to happen.

However, the CHAT concept of distribution can also be used in a discussion of exactly who gets these messages . . . and who doesn't. So, in this case, team members all over the country get these messages, and we all use Facebook to send them, so the tools for distribution are all the different aspects of Facebook by which people communicate and that shape the messages sent via Facebook. For example, one of the ways we use Facebook to distribute messages is by creating pages for events and signups for these events to let people know what is going on during the tournament. New people who we want to join the team would not get to see all these events we go to and plan because these pages are private groups for only our team to know about. This may seem like a disadvantage in communicating about our team to prospective players, but it is not because our recruiting strategies involve action. Why just tell someone about quidditch through Facebook when you can actually *show* them? So, we show them videos, the equipment,

and even let them throw the quaffle around. Then, as they join the team, we get them connected with the appropriate Facebook groups.

How Do We Learn More About Teams?

146 teams across the United States of America. 60 teams competing for a national championship. Who will be the victor? That is roughly how large the sport of quidditch is just in the United States, and that doesn't even count unofficial teams (teams that don't play competitively). It is true that there are 146 teams across the country and over 500 teams globally. Despite quidditch not being a sport that is taken seriously, that does not decrease the number of teams that are popping up. So, an important question arises: how do we learn about the other 59 teams when trying to prepare for a national championship?

Quidditch is a sport that constantly connects people together. Take the Facebook example, for instance: each team is linked together through that social media platforms. However, communication between teams also expands from the social media we use as there are numerous websites that exist and discuss all the teams and notable players. In order for those websites to be created, communication between groups is required. This can be considered an aspect of socialization because socialization involves the way that interconnections between human beings can shape the texts they produce. One prime example of a text that impacts the socialization of quidditch teams is the *Quidditch Post*. The *Quidditch Post* is an online

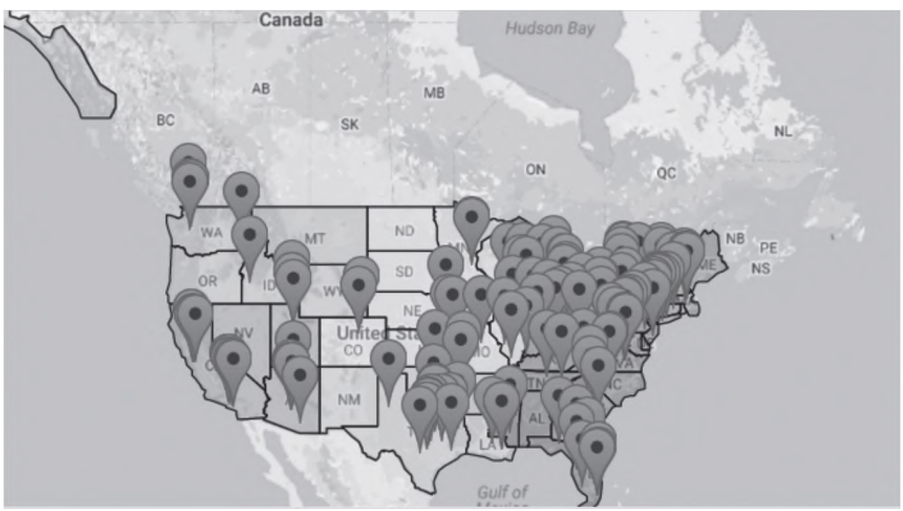

Figure 3: Map of every official quidditch team in the U.S.A.

collection of different recaps about games and tournaments across the entire globe. There are sections for the U.S.A., Europe, Canada, and Australia, just to name a few. In fact, this was the best resource when learning about the competition for World Cup 10, which was the national championship tournament that the Illinois State University Firebirds qualified for and participated in. In compiling all the different information about a team, the author (usually a member of a different quidditch team) would reach out to the team, look at statistics, or get any information needed in order to discuss how that team might do in the tournament. That leads to predictions and to what is essentially expected of the team before they even step foot on the pitch (the pitch is the oval playing field that the game occurs on). In this case, socialization occurs between the author and the team. It can also occur within the team after reading the article and reacting to what was said. All it takes is one article, one podcast, or even one face-to-face conversation to create this interaction. Once this interaction occurs, there is no telling where it might go from there! Maybe the team gets more coverage in the tournament. Maybe the team becomes a fan-favorite. Or maybe the team crashes and burns from all the pressure due to the coverage. The point is that one simple text can create all of this socialization, which is essential to the sport for understanding the competition.

When the team interacts with other sources, their next step is key: what do they do with that information? The CHAT term reception reminds us to think about how audiences take up and use texts. In this case, the reception by a team of all of the information in the *Quidditch Post* can be complicated. It can easily mess with a team's heads. For example, when the Illinois State Firebirds were listening to a podcast on the way to Florida for World Cup 10, they became discouraged at the dismal words that were being spoken about them when learning about the competition. The podcast was created by a group of past and present quidditch players who run a website called the *Eighth Man*. The *Eighth Man* reports scores from all over the country, gives recaps and previews for tournaments, and has standings. During this podcast they were giving a preview of each of the matchups where the purpose was to highlight which matchups would be close or fun to watch. To put it lightly, they predicted the Firebirds would be the laughing stock of nationals. They believed we would not get a single win and barely score any goals. So, our opponents were probably listening to that same podcast and had a certain view about the Firebirds before they even played against us. This shows that a podcast created in one location can be received from teams across the country and make the teams react. However, instead of hearing those dismal words as something that would discourage us, it made us play harder than ever. Our team figured we had nothing to lose, so we went out there and made people rethink doubting us. You see, reception is going to happen

no matter what. People take up texts in different ways. Sometimes they may make snap judgments about either the text, or in this case, the subject of the text (the Firebirds team). But, also in this case, reception may not be simple. A text may cause a reaction (and actions) that the authors might not expect. But that is just one of the many effects reception can bring.

It is also important to see how reception works in the expansion of the sport. As of right now, the reception of quidditch as a "text" is mainly seen in the college world. That is mostly the case because quidditch was created by a few college students at Middlebury College in Vermont. These students had a love for Harry Potter and made the sport of quidditch into a real game that can be played by everyone. These college kids grew up reading Harry Potter, so they have a strong attachment to it. But not everyone grew up reading Harry Potter, so many older adults and younger children do not know about this sport being played in real-life. This results in a small community of dedicated quidditch players where everyone becomes familiar with each other. As we play more and more against other teams, it is not just our opponents that we face, but also our friends that simply go to another college. This creates an atmosphere that is competitive yet fun, which makes this sport even more exciting.

Also, there are quidditch teams that are not from a college. As students graduate, they want to keep playing the sport, so they create their own teams (known as community teams) that still play after college. These teams are usually very good because these are adults that have years playing under the belts, and they chose to keep playing, so they have a deep passion for the sport. Yes, we do play against these teams. Yes, we usually do lose. In fact, Texas Calvary, a community team from Austin, Texas, won World Cup 10. However, even though it may seem like quidditch is expanding outside the college world, these former students did play for a college at some point, so it is just a continuation of a college team. Over the years, the "reception" of quidditch does seem to be spreading out, which means that, in the future, issues of socialization and reception may become even more complicated because college and community teams may have different goals and ways of communicating.

Moving Beyond the Quidditch Pitch

Quidditch is not just contained to the 108x180 sq. ft. oval of the playing area. Yes, the sport does happen on a field, but there are numerous ways that people have to be involved in order to make a game happen successfully. There are the seven refs, as well as the timekeeper, and a score keeper that

are required for every game. Also, there tends to be a field manager who makes sure all the volunteer positions are filled (like timekeeper, scorekeeper, etc.) and tries to keep the schedule on track. With all these people around, it's safe to say that there is socialization indeed. We know that socialization involves the interactions of people and texts. In this case, the text would be the schedule. Not just the game schedule, but the refereeing schedule as well. For example, say there is a game between Marquette and Kansas: Illinois State could be scheduled to be a part of the ref crew to make sure that the game is as fair as possible. So here we have the schedule (which is the text) forcing us to interact with others in order to properly coordinate a game. Part of that schedule is shown in Figure 4. These interactions come in the form of the head ref talking to the assistant refs, assistant refs affirming goals with goal refs, and the timekeeper yelling out the time to the teams. To think these are only scratching the surface of examples! What makes socialization particularly interesting is when it involves members of different teams. For example, usually the head ref is from a different team than the remaining refs to make sure there is no complete bias against one of the competing teams. Personally, when I was timekeeping at World Cup 10, I had frequent interactions with the head ref, who is a renowned player from the Quidditch Club Boston team (so I was totally fangirling). Therefore, socialization happens on all levels due to the simple creation of a schedule.

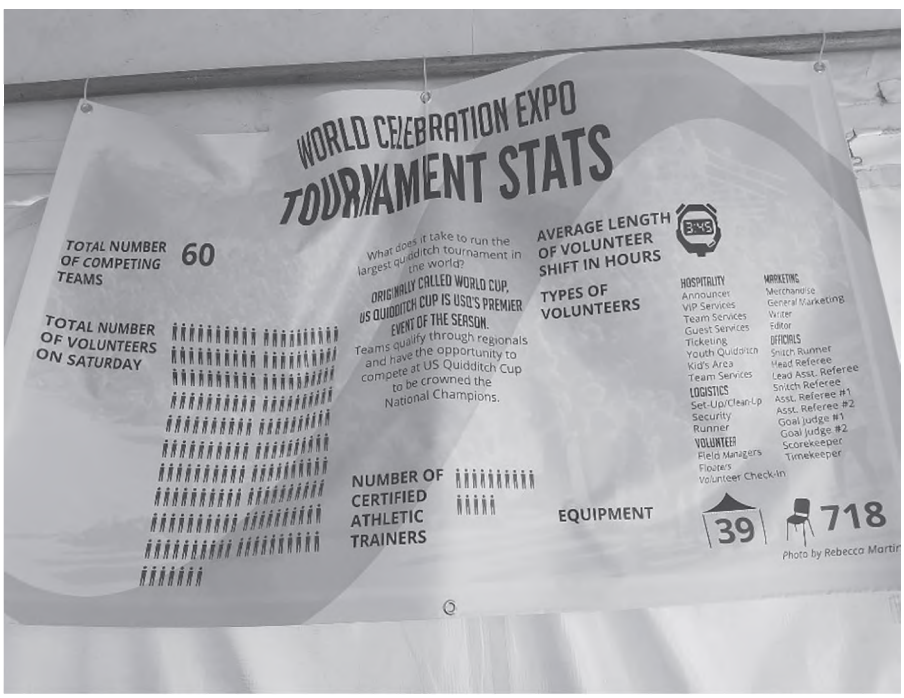

Figure 4: Poster at World Cup 10 illustrating number of volunteers required.

Figure 5: Officials hanging out under a tent before the finals of World Cup 10.

Looking at my top-notch photography skills in Figure 5, you can see that quidditch does take place outside. From the sky, you can tell that it was a sunny day, and the fact that it was in Florida made it even nicer to play outside. However, it is not all sunshine and rainbows. We've played tournaments in the rain, snow, and 25 mph winds. Weather is a major influence in how the team plays, and it alters the text involved. This is ecology. The weather can be considered part of the ecology term of CHAT, but it's not just the weather. Ecology involves all the different kinds of environmental factors that can influence how texts are produced and used. Ecology really involves thinking about the "big picture" of the physical systems that impact texts. If we think of quidditch as a kind of "text," then it's easy to see how the weather and the physical environment become part of the activity system of the quidditch game. And it affects non-playing people outside the pitch as much as it does the people on the pitch. For example, the scorekeeper keeps records of the penalties, scores, overtime, etc. on a piece of official documentation as the game rolls on. It is possible, though, to have that paper become damaged or even lost in drastic cases. In the Marquette tournament, there was a terrible storm that passed by and basically drenched the paperwork no matter how hard we tried to cover it up using tents and umbrellas. Even though nothing bad happened (in the form of scores getting incorrectly reported) because of damaged paperwork, weather is still a force to be reckoned with, as people off the pitch try to make our games run as smooth as possible. Another example of the physical environment affecting ecology was the Grand Valley State University tournament, which was played indoors with a turf field, requiring players to adjust to playing in that environment.

However, people that are required to be there aren't the only ones affected by the ecology; the volunteers that are helping out for fun are also affected. These people, who help for the fun of it, engage in all kinds of literate activities, including creating livestream/videotape of games and taking photographs. But, honestly, people who livestream or videotape games appear once in a blue moon. Usually videotaping games is not a priority to most teams (like ours) because it requires an extra person to be responsible

for it, an extra person we usually don't have. Now livestreams do happen with major tournaments, like World Cup 10, because there are 60 teams playing, and viewers at home, like family, friends, and teammates who couldn't go, want to support their team. The physical environment very much impacts these video feeds because one wrong weather pattern could knock out this communication to viewers back home. And not only is livestreaming affected, but also the photographers. Photographs are probably the coolest thing to look at after a tournament. The various photographers from different teams post their action shots of the different teams on Facebook. These photos are pretty darn cool. People set them as profile pictures and are just overall proud of the moment, which makes photographers sought after. When the photographers are surrounding the pitch, the weather affects them pretty significantly, which impacts the quality and message that the picture could convey. The pictures could turn out great or awful given how the photographer prepares themselves for the weather or how the camera is able to handle the environments. It is these pictures, though, that are crucial to the players and to getting the word out about quidditch. Viewers outside the quidditch community may take one look at those pictures and see how intriguing the sport is and may want to learn more about it. So, these pictures aren't just pictures, but rather a way to expand the sport!

The Snitch Is Released

There you have it folks. Quidditch isn't just for Harry Potter nerds. It's a sport. An unusual sport, I will admit, but a sport that exists and is growing in popularity outside the Harry Potter series. It certainly exists here at Illinois State and many other colleges and cities across the country. If you are interested in joining a team, you can explore the USQ website and find the nearest team to you, or type "quidditch" in the search bar on the Illinois State website. Ultimately, though, we can consider quidditch as a kind of "text" or an activity system that involves all kinds of communications and the production of different kinds of texts. And this means that we can use terms like production, distribution, reception, socialization, and ecology to understand how it works. That's the kicker, though. Terms like that can be applied to a sport! Writing and communication don't just exist in a bubble, and that is what is important when looking how texts are used by people as they engage in activities like quidditch. Because quidditch is anything but typical as a sport, it doesn't necessarily make use of the same kinds of texts and communications as other sports do. It doesn't even really fit into the "genre" of sport in some ways, and it certainly doesn't match up with the genre of quidditch that is described in the Harry Potter books and movies.

As people, including me, use and participate in the genre of quidditch as a real-world sport, we change it (and we're changed by it). And texts and writing and communication all play a big part in this evolution.

Some links to games if you're curious . . .

1. World Cup 8 Highlight video of the championship game: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taDda9lLaEw&t=12s
2. World Cup 9 Highlight video of the whole tournament: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTpvSlToD5s
3. Game between Kansas and Mizzou: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSiC9jcZB6s

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Elizabeth Cerullo is an elementary education major and Golden Apple Scholar. If she isn't obsessing over quidditch you can find her traveling, listening to music, or finding the nearest dog to pet.

Remediating the Runway: How Transfer and Remediation Allowed *Project Runway* Help Me Write a Book

Michael Haley

In this article, Michael Haley considers the processes in which learning the genre conventions of the reality TV show *Project Runway* helped him learn how to edit a literary manuscript. He considers how his antecedent knowledge of literary genres helped him learn about conventions of fashion as presented within the show's weekly challenges. Then, he considers how new knowledge of fashion conventions transferred into knowledge of how to edit a literary manuscript, and he ultimately considers how the various genres merged within the process of genre remediation to result in a publishable book.

Once upon a time, it was my dream to publish not just a novel but a *book*. A *book* that my friends could check out from the library, a *book* that sat on the shelves of Barnes and Noble, a *book* I could not only read but also feel the tight binding of its spine and the exhilarating smell of its ink. After many years and many tries, I finally had an idea for a plot that could potentially form an actual novel. I wrote, wrote, wrote, and wrote—lots of scenes, lots of characters—all in the same book! My book was to be a comedy, a drama, a musical, a wild-as-hell fantasia of thoughts and feelings and ideas that the world had never seen before! Just wait until someone reads it!

This confidence was inspiring, to a degree, until I realized I had a manuscript with lots of words and no story. Or perhaps lots of stories, *too* many stories, but not something cohesive that one would read and call a publishable novel. Now that my "vision" (writers and artists in general like to convince ourselves our works are mystical revelations) was on paper, it became clear that this "vision" had to be tempered into a text that someone else could read, understand, and enjoy. One such tempering process is called **editing**.

Vocabulary Terms Involving Editing? Yes Please!!

Editing is the transformation of one's textual production into an improved text that can be consumed, enjoyed, or otherwise used by other people. This transformation comes in two flavors: grammatical and conceptual. The former is called **copyediting** and consists of both grammatical and mechanical corrections and/or revisions to ensure that the text reads in a consistently "correct" manner that your high school grammar teacher might approve of. However, editing can also entail correcting, balancing, deleting, or otherwise revising much larger concepts than correct grammar. These could include, but are not limited to, things like characters, plot consistency, pacing, and others that will be discussed shortly. This is called **developmental editing,** which is usually conducted by either a professional editor or team of editors who have not written the text themselves. The author doing their own editing on their text is a process referred to as either **draft editing** or **self-editing.** For purposes of this article, our focus here won't lie so much in grammatical types of editing but instead in conceptual, "big-picture" issues of self-editing.

Editing is a process that is fundamental to nearly every textual production that has ever been published. Every book Barnes and Noble sells has been through an editing process, newspaper articles have been edited prior to print, and even this article you're reading right now will have gone through an editing process. This process involves as few as one editor to as many as multiple different editors who are employed by the press/publisher to get the writer's manuscript in a form that the public can read. In the genre of literary fiction, also known as the genre of books you probably had to read for school, the editing process not only involves grammar and mechanical correction, but also consideration of how effectively the author is conveying the story that he/she is attempting to tell. Thus, the editor will look at elements such as character development (do the characters grow in some way?), plot sequencing (does the plot follow a logical sequence?), consistency (do characters behave consistently from scene to scene?), and general likeability (will readers respond favorably to a certain scene or character?) Tracking these elements is the responsibility of the writer, who not only has the task of creating a text that tends to average a few hundred pages in length, but who also has to manage the world of the text, including its characters, conflict, dialogue, internal and external motivations, and plot sequencing. It can be very difficult for any writer to successfully pull off such a feat without the guidance of an editor, who can be in the position to look at the work in question objectively and identify the areas in which the text might need extra help.

I Don't Need No Extra Help! Oh Wait . . .

Extra help is something that all texts and their writers benefit from, and my rough draft of a future novel was no exception. One of the awful things about editing is that the text must often be at a certain level of quality before a potential publisher will deem it worthy enough to hire a professional editor to edit it. This is partially because of constraints on the editor's time and the publisher's checkbook, as well as the sheer volume of manuscripts seeking publication. There simply aren't the resources available to grant every author an opportunity to have their work professionally edited (unless they hire one themselves prior to submitting to a publisher). As editors are only able to handle so many assignments from a publisher, they must be selective of what they invest their time into, and to be selective means that the text must show some type of potential to be worth the time and life the editor puts into it. This "level of quality" is subjective to the reader and dependent upon the genre that a writer is writing in, yet the subjective benchmark nevertheless exists for virtually all textual productions that seek publication.

This means that writers, in addition to being creators of fantastic new worlds, compelling characters, and exciting dramas, also must be their own editors. This is one of those secrets that isn't often mentioned amongst the general public, as a common myth is that the work of writers emerges from their heads more-or-less complete as is, without the need for additional help or guidance. After all, writers are supposed to know all this stuff intuitively, right? Isn't this what separates them from normal people?

Draft, or self-editing, then, is an **occluded genre** (a genre that is not apparent or obvious to see) with its own conventions that most writers discover need to be dealt with for their work to see publication. Although professional editors are trained in such processes, writers themselves are often not. I certainly wasn't. The more I tried to edit the text myself without knowledge of the genre's conventions, the larger and more involved the text grew, as my solution to most of the issues that I deemed apparent in the text was to include *more.* Having other people read the work and comment upon it was only helpful to a degree, as my sensitive ego might have been too insulted by someone who trashed a character that I loved. Or even worse would be the wrong-headed assumption that the gracious reader simply didn't "understand" my work. The thought that I had not communicated my work in a way that the reader could potentially understand, naturally, did not occur to me.

Blah Blah Blah, I Thought This Article Was Supposed to Be About *Project Runway*??

So, in a totally unrelated (but actually super-related, as we'll discover shortly) note, I saw nothing wrong whatsoever with wearing brown and black. Not selectively chosen shades of the two neutrals that play contrastively off each other, mind you, but rather a black belt with brown khakis and cigarette-black loafers was my signature look. Totally rocked it.

My wife thought otherwise and expressed such thinking through eye rolls, awkward silences, and not-so-silent, "Are you *really* going to wear that?" I thought there was nothing wrong with my approach to fashion, unconvinced that my fashion choices communicated any specific messages about me or my sensibilities to anyone else. I was a *writer*, and writers are not supposed to care about how their clothing appears to the rest of the world. Writers are supposed to be preoccupied with other matters, like saving the world from tyranny one poem at a time or something. Fashion is beneath us.

Oh, but little did I know that I was about to discover that what I didn't know about fashion would inform what I didn't know about editing. And what better to inform us of what we don't know than reality TV?

Finally! A Look at the Processes of *Project Runway*

My wife, who is much, *much* more familiar with the conventions of fashion and the fashion industry than I, watched *Project Runway* every week. She told me about the show a few times, and it was often present in the background of our apartment while I would write. Little by little over the course of season four (this was a while ago, folks) the judging segments started to catch my attention. I began to pay more active attention to the whole show, and, eventually, I became hooked.

Project Runway, for those of you who don't watch it, falls into the genre of reality-contest shows. Aspiring fashion designers are presented with a challenge to create a fashionable, runway-ready garment within various styles (an outfit for the red carpet, an avant-garde outfit, something made from unconventional materials, etc.) within the time frame of usually one day. The garments go through numerous processes that involve:

1. Initial inspiration
2. Sketching
3. Selecting and purchasing materials

4. Constructing the outfit with materials
5. Critique of outfit by show mentor Tim Gunn along with his suggestions for improvement
6. Finishing the construction of the garment
7. Enhancing the garment with additional processes, including decisions about what makeup to adorn the models with, what accessories will accompany their outfit, and what type of walk the model will perform to present their outfit on the runway
8. Judging, composed of a model (Heidi Klum), a fashion designer (Michael Kors in earlier seasons, Zac Posen in later seasons), a fashion editor (Nina Garcia of *Elle Magazine*), and a variable guest spot, which could include actors and actresses or other models and fashion designers, all who judge the contestants' outfits and rank them top, bottom, or safe
9. Critiquing the garments, in which the judges tell designers in great detail what they did and did not respond favorably to
10. Deliberation amongst the judges on who should win the challenge and who should lose
11. Congratulating the designer of the winning outfit
12. Eliminating the designer of the losing outfit
13. Next week, next challenge!

The Process of a "Vision"

One thing that *Project Runway* really highlights about one's artistic "vision" is that creating a fashionable garment is not just having a great idea or a flash of inspiration. Rather, constructing an outfit that reflects the designer's vision is a messy process full of problems, compromises, and unforeseen constraints. The designer might have an idea for a gorgeous evening-wear gown, but then choose a fabric that does not "move" (flows well through the air as one walks) on the runway. Or the designer envisions a super-charming jacket to coordinate with pants no one has ever seen before, only to realize that their measurements are off and, as a result, both garments look hideous together. On a weekly basis, *Project Runway* showcases how such problems occur throughout the creative process and that the designers who face such problems are not "bad" designers. Rather, the problems are simply issues that must be overcome if they wish to successfully execute their garments.

These problems present, as Tim Gunn says so frequently, "make it work" moments.

"Making it work" is something I would fail miserably at if trying to sew fabric (my skills amount to reattaching two-hole buttons), but was something I was desperately trying to do in completing the novel I was writing. Like the designers, I found myself overwhelmed with trying to get the novel "to work." As I would write scenes that I thought were getting me to closer to completion, I would realize that characters had developed conflicting motivations. Then I would add more "stuff" to fix the motivation issue but now had pacing issues in the second third of the plot. I would add more "stuff" to balance those issues out, but then the ending suddenly became nonsensical. Like every story I had ever written prior, and even to an extent for the revisions of this very article, my tried-and-true solution was to keep adding more, more, and more and hope that all the additions would magically make the book perfect and complete.

Tim Gunn Comes to the Rescue!

Once I adjusted to the rhythms of the show and began to understand it, I began to pay closer attention to the processes within the designers' work room, particularly the role of series mentor, Tim Gunn. After the designers have created some draft of their outfit (but not complete), Gunn critiques their work and probes their processes, often asking the designers such questions as, "What story are you trying to tell with this outfit?" or "What is your unique point of view as a designer?" This round of mentoring is not unlike **draft editing** of another's manuscript by a person who has not created it. Furthermore, these types of questions are also asked by critics and readers of literary fiction, questions such as "What's this novel trying to say?" or "What's the writer's point of view?" As I had a great amount of exposure to the genre of literature, I found I could draw upon my **antecedent knowledge** (my past knowledge) of literature to make sense of the artistic process of the fashion designers by identifying elements that they had in common. Identifying these elements allowed for learning **transfer** (applying antecedent knowledge to a new process/situation to either create new knowledge or learn a new skill) and allowed me to come to the realization that fashion designers were also storytellers working in the genre of fashion. If they were storytellers, too, then perhaps they might know something about the editing of storytelling that I did not.

I don't know when this first occurred, but, at some point while I was agonizing over a character's motivation or something, I began to daydream

and imagine Tim Gunn was in the workroom critiquing not a designer's outfit but rather my novel in progress. Even in my imagination, he was a gracious but tough critic, and I imagined him asking me the same types of creative and rhetorical questions he frequently asks the contestants on the show: "Who are you as a designer?" (Who am I as a writer?) "How is this fabric working against your point of view?" (How is this chapter working against my point of view?) "Where is the wow factor in this dress?" (Where is the wow factor in my fiction?)

What Editing for the Runway Taught Me About Editing for the Page

The voices in my head were not limited to Tim Gunn. Soon, I began to also hear Michael Kors's voice in my ear telling me that a scene "was too long," "doesn't fit with your overall vision," or (heavens no!) that he "questions my taste level." Nina Garcia might chime in, too, questioning whether the fiction I wrote was "editorial." As my goal was to get published, the one voice I did *not* want to hear was Heidi Klum telling me, "I'm sorry but you are out. *Auf wiedersehen*" (translation—goodbye, or until we see each other again).

Once this had occurred a couple times, it became routine to imagine their questioning as an integral component of whatever scene/chapter/section of the book I was working on. Yet, to fully address such editorial questions that someone as fashionable as Heidi or Nina might have of my work, it became apparent that I would have to follow Nina's advice and approach my work with an editorial eye. Not having a strong grasp on how to do this, I found that the show was more than willing to provide examples of the editorial process. To learn, I mentally took notes as to *why* a designer would willingly remove design elements from their outfits that they personally loved but that worked against their overall vision, which made me realize I might have to remove a chapter (or two . . . or four . . .) to maintain the vision of my work. Or, if reversing a garment (wearing it backwards or flipping it inside out) was the solution to creating a "Wow!" moment, I, too, might have to change the narrator of a scene or move the entire scene somewhere else in the story to really stun my readers. It was *very seldom* that the solution to the designer's problems was to add more to their work, but, rather, to creatively remove existing elements within their work in order to improve it. In other words, they had to *edit* their visions, and I did, too.

When I watched designers face critique from the judges, I saw that they had to be able to fully articulate the aesthetic choices they made within the production of their work in order to be taken seriously. So, too, would I have to fully articulate my choices, which meant that I had to treat every word I

had written as a conscious choice to write *this* word as opposed to *that* word, and I better have a good reason for doing so. This process occurs frequently with designers who fall so in love with their work that they cannot accurately see the effect that their work has upon other people until the judges critique and look at it. There is no way to avoid this entirely, but learning how to self-edit and approach one's work with an editorial eye dramatically increases the chances that other people (readers, publishers, fashion judges) will be able to specifically respond to what the writer wishes to communicate, as opposed to all the other elements that the writer may personally love yet that detract from that communication.

Watching *Project Runway* essentially allowed me to form a connection between a genre of knowledge that I knew (literary conventions) and a genre of knowledge I did not know (editing) via a genre that I was learning the conventions of (fashion). Here's a weirdly drawn graphic to illustrate:

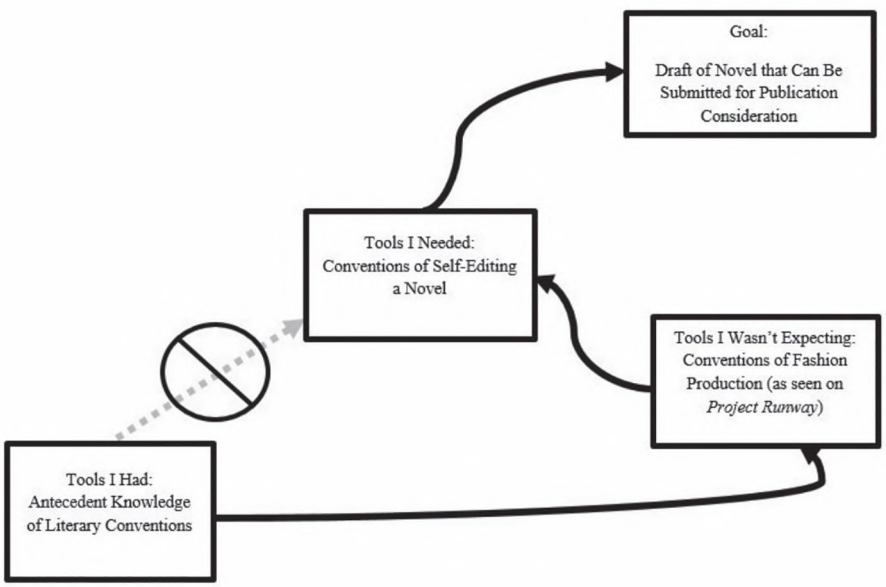


Figure 1: Graphic about antecedent knowledge.

I discovered that all three genres could meaningfully **remediate** (change from one form to another) into the new genre that would become my published book. This remediation was possible because I had mistakenly assumed that having antecedent knowledge about literature would **transfer** to skills in editing a literary text. It did not. However, applying my antecedent knowledge to learn the new genre of fashion production allowed me to see the parallels between literary conventions and production and between

fashion conventions and production, which included principles of editing, and, thus, to transfer this new knowledge to learning the new skill of self-editing a literary novel.

Auf Wiedersehen to the Rough Draft

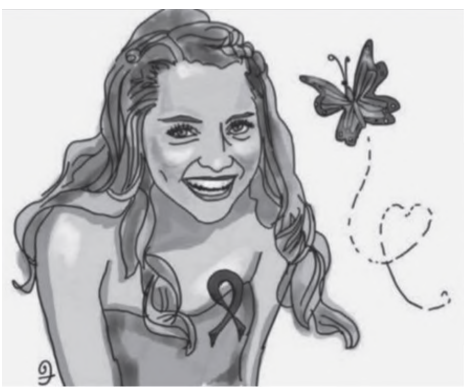
Eventually, I finished draft two, then draft three, and then too many drafts to count as the novel went through numerous personal revisions before undergoing three formal, professional revisions with different editors prior to publication as a book. No two drafts are completely alike, and no two drafts were more different than draft one and draft two. The second and subsequent drafts are the direct result of the knowledge transfer that occurred while watching *Project Runway*, where the socio-biological genre that is "Michael Haley" came into contact with the knowledge and skills of socio-biological genres that are named Michael Kors, Nina Garcia, Zac Posen, Heidi Klum, Tim Gunn, and numerous fashion designers. Their insights into fashion and the processes in which they created and/or judged fashionable attire might not appear anywhere in my novel, but the novel as a published book simply would not exist without them. Yet, the real question of this article remains: could *Project Runway* designers remediate a black belt wrapped around brown khakis with cigarette-black sneakers into the genre of fashionable clothing people would want to wear? Whether one is a designer manipulating fabric or a writer making up a happy ending for the challenge, some genres are simply beyond remediation.

Michael Haley is a Master's student in English at Illinois State University. A lifelong lover of storytelling in various forms, he primarily studies how intersections of culture, personal identity, and language ideologies are created/destroyed/reborn within age-based genres of literature. Following his experiences publishing the New Adult novel *Lost on the Edge of Forever*, he dreams of the glorious day in which he'll actually have enough free time to write a second book—while watching or streaming *Project Runway*, naturally.

Social Media Grieving: How to Find Support in a Digital Era

Colleen Keefe

In this article, Keefe explores the role that social media plays while mourning the loss of a friend or loved one. She uses her own experience of losing her friend, Gabby Ives, to explore the benefits of social media during the grieving process. Keefe explores these ideas by applying cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) to them, and she argues that mourning online allows for a strong community to form.



Artist: Lisa Frost, Rockford, IL

Bright-eyed, inspiring, positive, smart, loyal, determined, lighthearted, and fun describe a few of the many amazing qualities of my sweet friend Gabby Ives. Gabby always appeared to be like any other teenage girl. She was very involved in high school, had many friends, was accepted to the University of Illinois, and joined the Alpha Phi sorority there her freshman year. Gabby worked her hardest to maintain an ordinary life, but she did so in extraordinary ways. She had to work extremely hard in order to maintain her health to do all of the things that she loved because Gabby battled cystic fibrosis (CF), "a progressive, genetic disease that causes persistent lung infections and limits the ability to breathe over time" (Cystic Fibrosis Foundation). Gabby worked so diligently to protect her health that many people were never aware that she was battling this disease. In fact, I didn't know that Gabby had CF for more than a year after meeting her. Here she

was, on a daily basis, battling a disease that constantly led to her discomfort, and I never knew because of the ever-present smile on her face and her relentless desire to make everyone around her happy.

Gabby passed away suddenly on June 21, 2017, and her positive nature left an eternal impression on anyone who was fortunate enough to cross paths with her. Because of how extraordinary she was, her death has been extremely difficult for me and many others to understand. While coping with Gabby's loss this past summer, I made an interesting observation about the ways people were choosing to cope and find support during this difficult time. I found that myself and many others turned to social media platforms, including Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, for support. Tributes to Gabby were constantly posted on these different platforms days, weeks, and even months after she passed, and these posts all looked very different. Depending on the site they were posted on, some had pictures, while others were strictly words. Some people chose to use multiple pictures of Gabby, while others chose just one. And some people spoke *to* Gabby in the posts and some spoke *about* her, her character, and the vast impact that her life had on the world. I found all of these differences interesting, and I found myself wondering why so many differences existed among the same platforms.

These questions I asked led me to examine the production of these texts, or social media posts. The production of a text is an extremely difficult and complex process. These specific posts in question were written during mourning, which is also an extremely difficult process. I wasn't finding any answers on how to understand the loss of Gabby, but I knew I had one tool to be able to break down and begin to understand the writing processes of these grieving social media posts. This tool is **CHAT, or cultural-historical activity theory**, which, when applied to **literate activity**, becomes a "set of theories about how people act and communicate in the world through a production of text" (Walker 72). I knew this theory would allow me to think critically about this writing practice and help me understand the how/why/what of these posts in order to begin to find a way for me to receive support.

What Does the Internet Have to Say About Mourning on Social Media?

Before even touching on the conversations found on the Internet that suggest ways to handle death on social media, I think it is important to discuss where people post and what these posts look like. ISU's version of CHAT, which focuses on literate activity, identifies terms that help us define and understand some of the writing practices that we use across many genres and settings.

The first of these terms that is directly related to these social media posts is **production,** which deals with the means through which a text is created. There is a vast difference between posts on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. I observed that Facebook posts for Gabby seemed to be much longer and usually had a focus on words rather than pictures, while Instagram posts tended to have multiple pictures with somewhat shorter captions. Twitter has a 140-character maximum in a post, and this limitation greatly influences the types of tributes that are posted because they have to be much shorter. I noticed that many of the tweets for Gabby usually just said some rendition of "breathe easy" or "miss you."

While these are all very different means of production, I did see a lot of overlap because of the collaboration between these websites. It's probably safe to say that most people around my age (20) have a social media account, and many have more than one. These social media platforms have many agreements with each other and let users connect their accounts to help them find friends to follow and to post all at once across different sites. Because many of my friends have linked accounts like this, I noticed quite an overlap between platforms as I made my observations. While this overlap slightly changed the nature of the posts I saw on Facebook, these duplicated posts still noted that they were from Instagram, for example, keeping each post native to its original platform.

The constantly changing social media platforms and the constant release of new technology makes it difficult to define any sense of public grieving on the Internet. While I understand that there are no formal rules to guide users when creating and publishing online memorials, I still wanted to know what, if any, conversations exist about the etiquette of posting an online tribute. A simple Google search—"social media coping with death"—led to many articles and informal blog posts about suggested etiquette when choosing to post. Some of the articles and blogs discussed negative experiences with social media postings pertaining to death, while others detailed positive experiences. Three articles in particular stood out to me. These articles were *Dealing with Death on Social Media: 11 Etiquette Tips*, *A Guide to Facebook Etiquette after Someone Has Died,* and *10 Rules for Grieving on Twitter*. From these three articles, I comprised a list of the top five etiquette tips that I personally found to be most important. I kept my personal experience with social media grieving in mind while deciding which of these tips appeared to be the most important.

1. *Follow the lead of the family. There is no need to rush to post your farewell message (Thompson; Hiss).*

Almost every article I read had this as a common tip. If you hear about a death of a loved one, you should not be posting about it before the family

or inner circle of friends do. The family, or those that are closest to being family, should be the ones that start the social media tributes. Once they do, that means they are ready for everyone to know, and they are more willing to talk about it. If the family isn't ready for that yet, and someone not close to the family posts, it could result in a lot of people contacting the family and asking what happened, which would be the last thing they need in that tough time.

2. *"Don't 'showboat'" (Thompson).*

It's unnecessary to make a post if the tone of it is simply trying to prove how well you knew the deceased. In a tough time of mourning, there is no place for messages that are boisterous. Make sure that when you are posting, the intentions are centered around the deceased and making a positive tribute to them and not centered around your own intentions of proving that you knew the person.

3. *You do not* have *to post (Wickman).*

Posting a tribute is in no way a necessity. Posting for me was a way of grieving and was beneficial. Everyone handles the grieving process very differently, so, for some people, posting may not be the best option.

4. *"Keep your questions offline" (Thompson).*

Many of us have probably seen comments on these types of posts that ask, "what happened?" or "how did s/he die?" These questions are inappropriate to post in a public forum and are inappropriate to ask a person who is clearly grieving. It is best to wait until an obituary is published or more information is revealed somewhere else.

5. *Consider privacy settings and carefully decide if you want to tag the deceased (Hiss; Thompson).*

When you make a post, make sure you check your privacy settings to ensure they are what you want them to be. It may not always be necessary for anyone in the world to see your post, but, on occasion, this may be exactly the kind of tribute a person deserves. Remember that when you tag the person that has passed, your post may come up on many other people's timelines, especially when they are not expecting it, so beware of these effects and be considerate.

Many of these etiquette tips appear just to be common knowledge. I, for one, did not research this idea until I started writing this article. I created my post without knowing these specific tips. When I made a post to tribute Gabby, I followed the lead of others who were posting, and my number one concern was to be as considerate as possible to Gabby's family and her

closest circle of friends. This relates to **socialization,** which describes the interactions of people as they produce, distribute, and use texts. An important component of socialization is that the *conscious* and *unconscious* engagements when representing different social and cultural practices are both considered. While I can now reflect on knowing that I consciously followed some of these tips, I certainly followed many of them unconsciously as well. While Gabby is the closest person to me that has passed so young, she unfortunately is not the only one in my community that passed away too soon. Observing the trends from previous situations is another way that people form schemas about "proper" ways of grieving on social media. Every time you see a post online, you are interacting with it, whether this is on purpose or not. The observations you make when using these texts all contribute to your knowledge of what you think is possible in the creation of these grieving posts.

These etiquette tips directly relate to another CHAT term, **reception**, which deals with how a text is taken up and used by others. Reception is not just about who will read a text; it also takes into account the ways the audience uses the text that the author may not have anticipated or intended. If a someone posts before a family member is ready, it may elicit phone calls or messages that the family is not ready for. An early post may also end up being the way that someone finds out that a loved one has passed. An author may not have this intention either, but someone may end up seeing a post in a setting where he or she is not prepared, such as work or school. Producing your post with these etiquette rules in mind, both consciously or unconsciously, allows for positive, meaningful interactions to occur and allows for a supportive community to form.

Why Did I Post?

After thinking about it, I realized that there were a couple of reasons that I chose to make a post after Gabby's death. The first of these reasons was to make a tribute to Gabby, her amazing heart, and the great life that she had. I went to a different high school and college than Gabby did, so, while we had some similar followers, I have many followers that never met Gabby. I wanted to post about the ways that Gabby touched my life so that those who were never fortunate enough to meet her could still learn about the strength and positivity she endlessly portrayed.

Another reason that I wanted to post was that social media can serve as a platform for support. When I made my post, I received an outpouring of support from many people—some who knew Gabby and some who didn't.

Every post for Gabby had a comment section filled with positive words and emoji hearts (specifically purple ones, since purple is the color for Cystic Fibrosis). After I made my post, I received countless texts from people who had never met Gabby and wanted to let me know that they were here for me because they saw what I was going through. Making a post meant that I was part of a special type of community — a community that was in mourning and a community that realized that we all needed to lean on each other for support.

Posting after Gabby's passing also helped raise a lot of awareness for cystic fibrosis. A lot of people don't know anyone who is affected by CF, so I received a lot of questions from friends and family who had never heard of it. I made my initial remembrance post within a week of Gabby's passing, but I also made a special post about a month later. During school breaks and summers at home, I work as a server at an Italian pizzeria. I decided that one day I wanted to share Gabby's story with all my customers and donate every penny that I made to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation in Gabby's name. I made a write up to put in each checkbook and took a picture of them once they were printed out. I explained the fundraiser that I was doing in the following Facebook post seen below.

There was a lot that I thought about as I produced this post. The term **activity** is most relevant to use when exploring what I went through as I made this post. Activity encompasses the actual practices that people engage in as they create a text. The most notable component of my activity of creating this text was that I made quite a few drafts before I was happy with how I posted. I struggled with creating the tone of this post; I wanted it

As a lot of you know, I am a server at Armand's Pizzeria in downtown Arlington Heights. I've worked many shifts there over the years, but today is special. I've decided that today I will be working for Gabby Ives. Each one of my tables will get this handout in the checkbook to get to learn a little about Gabby and the amazing life she led. I am also donating all of the money I make today to the CF Foundation in Gabby's name. Armand's ALSO has a great half price pizza special tonight, so if you are looking for something to do for dinner tonight please come by! We are located at 101 W Campbell Street Arlington Heights. Make sure you request to sit in my section!

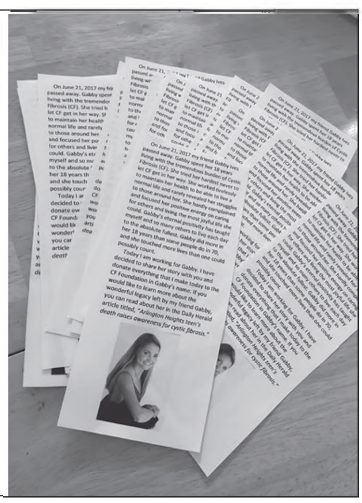


Figure 1: The Facebook post I made for my fundraiser.

to sound positive and fun because I wanted people to come and celebrate Gabby's life and support CF research, but I also wanted to keep a solemn tone because each person who knew Gabby is reminded every day about how much they miss her. The activity of creating the handouts pictured above was also a very difficult one. I know it is hard to read from this picture, but each handout basically just gives some background on Gabby and how positive she was. I, once again, wrote many drafts before I was happy with what I had created. And I still feel like there is no way to capture how great Gabby truly was. I remember sitting on my bed fighting tears while reading obituaries to find the most relevant information about her and searching her Facebook for pictures or any other ideas on what to include. Writing this also helped me have time to sit and remember Gabby because I dedicated time just to think about her while creating these. In addition to the great emotions I felt during this process, I also felt some pressure while writing this handout because I knew it was somewhat high-stakes. I wanted this fundraiser to be successful, and I wanted Gabby to be remembered in incredible ways. I also created the handout before getting the fundraising idea approved by my managers and owners of the pizzeria. After typing up a draft, I nervously brought it to my superiors who approved and supported the idea in a heartbeat.

When I published the actual post, I had to think about what I needed to do to ensure that as many people as possible would see it. This directly relates to the CHAT term **distribution**, which involves the consideration of who a text is given to, for what purposes, using what kinds of distribution tools. I changed my privacy settings on that post from "only my friends" to "public" because I wanted people to be able to share the post, and I wanted their friends, who I may not know, to be able to see it. I also chose to tag Gabby's profile in the post. Facebook links posts that friends are tagged in on your timeline or home screen, and I wanted any of Gabby's friends to be able to see this post to read about what I was doing.

In addition to my Facebook post, the write-up that was put in each checkbook during the fundraiser that night sparked a lot of conversation about Gabby and about cystic fibrosis, which again relates to reception. By the end of the night, I was taking more tables than were even in my section that were all filled by people who had seen my post and decided to come for the event. Before my section got super busy, I had a few tables of regular patrons who had no clue this fundraiser was occurring. One table in specific spent a lot of time talking to me about Gabby's life. They asked me a bunch of questions about CF and about what Gabby was involved in, and it gave me an opportunity to share her amazing life with people who did not have the chance to know her themselves. Due to the generosity of all of the customers that night and the great turnout from the purposeful distribution

of my Facebook post, I was able to donate over $600 to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation in Gabby Ives's name.

What Are the Benefits of Social Media After a Loved One Passes Away?

From my experience, I saw nothing but positivity stem from these grieving posts. A study conducted in 2014 found that "web-based memorials and social media use can enable meaningful grieving rituals, promote connection between grieving individuals, and facilitate community-building practices" (Rossetto et al. 975). Posting enabled me to link with other individuals that were mourning and helped me find a support system of people who were going through the same thing as me. To once again relate to activity, writing never stands alone or in a bubble. No matter what, we are always affected by the conversation that we are contributing to. My post helped me realize that I was positively contributing to a conversation that already existed, and it showed me that I was not alone.

Just like with the Facebook post for my fundraiser, activity is important to explore when discussing my initial tribute to Gabby that I posted within about a week of her passing. I put a lot of thought into creating my post. I, again, created a countless number of drafts because I kept thinking that no matter what I said, it still wouldn't capture how amazing Gabby Ives truly was. It was especially hard to hit the "publish" button because posting would mean that I was another step closer to accepting and admitting that she was really gone. The outpouring of support that I received following the publication of my post helped me realize that the activity of creating this post was worth it.

Social media is also a way for the deceased to have a continued identity. When a loved one passes, they may lose their physical identity, but their social media identity remains. This helps the deceased maintain a legacy in a way that was not possible before the era of social media. This can be understood in relation to the term **trajectory,** which helps us understand what texts do and how they move around in the world. It's important to consider how a genre shifts or changes over time. Someone who is living and is actively posting is interacting with social media while thinking about the present. Over time, specifically when a loved one passes away, his or her Facebook page endures a shift and now becomes a way to memorialize that person. In addition to memorializing the identity of the deceased, social media works to comfort those who are living. This existing profile of the deceased functions almost like a scrapbook of the events of their life. Many people may find comfort in this because whenever they miss their loved ones, they can look at online profiles and use that platform as a way to connect again and revisit memories.

To Sum It All Up

People have always built monuments and cemeteries to mourn and remember those we've lost. Now, in our culture, these traditional ways of remembrance remain but have an added digital level of remembrance. Monuments and tributes are no longer limited to cemeteries, but are also now in the palms of our hands. Through different means of production, socialization, careful distribution, reception, and activity (creating the post), I was able to find support for myself and make a tribute to a beautiful friend. The same study mentioned earlier said, "these benefits of online memorializing may stem from the inexpensive, accessible, and anonymous nature of social networking sites, which provide instant and unlimited access to others, allowing people to express grief, overcome distance to form community, and give/receive support" (Rosetto et al. 975). The accessibility of social media platforms provides users an inexpensive way to distribute information about funeral arrangements, to post tributes, and to remember loved ones.

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Colleen Keefe is a junior at Illinois State University pursuing a BA in English education. She has a passion for education and is excited to get to share her love for English with high school students. She is endlessly inspired by her amazing friend Gabby Ives, who passed away last year. She aims to raise awareness for cystic fibrosis and encourages anyone to consider donating to the CF Foundation in order to advance medicine and find a cure for CF.

CHATting Doors: Examining University Office Doors as a Genre

Nina Jang

In this article, Nina Jang presents her findings from walking down the hallways of offices in the Stevenson building at ISU, and she analyzes university office doors as a writing genre. Incorporating cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), Jang comes to the realization that certain elements in CHAT play more prominent roles than others in this writing genre, and she traces the development of her own office door.

When the Doors Started Talking to Me

Never have I ever thought that doors were interesting (except *The Doors*, but that goes without saying). There was nothing interesting about them except that you open them to go in and out and occasionally to knock on to indicate that you are a civilized human being.

That was until I went to college.

When I was heading towards my college classrooms for the first time as a freshman, I encountered many doors of professors from various departments. There were doors that had nothing on them, but a lot of them had *some kind of writing* on them: name signs, the spinning wheel that indicates if the occupant of the office is in the room/a meeting/on campus/off campus, office hour signs, artwork, poems, advertisements, and other random collections of things. Back then, I surely didn't have the frame of mind to think that those doors were a **writing genre** that I was getting newly acquainted with. To me, writing was writing only when letters were printed/inscribed on a sheet of paper or on some sort of an online document like a blog or news article.

It also had to be either fiction or non-fiction-like things that people who call themselves writers create for artistic purposes or that students occasionally have to produce for a class. My idea of writing genres was limited.

You see, I think it is very common in life that things happen to you while you are not realizing that they are happening. You have to look back on a memory to really see that a meaningful moment happened to you. You need time for things to sit so that they become *something*. You know, like cheese (a rather gross simile, but whatever). After all, John Lennon once said, "Life is what happens to you when you're busy making other plans." Who would have thought that those encounters with the office doors as a freshman would later become a subject for my article, or that I would become more deeply involved in their production myself? I hadn't the slightest idea of that, but I did notice that I started to stop in front of those doors to let them speak to me and to listen to what they had to say.

One Graduate Assistant Starts Talking Through Her Door

Once I arrived at Illinois State University as a graduate teaching assistant, the department gave me a door along with my office. It meant that now I could decorate my own office door, and, another way to put it, I could now actively participate in the **production** of office doors as a writing genre.

When people ask me what a writing genre is, I just get this overwhelming urge to shout out, "O, behold, the thing that speaks!" in a tone that is used in a Shakespearean play. Don't ask me why because just like Lauren Graham said on my beloved TV show *Gilmore Girls*, "My head is a wild jungle full of scary gibberish." To come back from my sidetracked pop-culture reference, I think, in my humble opinion, a writing genre is defined by its ability to communicate. *Any kind* of communication, that is. I was about to become an active participant in this office door genre as an author and make some sort of communication through my door.

On the first week of my employment, my coordinator took me to the graduate teaching assistants' office hallway to look at my office for the first time and see if the key worked properly. I soon realized that the hallway was overwhelmingly entertaining for the eyes. Just like the time I saw the professors' office doors in my freshman year of college, I saw both doors with nothing on them and doors with things on them. However, the cases of decorated doors tended to be rather extreme in here. Colorful, haphazard, simply extravagant. Extremely entertained, I wandered around the hallway looking at each door, sometimes cackling with laughter and sometimes tilting my head to the side in question when I did not understand what the doors

Figure 1: One extreme example of office doors with flourishing conventions.

Figure 2: The naked face of my office door at the beginning of the semester.

were talking about. Then I turned, and there I saw my own door. Next to the door, there was a sign that indicated that it indeed was my door. However, this door did not indicate *itself* that it was my door. I have always been the queen of clutter and a talking-machine. Something this clean and quiet cannot be what says, "Welcome to Nina Jang's office! Here are some things that she finds DOPE! She would not mind talking about them on random occasions AT ALL, so please come on in." (I don't know why, but if my door had a voice, I think it would sound like male show hosts like John Oliver or Stephen Colbert. See? Again, a wild jungle.) This door was unacceptable. I had to do something about it.

After the first day I spent in my office, I brought a bag of *stuff* to my office. Preparing the bag was the weirdest thing since I didn't know what to bring. I would grab a random picture I took during my trip to New York City and go, "This would be cool!" and then go, "Nah . . . this is way too personal. What on earth am I thinking?" Then again, I would ask myself, "Does it have to be impersonal? I mean, what is considered personal on the door? Isn't *everything* personal on there?" And these questions had no answers. These questions were definitely too silly to ask my newly-acquainted colleagues who might end up thinking that I am the new weirdo in the hallway. These questions of mine were, I later found out, the aspects of **representation** in **cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT).** Whoa, I love it when I can call my silly thoughts something that sounds so big and fancy, don't you? It's like

one of those rare moments when you are sitting in a classroom and you just share a random thought out of a whim and the teacher goes, "That is a great observation, Nina! Well done!" and you just get a little red and secretly think to yourself, "OMG, I must be so smart!" The term representation describes the conceptualization and planning of a text by the people who produce it (Walker 160). In a much simpler explanation, it is about your thoughts on what the writing is supposed to be and your plans on how you are going to write it. In the case of the office door genre, the word "write" would have to change since I am doing more than just "writing" while producing the genre. In the world of genre study, genres often include more things than just alphabetic text. If you want to be Mr./Ms. Fancy pants and brag about some progressive knowledge of the literary world when you are hanging out with a bunch of your friends, you can call this **multimodality** and you might enjoy the befuddled looks on your friends' faces.

After thinking a little bit about the representation of my office door, several things ended up on my door: a picture of a fictional pirate ship from a Japanese manga called *One Piece* (which painted my childhood with laughter and tears), postcards that I bought all around the world in my travels, an advertisement for Ghibli film festival that I got from a professor in my young adult literature class, and a Harry Potter poster I bought at the campus poster sale. Wait, what am I doing? Here, I will show you the picture of my door, and it will tell you about it way better than my words.

Figure 3: My office door with some initial decorations.

Right? Sometimes one visual mode can speak more than a thousand words. These things I put on my door were all things I considered safe choices. Why? It's because things like posters and postcards were what people also used on their doors as well. I wasn't just going to put *anything* on there. What am I, crazy? Not that I care too much about what other people think (I am not saying that I am cool enough to *not* care either); it was more about figuring out what works and doesn't work. When you are writing a love letter, you are not likely to use charts and graphs to indicate how much you love a person in your letter, don't you think? It's more likely that you would use romantic language to deliver your heartfelt affection. What I was trying to figure out was exactly that—what would

work the best on my door. In hindsight, when I was trying to figure out what would work and not work on my door, I was doing **genre research** without realizing it. (Whoa, I did it again! Am I oh-so-fancy or what?) When you are doing genre research, you try to find the *norms* of the genre. These norms, in genre study, are called **genre conventions**. I would like to talk a little bit more about those.

What Am I Missing Here?

Even though I had put some cool stuff on my door, I wasn't really satisfied yet. My door just seemed like it was missing something. *But what is it?* I asked myself. Since I am writing an article about it and all, I decided to take an adventure to the hallways of the Stevenson building and explore some conventions of office doors. As a result, I collected fifty-one pictures of office doors of people who work in ISU and felt myself plenty creepy. These included office doors of English Master's students, English Ph.D. students (both graduate teaching assistants), English professors, mathematics professors, and economics professors. Some conventions were more predominant in certain departments and titles, but a lot of them were ubiquitous in all areas. Here is the list of the conventions I discovered on those office doors.

- Joke
- Advertisement
- Sign-up sheet (for various class-related purposes)
- Office-hour chart
- Dry erase board
- Cork board
- Wall pocket
- Poster
- Drawing
- Post-it
- Stickers
- Pamphlet
- Calendar

- Envelope
- Printed online meme
- Newspaper cartoon
- Name sign
- Postcard
- Inspirational quote
- Craft (paper owl, felt carrot and bunny, etc.)
- Nothingness

While examining the conventions, I noticed that different styles and trends were going on in this genre. On Master's students' doors, jokes, memes, and hand-drawn art seemed like they were especially popular conventions. On professors' doors, on the other hand, I could see more teaching-related conventions, such as wall pockets in which you can drop your papers, sign-up sheets, office hour charts, and also some ethical statements for social topics such as diversity and LGBTQ and animal rights.

On Master's students' office doors, those conventions I commonly found on professors' doors were harder to find, and the conventions of the Master's students' office doors were scarcely appearing on professors' doors. Interestingly, the doors of Ph.D. students seemed like they were in the middle of the two: a wee bit more of social activism, but with a hint of comedy as well on their doors.

Figure 4: Common conventions on professors' office doors.

Figure 5: Professors' doors with ethical statements.

After realizing that there are different trends on the doors, I started to wonder if these doors are influencing each other. It was like they were having a conversation. If you are talking to each other, you don't just yell random things to the air. That's not a conversation. There are certain common topics you share, and you try to respond to each other's ideas. Suddenly, the doors seemed more alive than they ever were (Spooks!). I wasn't the only *chatty* one standing in the hallway. (A-ha! See what I did there? "Chatty"? "CHAT"? Yeah? Ok, never mind.)

Joyce Walker defines **socialization** as, "the interactions of people and institutions as they produce, distribute and use texts . . . they are . . . engaged in the practice of representing and transforming different kinds of social and cultural practices" (161). Some brilliant and big words were introduced here. Basically, in some way or another, we are all influenced by other people when we are producing a genre and sending it to the world. You know, like life. No person is an island, and we are always influencing each other even when we are not aware of it. Wow, we got really deep here all of a sudden just like that, but we are going to save all the life topics and the meaning-makings for another time. Socialization is definitely an important aspect in the genre of the office door. How people interact with each other comes into play in people's representation of their office door undeniably, since certain trends and styles exist based on people's places and titles in the university. The important aspect of socialization is that it is deeply rooted in what is social and cultural. It is not shocking that my door got chattier as I got to know more and more colleagues in the graduate assistants' hallway as the semester

moved along, and that it also got sillier and more random as other graduate assistants' doors did too. The bottom line—literally in this section—is that what I lacked on the initial stage of decorating my door was the aspect of socialization. My door was not properly socialized enough yet. But, then, this happened.

Somebody Else Spoke Through My Door. MY DOOR!

Another interesting finding about this genre of the office door is the characteristics of its audience. The audience of the doors not only looks at the doors, but they often participate in producing the genre. A few days after I put up a Harry Potter poster, I found something else on my door that I hadn't seen before. There was a tiny Post-it note left in the corner of the poster. The person who left the Post-it that said, "I LOVE this!" on my door later turned out to be one of my colleagues who is also a passionate Potterhead. Before, my door was shouting, "I love Harry Potter! Yay!" After her Post-it, the door was shouting, "We love Harry Potter! Yay!" Since I have no intention of removing the Post-it ever (because, like, why would I? It's super dope), her comment is probably going to be part of my office door until I move out of the office or maybe until I have an epic fight with her . . . Hey, B, we good, right? (I hope some of you readers got the *Gossip Girl* reference here.)

Figure 6: Harry Potter poster on my door and the Post-it note that asys "I LOVE this!"

Reception is how people receive, react to, and use a genre production. I was getting a bit of reception on my door decorations from the people that I was interacting with in the hallway. One person commented on how the door was looking better and asked where the pirate ship picture was from, and a dozen people told me how much they loved the Harry Potter poster, and we talked about Harry Potter approximately for two hours (my definition of "approximately" is very flexible, just F.Y.I.). The Post-it incident, though, was an eye-opening moment for me. I realized that I wasn't the only one who produces and influences this genre production of my

own door. Like how I mentioned before, socialization plays an important role in this genre, and the audience's reception influences the genre production.

After the Potterhead incident, I started paying more attention to where the audience participated in producing the genre. Or, simply put, what kind of stuff do people leave on other people's doors? I went and knocked on a few colleagues' doors. Actually, that is a figure of speech. In reality, I just walked into their offices, since their doors are rarely closed unless they are not there, and we have no sense of civilized-human behaviors such as knocking. I asked them what kind of stuff people have left on their doors, and they kindly provided me with some examples. They were mostly memos to leave messages to each other and pictures and drawings to serve as small gifts. In the genre of the office door, there is no definite line between the **intended audience** and **unintended audience** since the university is a public space. And there is also no definite line between the **author** and the **audience** either. After examining this genre, I would like to say that the office door is sort of a hybrid of a bulletin board, a school locker, and a yearbook. Like a bulletin board, it's out in public and includes advertisements and campaigns for the audience. Like lockers, some people choose to decorate them to their own taste based on what they are interested in, but some people just leave them blank. Like yearbooks, people leave (mostly) friendly messages and draw silly stuff on them for the recipient. In all genres, the audience is always a very important element. However, it is somewhat rarer to find a genre that the author and audience can co-produce like this. In that sense, the office door is a unique genre with the special role of the audience and their reception.

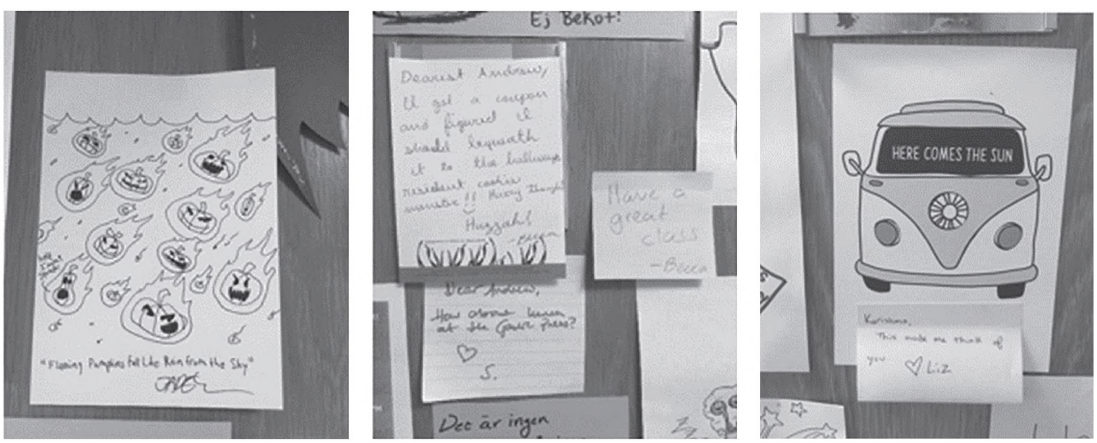

Figure 7: Examples of audience participation on office doors.

The CHAT Roundup

I used some CHAT terms to analyze the genre of office doors throughout this article. The thing about CHAT is that its use can be quite flexible depending on what you are trying to do and which genre you are trying to investigate. It's like a little toolbox that you can use for a genre research or a production. Inside the CHAT box, there are seven tools: production, representation, activity, distribution, reception, socialization, and ecology. I present you an image of this CHAT box to help your visualization. I will leave it up to you to imagine the tools inside, since they come in different shapes and sizes according to your needs each time. Yes, it's practically magic. I will also leave it up to you to imagine why my CHAT box is a pirate's treasure chest (I would like to think that the toolbox also changes its design depending on who you are, like a *Boggart*). The specific CHAT tools that especially came in handy for me in examining office doors as a genre were representation, socialization, and reception because of the nature of the genre and the purpose of my genre research for this article. However, I will also give you the CHAT map below that I made that includes other tools since it doesn't hurt to explore other aspects of the genre.

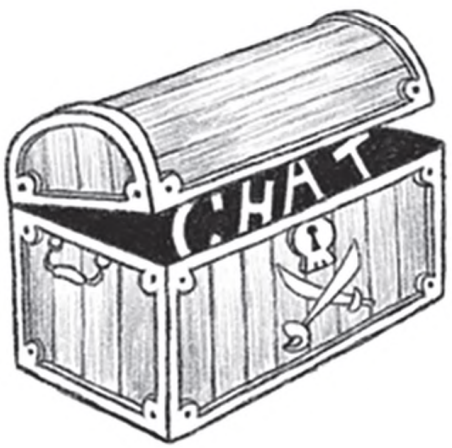

Figure 8: The CHAT tool box. (Artwork by Agathe Lancrenon.)

Many aspects of CHAT served useful for me to understand the office door as a genre. Some of them were more important in this research and some of them were less significant. Now, as the last part of this article, I would like to tell you about how my office door ended up looking in the end of my first semester at ISU as a graduate assistant.

The Ultimate Socialization: The Beatles Coloring Papers and Other Music Etcetera

The most terrifying aspect of being somewhere new is that you don't know anyone there. You feel alone. Like *alone*, alone. Not "I'm gonna have some quality me-time taking bubble bath and read trashy magazines and nobody gets to judge me" kind of alone. Humans are social animals, and we seek

Figure 9: The CHAT map of the office door.

others for support and cooperation, and we (except a few) get very anxious in a situation where we don't know anyone to call for help. Throughout the semester, I was very lucky to make a few friends in the hallway. I am really thankful about it. I felt truly accepted in the graduate assistants' hallway because of all the weirdos I met and the common interests we shared. When my friends outside of Illinois make fun of me for living in Normal, Illinois, my response to that almost became a catchphrase: "All the wonderful abnormal people I met there makes me feel perfectly normal," and then I shoot an awkward wink.

One of the common interests I found with my now-friends-colleagues is music, specifically of our love for the Beatles. One day, we were lounging in the hallway talking about the Beatles, and we remembered seeing the Beatles coloring papers roaming around the Internet. Before we knew it, coloring them became our favorite pastime and ended up improving the quality of art on our doors.

The more our exploration and discussion of music developed, the more conventions started to appear here and there on our doors as well.

Figure 10: The Beatles coloring papers decorating our doors.

Figure 11: Other music-related conventions.

Now my door was getting properly socialized, and I was also socializing other people's doors. My door wasn't quite the "new one" anymore. My door and I were becoming one of *them.* As the semester was moving along, it was truly interesting and rewarding at the same time to see that my relationship with the people around me here at my new home and new work was slowly progressing, which was reflected on my office door.

Figure 12: The most recent picture of my door.

Writing as an Adventure

Seeing how my office door transformed was a journey this semester, and this adventure got even more heightened because I was carefully paying attention to every step for the purpose of writing this article.

Every writing genre in this world is way more complicated than we often expect them to be. In Joyce Walker's article on CHAT, "Cultural-Historical Activity Theory: Because S*#t is Complicated," she discusses how CHAT helps her during the processes of writing: "As I map it, I learn what I want to do, what I might need to do, and how I might fit into this larger picture (the activity system) in a meaningful way" (167). I examined the activity system of the university office door as a genre for this article. And yeah, I'd say this office door s*#t is hella complicated, more complicated than I thought when I was beginning this adventure. (I was like, "Office door? What IS there to write about, really? It's going to be a piece of cake.") And then I wrote more than four-thousand words about it. I think the word count itself tells me how much more complicated this subject was. Did I have fun? Oh yeah, thanks to my adventure time buddies in the hallway who picked me up from the floor when I got overwhelmed with all the work and research and all the coloring papers we slayed together. And, importantly, thanks to my adventure swords, wands, shields, and whatever other tools that are now safely sitting in my pirate treasure chest until I need them again.

I have been listening to The Doors a lot while writing this article because, like, *DUH.* And now it sounds to me that Jim Morrison is singing, "Writers (Riders) on the storm . . ." Ok, I think I have maxed out my pop-

culture reference quota for this article. More for next time. But finally, like Ringo always says, peace and love to you all.

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Nina Jang is a graduate teaching assistant at Illinois State University, and she often finds herself daydreaming about nothing in particular. When she is not daydreaming about random subjects, she likes to write, play with her pet cat, Ringo, and upload pictures of food on her Instagram.

Welcome to Happy Valley: Exploring Translingual Spaces in a College Town

Su Yin Khor

As a big food enthusiast, language nerd, and voyager, your tour guide Su Yin Khor takes you on a journey to Happy Valley in Pennsylvania, the home of Penn State, to explore writing. The sightseeing tour will take you to different places that connect translingual practices and literate activities to ramen menus, Chinese dinner specials, campus buildings, and the new Amazon store in downtown State College. Bon voyage!

Readers: So, where are we going?

Su Yin: To Happy Valley! More specifically, State College. That's where Penn State is.

Readers: That's cool, but what does that have to do with space or trans- uhm, translingual spaces . . . ? And how is this connected to writing?

Su Yin: Well, it has nothing to do with planets and stars, but I'll answer your questions if you come with me. Vâmonos!

For this journey, I will take you to Happy Valley. If you google Happy Valley, you will be shown a map of State College, PA, the home of Penn State University. It's a college town in the middle of Pennsylvania, surrounded by mountains, farms, and a number of small towns. It is said that the State College area was given the nickname Happy Valley during the Great Depression, as the economic crisis did not affect the area to the same extent as other parts of the country ("Happy Valley," n.d.). Before we begin our journey to Happy Valley and explore the area, let me introduce you to **translingualism**. This is a key term that you should know about, and it will help you prepare for our journey. So, what does it mean? Translingual literally means "across language"

(Khor, 2017, p. 155). This concept is often used to highlight people's different linguistic and cultural resources that are used when composing a text, whether it's a research paper for a class, an email to a professor, or a text to your friends. Instead of viewing different languages as separate and working in separate ways without interacting with each other, the translingual perspective goes beyond describing languages as separate units that never interact or mix with other languages. Initially, it was used to refer to multilingual individuals, but, over time, the concept of translingualism has been extended to include those who speak one language as well. Thus, translingualism does not only refer to multilinguals, but it's also used to describe the types of resources that "monolingual" individuals have and their knowledge of different varieties that exist *within* the language that they speak. Simply put, languages are complicated. We change the way we speak and write based on who our audience is, whether we are aware of it or not. For example, when writing an email to a professor, you would probably not write this email:

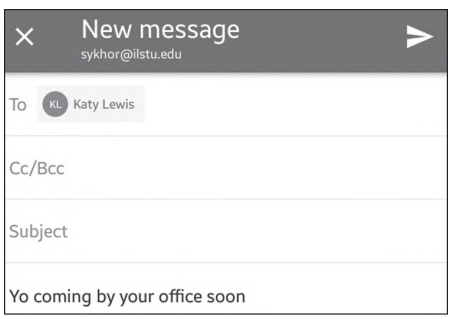


Figure 1: An email that doesn't follow the appropriate conventions.

Instead, you would probably write the email a little differently, as seen in the following image:

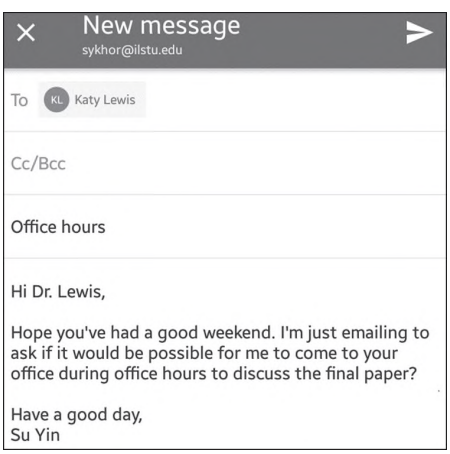


Figure 2: A more appropriately written email.

What kind of differences between the two emails can you identify? Go ahead—take a closer look at them. They're very different, right? We know that both emails are written in English, but the language use, such as vocabulary and sentence structures, are very different. The first email doesn't look very professional, and it looks like something you'd write to a friend, not a professor, whereas the second email looks more professional and like something that you wouldn't write to a friend. Obviously, the language use is significantly different in those emails. Different types of language use, such as informal and formal, in different genres, such as emails and texts, can often tell us what kind of relationship the writer and the (intended) audience have. We know this because of our experience with language use in different contexts and situations, and, oftentimes, these "rules" are not always explicitly taught.

Moreover, there are other language differences that we can identify. For instance, there are regional varieties, too. We've all had this debate before: someone says that they want a *pop*, but you correct them and say that it's *soda*, but then someone else interjects and says that it's *coke*. Who is right? Actually, *y'all* are right. Or is it *yinz*? Either way, *you're* all correct. These are regional varieties, and there are great differences in terms of vocabulary and pronunciation just within the United States. We can complicate matters further and look at language varieties by examining how people from different generations speak. It's more common for younger generations to LOL at funny things or OMG at something surprising, whereas older generations might not (although my dad has started to use emojis, which makes me LMAO pretty often). Evidently, there are generational differences—note that these boundaries aren't clear cut, and there are many exceptions—and there are also differences between social groups.

In addition to regional and generational differences, there are varieties that are spoken by different social groups that aren't necessarily generational. For example, African American English (AAE) is a widespread variety that has its own grammatical features. What is interesting is that AAE is not necessarily spoken by only people of African American origin. What I'm getting at is that we're not born to speak certain languages or varieties. It depends on where you live, who you interact with on a daily basis, and when you were born, so keep this in mind as you read.

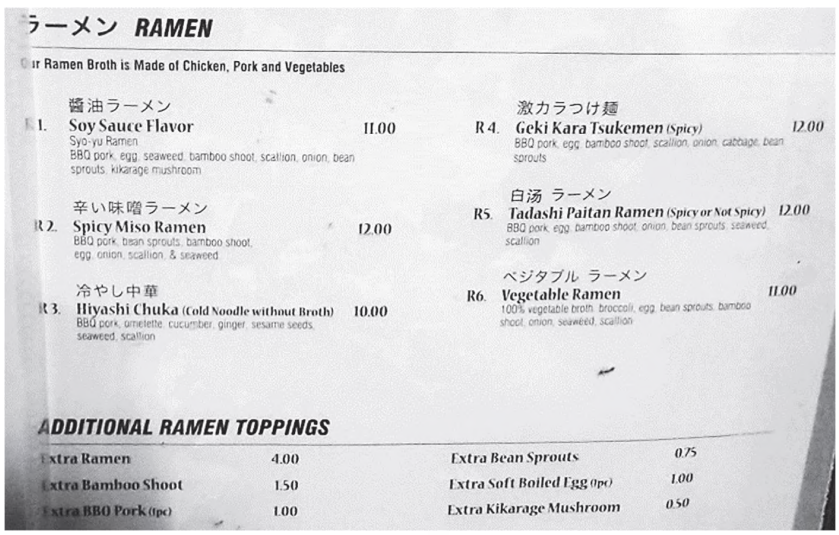
Further, if we think about language varieties from a more global perspective, imagine all the varieties of English that exist in the world and how many vocabulary and pronunciation differences there are! Not only are there differences within the English that is used in the United States, but there are also many types of *Englishes* in the world that have their own specific vocabulary that is not found in other varieties of English. Which variety is correct? Answer: there is not one correct form of English. For

example, *prepone* is a fantastic word that is used by speakers of Indian English. The meaning of the word is basically the opposite of *postpone*—instead of having the meeting later in the week, the meeting is moved up earlier. This means that if the meeting was planned for a Wednesday, it was preponed to Monday. Isn't that great?

So, what conclusions can we draw about language use and English? Simply put, we can say that English is full of variations and that the variety that you speak is shaped by several factors, such as your age, where you grew up, and who you interact with daily. Now that you have some understanding of translingualism, pack your suitcase and let's travel to Happy Valley and explore it in real life!

Translingual Spaces in Happy Valley: Ramen, Anyone?

Welcome to Happy Valley! At first glance, the downtown area doesn't appear to be very translingual. I mean, what's so translingual and urban about a college town surrounded by farms? However, if you pay attention, you'll be surprised by the findings. For example, there are so many restaurants in downtown State College. When I first arrived, I got so excited because I was surrounded by all kinds of food from different countries: Turkish, Chinese, Thai, Japanese, Indian, Mexican, and there are more restaurants in town that I haven't been to yet! But what's so translingual about food? It might not be the food itself that makes a place translingual, so have a look at this menu that I found at a local sushi and ramen place called Tadashi that is located in downtown State College:


ラーメン **RAMEN**

Our Ramen Broth is Made of Chicken, Pork and Vegetables

醤油ラーメン
R1. **Soy Sauce Flavor** 11.00
Syo-yu Ramen
BBQ pork, egg, seaweed, bamboo shoot, scallion, onion, bean sprouts, kikarage mushroom

辛い味噌ラーメン
R2. **Spicy Miso Ramen** 12.00
BBQ pork, bean sprouts, bamboo shoot, egg, onion, scallion, & seaweed

冷やし中華
R3. **Hiyashi Chuka** (Cold Noodle without Broth) 10.00
BBQ pork, omelette, cucumber, ginger, sesame seeds, seaweed, scallion

激カラつけ麺
R4. ***Geki Kara Tsukemen*** *(Spicy)* 12.00
BBQ pork, egg, bamboo shoot, scallion, onion, cabbage, bean sprouts

白汤 ラーメン
R5. ***Tadashi Paitan Ramen*** *(Spicy or Not Spicy)* 12.00
BBQ pork, egg, bamboo shoot, onion, bean sprouts, seaweed, scallion

ベジタブル ラーメン
R6. **Vegetable Ramen** 11.00
100% vegetable broth, broccoli, egg, bean sprouts, bamboo shoot, onion, seaweed, scallion

ADDITIONAL RAMEN TOPPINGS

Extra Ramen	4.00	Extra Bean Sprouts	0.75
Extra Bamboo Shoot	1.50	Extra Soft Boiled Egg (1pc)	1.00
Extra BBQ Pork (1pc)	1.00	Extra Kikarage Mushroom	0.50

Figure 3: Ramen menu in Japanese and English.

What do you notice here? We can see that the menu is in English, but there are also plenty of words that are in Japanese. It should be noted that the rest of the menu at Tadashi is in English and not a mix of Japanese and English, which is seen in the section where they list extra toppings. I'm not sure why they chose to use Japanese for the Ramen menu, which makes it even more interesting.

Moreover, I noticed that it's not only menus that are translingual here in State College. I have come across several signs that combine Chinese and English:

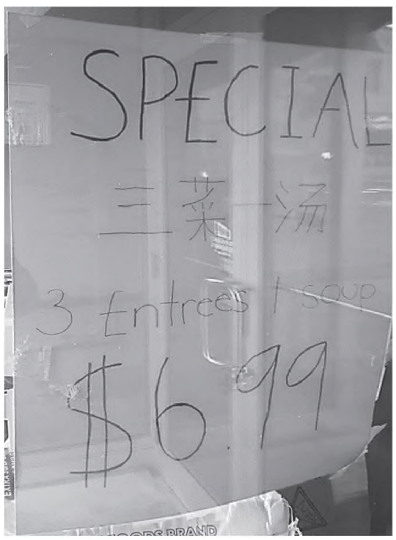


Figure 4: A special that includes three entrees and a soup for $6.99 at a Chinese restaurant.

Figure 5: A Chinese store sign using English and Chinese.

So, what do these pictures show us? They tell us that State College—although it's not a big city like Chicago—is quite an urban place. The people in State College come from different parts of the state, the country, and the world, and there are several reasons behind their trek to State College, whether it's for school, work, or family. In fact, some people might not stay here permanently, as their journey might take them somewhere else in the state, country, or world. Why does this matter? Let me ask you a few questions before I share my thoughts on why this matters.

First, when you travel, whether you visit a different city, state, or country, do you bring something with you when you return home? It doesn't have to be a keychain from the souvenir shop in the hotel lobby, but it could be other things, like photographs, a map, some other keepsake, or food, right? Besides physical objects, what else do we bring with us when we return home? Memories and experiences! If we extend this and think about people who move from one place to another for a longer period of time, then what

do they bring with them? For instance, when my grandparents were children, they migrated from China to Malaysia, where my parents grew up. Although my family is originally from China, they created a life, together with other Chinese people and other migrant populations, in Malaysia. The food, the languages, cultures, and traditions were brought with them to Malaysia, but they were also mixed with other cultures, languages, and traditions. In other words, when people move, it's not only physical objects that move with them. Other parts of who we are and our lives, such as language and traditions, are brought with us as well.

Similarly, when my parents got married, they moved to Sweden, and that's where I was born. My parents brought Malaysian spices with them and made our home in Sweden a little like a Malaysian home. When it was time for me to pursue my graduate degrees in the United States, my first stop was Normal, IL, and I brought more than clothes with me. In my suitcase, sandwiched between my winter coat and sweaters, I had Malaysian curry spices with me in addition to Swedish honey and cheese. I even brought a rice cooker with me, and some Swedish and Malaysian cookbooks. When it was time for me to pack my bags and move to Pennsylvania, I really wanted to bring with me a deep-dish from Chicago (I didn't). And this brings me to the question I asked you earlier: why does this matter? Now, imagine thousands of people, or even millions of people, moving to one place, and they all bring their languages, traditions, and cultures with them: what do you think would happen? The place would change, right? In short, it matters because migration changes the places that we're in. People have migrated since . . . well, since there have been people, which brings us to the next stop of our translingual journey: the influence of time. For this part of our journey, we will leave the downtown area and visit the Penn State campus, which is literally across the street:

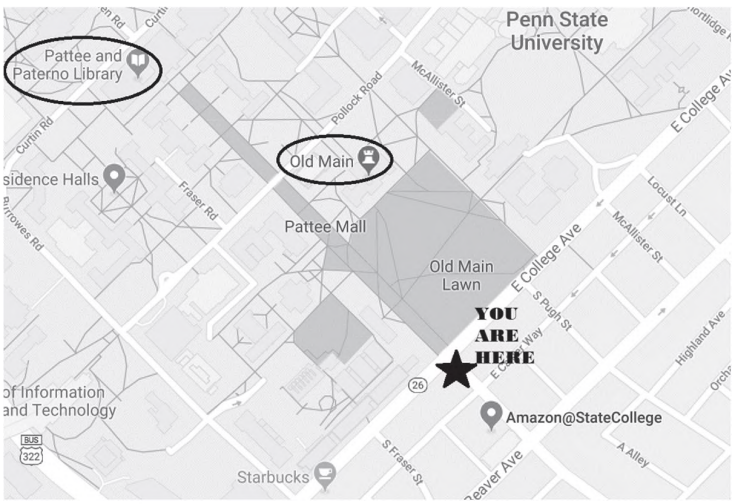


Figure 6: Map of downtown State College and Penn State campus (Google Maps, n.d.).

After our campus tour, we will return downtown to wrap up our journey before we head home, so let's go!

Translingual Layers: Going Beyond the Japanese-English Ramen Menu

By now, we know that translingualism is found in many places, if not everywhere. Now we can ask ourselves, is translingualism only about language? Could it be more than ramen? Yes, it can! Translingualism goes beyond language and food. In fact, our sightseeing tour will show you how different layers of time become part of the buildings and how the migration of people moving in and out of Happy Valley has shaped the campus, town, and buildings, making everything interconnected. The first stop of our campus tour will take us to the Pattee and Paterno Library.

Figure 7: Pattee and Paterno Library at University Park (main campus).

The university was founded in 1855, and over time, as the number of students that enrolled increased, so did the library's collection of books. Originally, the books were housed in other buildings, but they were moved to Pattee in the 1940s. The university and library continued to grow, and the new addition, the Paterno wing, was completed in 2000 ("History," n.d.). As we know, it's not uncommon for buildings to go through a series of renovations throughout time due to the natural damage that occurs as people use these spaces and because there might not be enough space to accommodate all the activity that takes place. With these changes, the buildings and other spaces where people engage in different activities also change. Another building

that has been affected by the shift in people's activities and other changes is Old Main. Let's leave the library and walk over to Old Main to explore it.

Old Main, which was one of the first buildings of the university, went through several renovations, and you can see the current construction of the building in the following image.

Figure 8: Old Main, the administrative center of Penn State.

The current structure of the Old Main was completed in 1930, but the original structure of the building was completed in the mid-1850s (Stevens, 2012). Despite going through a number of renovations, Old Main, just like the library, still has elements of its original structure, to which newer additions have been built on. These elements connect these buildings to the past, but are still important aspects of the university in the present and will probably remain a crucial part of the daily activities of the people who participate in activities in these buildings, whether these people are students, visitors, staff, or faculty. The same can be said about the remaining buildings of the university; however, we won't have time to explore all of them, as we are reaching the end of our journey. But before we head home, we have one more stop to make downtown.

Moving away from the university buildings, although they are just as much part of State College as the downtown area (some say that the university *is* the town), we will see that downtown State College, just like the campus, is a mix of old and new, the past and the present.

Figure 9: The newly opened Amazon store on Allen Street in downtown State College.

I'm sure that all of you know or recognize the Amazon logo. Amazon was founded in 1994, but the current location of the Amazon store in downtown State College opened up its doors in the fall of 2017 during my first semester at Penn State (Duigan, 2017). Not only is the company somewhat young, in comparison to some of the other companies in town, it's a new addition to the town itself, adding another layer of "time" to the town. We have already seen how the past is visible in State College, but we can also see how the present, or the future, is interconnected with the old and, at the same time, shaped by the people who live in this town.

As we can see in these images, the past is closely intertwined with the new and the present. The university buildings clearly show aging and connections to the past, which is contrasted with elements of modern times and globalization as new stores and restaurants open their doors. These images show that there are various translingual layers that, over time, have become part of State College and shaped the town. Different groups of people have migrated to Happy Valley—students, workers, or both, from different parts of the country and the world—and this migration has left its mark on the buildings that we can see in the images. This is not a new phenomenon at all. In fact, people have always migrated, and, thus, changed the new places that they have moved to (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015). For example, Chicago is a place that has been shaped deeply by migration, just like any other city. Chinatown emerged because of the Chinese population, but we're able to identify the Greek presence in the city as well as the Polish neighborhoods.

Just like Chicago, as people come and go, State College will be changed by the people who settle there. While it might look a certain way right now, who knows what it will look like a few decades from now.

Reaching the End of Our Journey: Unpacking Our Suitcase

Readers: That was a fun trip, but I still don't get how this is connected to writing. Don't people just read and write stuff?

Su Yin: It's more than just reading and writing, so let's unpack our suitcase!

Now that we're back home, let's unpack some of the things that we learned. First, what our journey to Happy Valley has shown us is that translingualism is not something that is only related to language and our present: the cultural and historical aspects also shape the places that we're in. With migration, whether it's from Illinois to Pennsylvania, or from the United States to Sweden or Malaysia, people tend to bring a piece of the place where they are from to their new home. What I'm getting at is that people are not the only ones that move when it comes to migration—food, objects, and language travel with them to their new destination and become part of their new home, which adds a new layer to that particular place. Moreover, food, objects, and languages are not fixed to a specific place. Instead, they are just as mobile as people are. Especially in such a globalized era, we are now exposed to more translingual platforms and forums through various types of social media. With time, more people migrate, and, just like the people before them, they bring food, objects, and languages with them that add another translingual layer to the place that they are in, as the pictures of State College have shown us.

So, what is the connection to literate practices and writing? Just like places are shaped by the people who pass through or settle there, the types of **literate activities** that we engage in and the types of literate practices that we develop are shaped by the **genres** and languages around us across space and time. This creates an intricate relationship that we have with the world around us, creating a network of interconnected individuals, objects, and languages. Even though these networks might change over time, it is clear that our writing and the types of genres that we interact with are not fixed or only in (a specific variety of) English. Different variations of different languages merge and we interact with them on a daily basis.

Whether we are aware of it or not, we engage in translingual practices on a daily basis, as the audience when we read or as the writer when we compose a text. The translingual spaces that we're in shape our linguistic and

cultural resources, and, as you have seen, you do not have to speak multiple languages in order to engage in translingual practices. This knowledge that you have helps you with writing because your linguistic and cultural knowledge is something that you have acquired over a long period of time, and you will continue to expand this particular knowledge. So, I encourage you to investigate the place where you are right now, whether you're at home, your dorm, a different city, state, or country. What kind of translingual layers can *you* identify? Enjoy and bon voyage!

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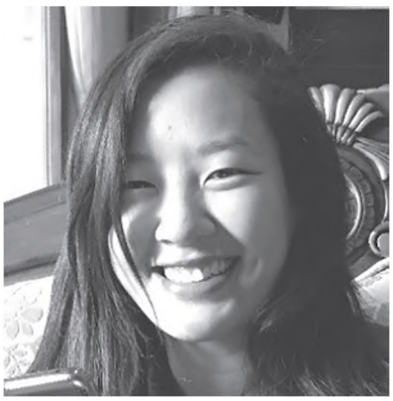

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Writing Identity: Putting a Stop to Cookie-Cutter Essays

Dakota W. Zientek

In this article, Dakota W. Zientek will explore the inner machinations of his mind to find the jack-in-the-box that is his specific writing identity. Comparing his process for writing tweets with writing essays, Zientek examines the amount of work it takes to do something that seems informal, fun, and like it took no work. He analyzes this through CHAT, specifically through production, representation, reception, and socialization.

A Lil' Background About My Writing

Now, before I start, let me get something out of the way: I have *not* mastered the art of writing. Before junior year of high school, the highest grade I earned on a paper was a C+ (it was hanging on my fridge for like three weeks). That being said, once I found my niche for writing, my writing identity, I couldn't get enough. For the sake of not talking about every little thing I write, I will focus on the two main outlets I have for writing: Twitter and essays, or papers, the kind students often write in classes in middle school, high school, and college. On the surface, these couldn't be more different. One is for fun; the other is for a grade. But what unites these genres for me is my writing identity.

According to the ISU Writing Program, writing identity is defined as follows: "you are able to think beyond just acquiring skills and begin to understand how all of your skills (and the skills you haven't yet acquired) change what you can and can't do as a writer." Now, my definition for a writing identity is not only who you are, but who you are as a writer, and how it is a malleable identity, since it changes all of the time in some ways,

but maybe stays the same in others. When I started writing this article, I had a hard time because I felt that writing comes pretty naturally to me. Like in my early drafts, I described my process as taking no work, that I could just think of a sentence and it will come out funny, which is nice and easy. But as I was writing this article, with the ideas just popping out of my brain, I started to find what was popping out was actually describing a process, one that it turns out is kind of elaborate, and while I wouldn't recommend *everyone* use it or anything, I have to tell you, that complex process doesn't *feel* like work because it's part of my writing identity, which I will be exploring in this article.

Disclaimer: if you ever see the initials "DWZ," that will be me being lazy and abbreviating my name. Wanna know why I can do that? Because *I* am the author. See? Having power is pretty fun.

You Know, CHAT! Wait, You Don't?

CHAT (**cultural-historical activity theory**). So, I know what some of you are thinking: what is CHAT, and why should I care about it? Well, as Angela Sheets writes in her article, *Angela Rides the Bus*, "Activity Theory is an exploration of how people, objects, and ideas work together to carry out objectives. . . . But the 'Cultural' and 'Historical' part talks about how the objects, ideas, and genres we use reflect certain cultural values at a certain point in history" (134). Now, how does this relate to essays and tweets? Very good question, my friends.

Well, there are many ways that CHAT can be used to study how people do and learn things in the world, but the ISU Writing Program's CHAT terms are specifically designed for studying literate activity. There are seven terms, but the ones that I want to focus on are **production, representation, reception,** and **socialization**. The CHAT term that I want to spend most of the time on is production; I want to do so because, as I started to uncover my writing identity, the production of the writing was what opened my eyes to different conventions of different genres of my writing. Production, when it comes to CHAT, is basically how a piece is created. The production of my tweets and essays is very similar. I usually like to be in a familiar environment when I write *anything*, especially essays. When it comes to tweets, I can do them anywhere, really, since I write them on my phone, but I prefer to be at a desk or some sort of environment that allows me to be able to think without too many distractions. I like to do this because if I get distracted, it is game over; I will not write a quality piece that I am proud of. I am someone that

can be distracted by something as simple as a red pepper flake that fell off of the pasta I was eating earlier.

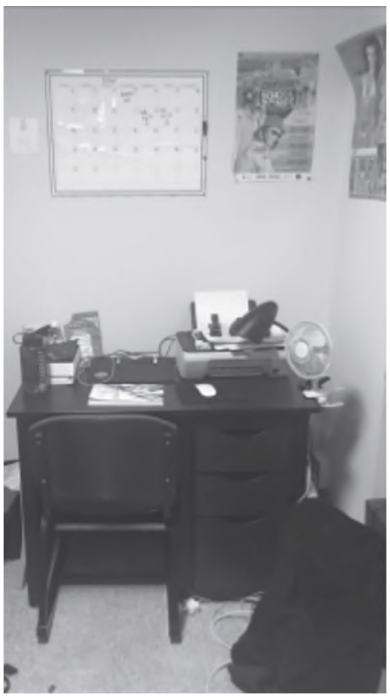

Figure 1: The familiar environment I write in.

Additionally, when it comes to production, the character difference that all users of Twitter are allotted makes a big difference. When writing a tweet, you only get 140 characters, but when writing an essay, if I turned in 140 characters, I would probably get kicked out of that class and get used as an example by that professor in every class that followed. But even though the character number in my tweets and essays varies by a lot, the thought process is still the same. I think, "How do I say this without sounding super-duper lame?" Usually, I will just write the first thing that comes to my mind, and then after that I will look for ways to add my informal twist to it. The reason I like to make some humorous breaks in an essay is because if someone is reading a boring, dry essay for too long, I assume they'll be bored reading the essay and lose interest. I like it when people read my writing and actually *enjoy* it. Having fewer characters in tweets makes it a little bit more difficult sometimes to get my point across, but being versatile is a very important aspect when it comes to writing in general. It makes me learn to get to the point and not ramble nonsense. When I was a little bit younger, I thought all that mattered in a well-written piece was length. I would try to get in these giant sentences with a huge variety of words, but I soon realized that that wasn't who I was as a writer. I like to speak my mind. That was kind of my first glimpse into my writer identity. I became aware of a writing style that I thought was a convention (writing long, boring sentences) and learned that there was more flexibility. If I get wordy now, it's for the sake of doing something I think is entertaining, not because I think that's what "good" writing is.

The next CHAT term that I use when creating all of my written pieces is **representation**. The definition of representation according to Joyce Walker is, "the way that the people who produce a text conceptualize and plan it (how they think about it, how they talk about it), as well as all the activities and materials that help to shape how people do this" (75). Now, if you're anything like me, you might not completely understand what that means. I think of representation as simply the way a writer starts thinking about the building blocks of their writing. I like to have a humorous/informal

tone to infuse into my writing. This lets me come across as a casual and fun, which is why when I started writing this article I had a hard time breaking down my process; I was just focusing on being fun instead of thinking about how I write.

For both essays and tweets, my thought process starts with what I want the piece to be about. That sounds a bit vague, but my process is a top-down process: starting out with the main idea and then inserting finer details around the piece to tie it all together. After that part is done, I think of how to write in the language that I use in everyday life: humor. The last edit I make to a tweet is a glance over to make sure I did not make any silly errors, but my last edit for essays is a little bit different. What I do is have my rubric in one tab and my essay on a different tab. Once I have that, I go through the essay as if I am the one grading the paper. I do this because the rubric is not necessarily on my mind when I write. It doesn't initially factor into my representation of the text. I know, throw me into writer's jail. After I give my piece the a-okay, I tweet or submit the piece of writing that was just completed and hope that I become Twitter famous (that really is a goal of mine . . . seriously).

Then comes the CHAT term **reception**. Reception, in my own words, is how people react to a certain text, although it can also involve things they do with texts or what they use them for. When I write something, I try to think of how I would react if I were the one grading the paper, or the one scrolling down and seeing the tweet. I realize that's a bit biased, but it is my way of proofreading and making sure what I write is what I want it to be. I also do that because I am very prone to doing stupid things in my writing, like saying things that make me sound like I was half-asleep while writing. For example, my roommate is a true friend because he actually has my tweet notifications on. That means he gets a notification every time I tweet something. He is usually my first wave of defense, as he corrects me if I make a boneheaded mistake, which is probably a third of the time. My mistakes usually aren't too major, but having mistakes is not what I want to be known for! If I realize there is a tweet that I submit with some boneheaded mistake, I will try to take action before anyone has liked or retweeted it. If I catch it before then, I will completely delete the tweet and rewrite the tweet before anyone can "flame" me. If you're unsure what "flaming" means, it is when someone "puts you over a flame" with their comments; they expose your flaws and make you look bad. With that, I would say having someone to proofread your work is something that is very important. Luckily, I haven't ever made a critical error in a project that is important because I know my audience has higher expectations, which causes me to be more detail-oriented. Since I can't have my roommate be notified when I send my essay

to a professor, I have to take more time for the "proofread" aspect of my total writing process. This includes me reading the whole essay from start to finish with the rubric next to me, and once I think it is good, I usually send it to a trusted person, usually my mom, to read over it. I have found out over time that when I read something that I write, I will sometimes read it how I *want* it to sound rather than what it *actually* says. This can be a very bad habit to get into, so I recommend reading it out loud. If you do that, you'll have a greater chance of catching mistakes.

The last CHAT term that I realized informs a lot of my writing is **socialization**, which generally involves all the ways that people influence and are influenced by the texts they interact with. The way I think of this term when I write is that now on Twitter there is a part of the page called "Impressions" that shows how many times people interact with or view your tweets. That has been pretty useful to me since I am someone that always wants to know everything. If I spend the exhausting minute and a half to write a tweet, I want to know who is looking at it! I didn't just write the tweet for my own enjoyment. There is also an Impressions section that shows how many times my page has been viewed, and seeing the number of impressions I've made get close to 10,000 is always a pretty satisfying thing. For example, as I write this, I looked at my Twitter page, DecodeMcBuckets, to see what my impression on my viewers has been. This month, November, I have made 29,478 impressions on people; that is pretty nice to see. The coolest part about that is that it shows what day was the most impression-filled and even the time of day I made the most impressions on people. With this same time frame in mind, I have the most impressions on Fridays and Saturdays. That makes a good amount of sense since I am a freshman in college and usually the most "tweet-worthy" things happen to me on Friday or Saturday. Since I am such an in-depth person, I am going to be analyzing my Twitter page and comments that I have received on past papers to see what actually goes into each aspect of those types of writing and how I was able to find my true inner writing self.

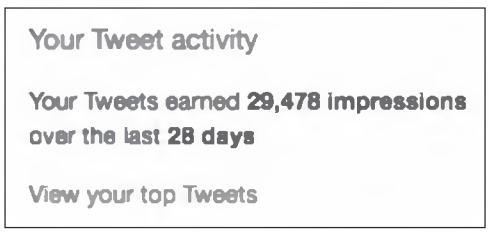

Figure 2: Example Tweet impressions.

Twitter: An Open Notebook for Ideas

When it comes to my Twitter, I have a persona of being a very casual, funny tweeter. This hasn't always been the case, though. I used to just write "#swag" and call it a day. Now, after I found my identity as a writer, I found my niche. I

will have wrong punctuation, improper spelling, and uncapitalized "I"s; that is just kind of my style. Now, you might be thinking, "doesn't this contradict what you were saying with your roommate proofreading your tweets to make sure they're *not* flat out not English?" Well, no. An example of what I mean by having wrong spelling would be to say something like, "da bears are gonna win da superbowl." Now, if I turned something into my professor like that, it probably wouldn't be very successful. That is what I mean by my style. If I were to say, "da beasr are going to win da suprebowl", that is something my roommate would laugh at me for and have me change. I do not do this because I love being a rebellious college freshman, but because I just write what is on my mind and have kind of adopted that style as my own. In terms of reception, it makes the tweets seem like they just pop out of my brain rather than me methodically crafting them/asking my roommate to review them, etc.

Twitter is my place to dump ideas; sometimes it is just nice to empty my brain to let new ideas form. Even though it is something I wouldn't turn in as part of an essay for a grade, it is still a very important aspect to my writing identity. This is in part because, as a young boy in a small elementary school named Maplewood Elementary, we once had a guest speaker by the name of Dan Gutman. You might know him! He is the author of books like *The Homework Machine, Honus and Me,* and the *My Weird School* series. He came into our library, and even though this event went down in the same year of the movie *UP* being played in theaters, I still remember what I took away from that guest speaker. He said if you ever want to be a writer, always keep something to write ideas in. I remembered him talking to me, which caused me to actually reach out to him via Facebook later in life. When I reached out to him, I asked him what his best advice would be for someone trying to get into the field of writing, and he said, "Keep track of every idea you ever have. You never know what idea will turn into a great book or series of books." I, as you can tell by my explanation of writing all of my ideas down, took that to heart. I have always, except for my fourteen-year-old rebellious stage (don't ask), taken advice from elders. So, Twitter is both the place where I keep track of my ideas and also put them out into the world. It's a weird balance of like a private notebook and a published document, which might be part of why I like using the informal persona I've cultivated; it allows me to keep it like a dump place but without fear of getting flamed.

Drafts: An Endless Wonderland of Blossoming Thoughts

In Twitter, I take advantage of the "Drafts" function. Drafts is where you can write something down and tweet it later. The reason I like this is because

ever since I was a boy, I have always had a *horrible* memory; it is probably my dad's fault (damn gene pools). Anyway, one of the reasons I use it is simply because it is kind of a Twitter violation for someone not famous to post more than a couple times a day. You get put into Twitter jail or something. The place sucks; trust me.

Figure 3: My drafts as of now. I can't let you all see my secrets, though, so they're blocked out.

Another reason I like to use Drafts is because if I feel like an idea is decent, but not as good as it could be, I can just keep it there for a few days to mature into a great idea. So, say I have a decent idea. I don't want my followers thinking I am decent; I want them to think that I'm *the man*! That being said, I will keep the tweet in my Drafts for a few days, and then when I go on Twitter, I look at my Drafts to see if I can add anything to the tweet to make it a ten out of ten. If I cannot, in the Drafts it stays. This is actually a very important lesson that I've learned. I would never want to turn something in that I do not think is a great piece of work to a professor. Those same expectations stay constant in my tweets. This is something that I like to do that I use in my everyday writing. It is a good habit for me to get into in both the genre of Twitter and the genre of essays because it teaches me to make sure to not just be okay with turning in average writing.

Boring Writing–I Mean Formal Writing

When you think of formal writing, what do you think about? Persuasive essays on whether or not Scout from *To Kill a Mockingbird* was a dynamic character? There are many things that could be formal writing, but formal does not always mean boring; it rarely means boring if you get *really* good at writing that genre. It all depends on your writing identity. For me, a major part of my writing identity is that I used to be a suspect of cookie-cutter essays. *What's a cookie-cutter essay, Mr. Zientek?* Ah, great question, imaginary student. A cookie-cutter essay is one that follows a formula of one topic sentence, one piece of evidence, and three sentences of analysis. I was always taught that this was the way to do it and there was no way around it. During this time I absolutely *hated* writing, but that's because I was taught was that there is only *one* way to write an essay, and that is the "blah blah blah" method. No, the "blah blah blah" method is not a scientific method that I researched, but that is what I

am going to call it. Remember, I am the author. I make the decisions around here, slick. Anyways, formal writing was what I was talking about, right? Yes, yes. So, if I were to ask you for the first example of a formal writing piece that you can think of, what would it be? I am sure all of you picked a right answer, but did any of you say this article? This, at least to me, is a formal piece of writing; my definition of formal writing is writing that gets graded or published. This article started as a piece that I was going to be graded on by my amazing English professor (brownie points?). It may not sound like a formal piece of writing, but that is because I found a way to make formal writing fun for me. Can you guess how? You (maybe) guessed it: my identity as a writer. Now, formal writing is not *all* fun and games. You cannot just write whatever you want. Your writing has to have some sort of academic structure, but within those confines, you can make it more of *your* writing by finding your writing identity. As you've probably figured out by now, for me, making formal writing fun means including humor, one of the major parts of my writing identity that I used to think wasn't allowed in formal writing—like essays—thanks to the "blah blah blah" method. But when I stopped to actually think about my writing process and my writing identity, I realized that I could bring some of the things I love about Twitter and the ways it allows me to express my writing identity into my formal writing.

I remember a conversation I had with my senior year (high school) English teacher. The conversation was regarding a paper I had to write covering the topic of main themes written about in the book *Kite Runner.* I remember telling him I didn't want to write the paper because I was imagining such a boring paper. He told me that there is almost always a way to make something boring interesting. I slept on that idea and realized that he was absolutely correct. The next day, I went into his class, still recovering from the sleepless night I had before caused by the binge watching of *Chopped* on Netflix. We were talking about the conversation we had the day prior, and I came up with what I thought was a good idea; the idea was that I could write the paper as if I were a news reporter going into the country and time in which the book had taken place. I felt dumb at the time because when I first asked, he didn't really give me an answer. I saw that he was thinking pretty hard, but I couldn't tell if he thought it was a good idea. He told me he was going to think about it and that I should just start getting quotes and stuff so that I wasn't just wasting my time waiting for him to give me the a-okay. Once the class ended, and with my notebook full of a whopping zero quotes for the paper, my teacher called me over and said that he really liked my idea and was making sure I didn't steal it from the Internet. That was the day I started to find my writing identity. The reason I was able to make it fun was because I realized that as long as I meet the requirements for whatever the project was in the class, I could have a lot of freedom. I could cover the

same content and do analysis/research through a different format. No more cookie-cutter essays from me, said I. From that day forward, I never wanted to turn in a piece of writing that was completely lifeless and boring.

Let's Recap, Shall We?

Ah, yes. Fancy seeing you here again, reader. No, I'm just joking. So, the main focus of this article is to see how I, Dakota W. Zientek, found my writing identity and how I was able to make the back-breaking work of writing into a hobby for me. I want to assure you that I am not trying to convert you to Zientekism (that sounds awful—who would want to join that?), but I am trying to teach you that *you* can find and embrace your own writing identity. It doesn't come right away to many people; it took me eighteen years! Life is just one big trial and error; you have to experiment to find out what works and what doesn't work for you. But keep experimenting (or start experimenting)! Just keep on writing, tweeting, note-taking, novel-writing, Facebook-statusing, WHATEVER. See what gets good feedback. But also see what work you like to do and are proud of. As you start to find your writing identity, those two things will (hopefully) come together.

Now that my Oprah Winfrey speech is out of the way, I can finish this article off. What I want to leave you all with is that there is not only one single way of writing one thing. You can, and should, make your writing what *you* want it to say and how you want to say it. But you do need to figure out how to fit those things within the parameters provided, which could be a rubric, or conventions of the genre, or even the rules set out by the people who would want to flame you. For me, finding my writing identity has been an oddly convoluted process, and, as I write it here, I realize there is a lot of work that goes into it, but the important thing is that it didn't *feel* like a lot of work, and the important thing for my persona is that it doesn't *look* like a lot of work.

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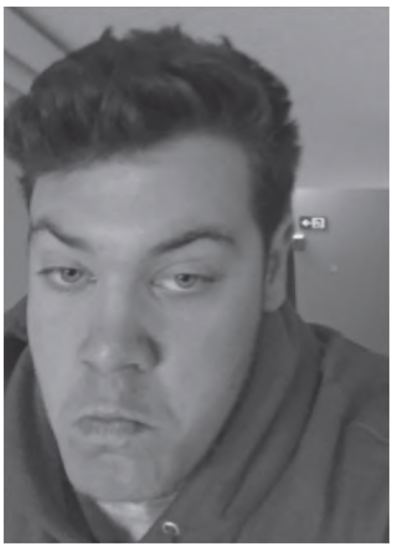

The Man, The Myth, The Legend: **Dakota W. Zientek.**

Do Read the Comments: Developing a Writer-Researcher Identity through Instructor Feedback

Charles Woods

In his article, Woods explores how students take up instructor feedback by identifying and analyzing the different genres within which instructor feedback is offered. He asserts that taking up feedback in a positive and efficient manner—whether it is online or in person, electronic or handwritten—plays an integral role in the development of a student's Writer-Researcher Identity. By exploring the subversions within the ever-evolving genre of instructor feedback through an activity theory lens, Woods offers valuable insight to both teachers and students when it comes to navigating this sometimes-confusing genre.

> "I do not want to write this article. I do not want to write this article. I do not want to write this article."

If I say this three times, turn around, look in the mirror, tap my ruby-red slippers together, and pray to the almighty sun-god, I still must write this article. The reason I do not want to write this article is because I do not want to have my writing critiqued. You are going to critique this piece of writing (you are already doing so), so I have no choice but to accept that readers will always critique my writing.

Having one's writing critiqued in the form of instructor feedback is a fundamental element in developing a **writer-researcher identity**. This identity evolves throughout a person's writing life, during the university experience and beyond, often into one's work life. Composition courses play an integral role in this development; however, the most effective way to ensure the development of a writer-researcher identity is to pay attention to instructor feedback. This article highlights the importance of valuing instructor feedback in terms of the development of a writer-researcher identity. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the importance of

acknowledging (and ultimately growing from) instructor feedback, I examine the different types of feedback instructors may offer, including the implications of using red ink versus black ink to review a student's work. Next, I'll analyze the implications of offering written feedback versus online criticism, as well as the implications of different submission guidelines (and preferences) set the instructor. I focus in particular on how instructor feedback is taken up by students to develop their writer-researcher Identity. My interest is in *how* what students take up from the feedback from instructors on assignments assists them in identifying and successfully participating in new and different genres. After assessing the implications of how instructor feedback molds our writer-researcher identity and helps us gain the knowledge necessary to participate successfully in new genres, I explore instructor feedback as a genre through the lens of **cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT)**. I argue that CHAT can help us understand instructor feedback, which in turn allows us to analyze the development of one's writer-researcher identity. The article concludes with an interview with . . . myself, concerning the development of my writer-researcher identity as an undergraduate student at the University of Montevallo (Montevallo, Alabama).

Some of you are probably wondering right about now, "Why are you interviewing yourself?" The reason I am interviewing myself is because to successfully participate in the genre of instructor feedback, you must be willing to be vulnerable and to accept constructive criticism of your writing. Remember, the reason I did not want to write this article is because I did not want my writing critiqued. I tapped by ruby-red slippers together. I prayed to the almighty sun-god. I still must write this article.

Writer-Researcher Identity

The term **writer-researcher identity** "means you are able to think beyond just acquiring skills and begin to understand how all of your skills (and the skills you haven't yet acquired) change what you can and can't do as a writer" ("Key Terms & Concepts for the ISU Writing Program"). Development of one's writer-researcher identity is central to participating in any **literate activity** and successfully navigating new **genres**. One of the primary ways in which our writer-researcher identity is shaped is by how we take up the feedback received from instructors on assignments. To participate in this genre, students must willingly accept instructor feedback of their work, an act that is unnatural, as no one likes to be criticized. (Remember, I did not want to write this article.) The ways in which feedback is provided differs from instructor to instructor based on variables such as the stakes of the

assignment, the genre in which the assignment is submitted, and how the instructor wants to represent herself.

The traditional way in which instructors provide feedback on students' work is with the mighty and all-knowing red pen. This article asks, "How is an instructor representing himself if he uses a red pen to provide feedback on an assignment?" Moreover, in what ways are instructor comments in red pen *taken up* by students? Instructor feedback in red pen is a performative intimidation tactic and unnecessarily constrains the efficient development (to the fullest potential) of one's writer-researcher identity. However, red-ink is not the only way in which instructors provide feedback to students, as some may use a different color ink (green is nice) or even a pencil. If an assignment is submitted electronically, perhaps the instructor's preference is to distribute feedback digitally. The development of digital platforms for assignment submission, syllabus distribution, online discussions, etc., such as Blackboard, Canvas, or university specific systems like ReggieNet at Illinois State University, allows instructors to provide feedback in new genres not previously accessible. Digital feedback differs from written feedback on an assignment and is taken up in a different way by students. This article acknowledges the differences in student uptake between written and digital feedback, as both develop one's writer-researcher identity.

Red Ink vs. Black Ink

The most important factor concerning instructor feedback is not how feedback is distributed, but how it is taken up by the student. Instructors have their students' best interests in mind when providing commentary on assignments, specifically in aiding a student in developing skills that lead to a diverse writer-researcher identity. To understand the genre of instructor feedback, we must acknowledge the **conventions,** or general characteristics, that mediate the genre, as there is no correct standard for distributing instructor feedback. In many cases, ink is used to comment on an assignment at either the micro- or macro-level. Therefore, using a CHAT lens to explore how different ink colors dictate how the instructor represents herself, as well as how the feedback is received by students, is essential to this pursuit. The version of CHAT used by the ISU writing program, which is specifically designed to examine literate activity, includes **representation** and **reception** as part of its seven concepts. Let's first think about representation.

What do you see when you receive an assignment back with instructor comments written in red ink all over it? Does the paper look as if it has been gutted and left for dead, the red ink mimicking blood? Instructors use red ink

for a variety of reasons, such as the stark contrast against black ink. However, using red ink is an intimidation tactic utilized by the instructor to maintain power in the dynamic relationship between herself and the student; using the mighty, all-knowing red pen, the intention of the instructor could be misrepresented by this performative act. Within the framework of CHAT, representation "highlights issues related to the way that the people who produce a text conceptualize and plan it" ("Key Terms"). Representation within the genre of instructor feedback prompts question such as, "Is the instructor attempting to assert power?" and "How do student's take up feedback offered in red ink versus other colors of ink?"

Defined by Joyce R. Walker in her article "Just CHATting," reception "deals with how a text is taken up and used by others. Reception is not just who will read a text but takes into account the ways people might use or re-purpose a text (sometimes in ways the author may not have anticipated or intended)" (75). Reception is the key concept concerning uptake of instructor feedback by students because how a student responds to feedback ultimately dictates the development of his/her/their writer-researcher identity. Instructors who wish to promote productive uptake of their feedback on the part of their students need to cultivate a keen awareness of how their feedback might be received and how different techniques and practices of offering feedback might impact reception in different ways.

Written Feedback vs. Digital Feedback

Technological advancements such as the creation of digital platforms for assignment submissions have resulted in ecological and distributive changes concerning the genre of instructor feedback. Traditionally, students received feedback in the form of written comments on assignments, but, as digital platforms such as Blackboard, Canvas, and the system specific to Illinois State University called ReggieNet become more prevalent in the university setting, the distribution practices of instructors evolve. Instructors can now have students turn in their assignments online and provide feedback digitally. This practice subverts the traditional conventions of the genre of instructor feedback, which may mean that the way feedback is taken up by students is altered. Investigation of the genre's **ecology** and **distribution**, two other CHAT concepts, helps us analyze this subversion.

Ecological differences within the genre of instructor feedback include the differences between written feedback and digital feedback, and they inherently constrain the ways in which instructor feedback is taken up by a student. Perhaps a student would see written comments as more personal,

more direct; perhaps instructors are more likely to take a holistic approach to providing feedback digitally because of the difficulty of including comments line by line. The ecological differences of using different kinds of media and tools can affect a writer's uptake of instructor feedback. If the writer is able to make good use of the feedback they receive, then the system of communication as a whole can lead to a more diverse writer-researcher identity.

Additionally, student uptake is going to diverge if feedback is distributed in written form versus digital form. If instructor feedback is distributed in written form, the feedback is usually returned during class when the instructor sees the student. The dynamic relationship between instructor and student is challenged when the instructor distributes feedback in this way, but, if the instructor distributes feedback digitally, she can do so at her leisure whenever she has finished reviewing assignments. This may mean feedback is distributed late at night or early in the morning, times when the traditional university student may not be awake. Moreover, digital distribution removes the awkwardness of facing the instructor after receiving harsh feedback, which might alter the student's ability to maintain confidence as a writer-researcher in the classroom.

Finishing the Chat About Writer-Researcher Identity

Understanding instructor comments and how instructor feedback shapes one's writer-researcher identity can be effectively explored through the lens of CHAT. While there are seven concepts that comprise ISU's CHAT model, within the genre of instructor feedback, some concepts are more relevant than others. Moreover, some concepts are inherently working together within the genre. Since we have already explored representation and reception while discussing the implications of red ink versus black ink, and we came to understand how ecology and distribution prove relevant when we discussed written feedback versus digital feedback, let us explore the final three concepts at work in CHAT: **socialization**, **production**, and **activity**.

Socialization "describes the interactions of people and institutions as they produce, distribute and use texts. When people engage with texts, they are also (consciously and unconsciously) engaged in the practice of representing and transforming different kinds of social and cultural practices" ("Key Terms"). When thinking about socialization in terms of instructor feedback in a university setting, we must acknowledge that we already have instructor feedback from our previous educational experiences. So, we have to ask ourselves, "How are you socialized to interpret red marks

all over your paper? How does socialization affect how you might speak to your instructor about her feedback? If feedback seems particularly harsh, do you post on social media about it? How does social media socialize how your post, tweet, or update?"

According to her article, "Just CHATting," Joyce R. Walker describes production as:

> deal[ing] with the means through which a text is produced. This includes both tools (say, using a computer to produce a text vs. using a cell phone to produce a text) and practices (for example, the physical practices for using a computer vs. using a cell phone have some similarities, but also many differences). Production also considers the genres and structures that can contribute to and even "pre-shape" our ability to produce text. . . . When thinking about or investigating production for a specific text, an author is really trying to uncover how individuals and groups create texts under specific conditions, using specific tools, and following certain practices. (74–5)

When thinking about instructor feedback as a genre, we can think about the instructor-student relationship as a dynamic relationship with inherent constraints that dictate what an instructor might offer as feedback, as well as how an instructor offers feedback. Does the instructor write comments in the margins of a printed essay? If so, does she use colored ink? Does the instructor offer feedback digitally? If so, what font is used?

"Activity is a term that encompasses the actual practices that people engage in as they create text" ("Key Terms"). When exploring activity within the genre of instructor feedback, we must acknowledge that instructor feedback is an activity performed by a single person (the instructor) in conversation with a single audience (the student). Instructor feedback may be very well-thought out, but, if the feedback is hand-written on an assignment, the instructor only gets one opportunity to relay their comments to the student. Digital comments, however, can be revised easily before being returned to students. For an instructor, understanding the activity of making comments is necessary to assure that the comments are taken up as they were intended. From the point of view of the writer, the activity begins when they "take up" the comments and use them—perhaps to revise a particular text, but maybe also to learn things they can use in future writing situations.

An Interview with Myself

In the next section, I conduct an interview with myself about my personal uptake of instructor comments as an undergraduate student. I chose to

interview myself to emphasize the fact that one must be open to criticism and self-reflection to take up instructor feedback productively in ways that can help with the evolution of one's writer-researcher identity. By interviewing myself, my hope is that my readers can use my experience to gain confidence as writer-researchers. The idea is that even if an assignment is returned slashed with a red pen, the writer can still take up the feedback productively and use it to develop a stronger writer-researcher identity. (Remember, I did not want to write this article.)

Question 1: How did you take up instructor feedback as an undergraduate?

As an undergraduate, there were times when I did not want to accept an instructor's criticism of my work. It was my work, and I thought it was the best work I had ever done. Who was my instructor to say that my work was not "correct?" The reason I was not always receptive to feedback is because I thought I was the greatest writer to ever complete a specific assignment. I do not believe in the idea of correct or incorrect; rather, I prefer to think of decisions within a genre as *effective* or *ineffective*. Moreover, I was afraid to criticize myself, which really hindered the development of my writer-researcher identity. I was ignoring valuable skills I could learn to become a more diverse participant in any literate activity, and I was not learning to successfully navigate and partake in new genres. As I progressed through my undergraduate program, I learned I had to take up instructor feedback and not ignore it.

Question 2: Is there one specific tool or skill mentioned by your instructors that you struggled with more than other tools or skills in developing your writer-researcher identity?

There were many skills that were challenging for me to take up, but one I had trouble with particularly. I was an English major, so most of my assignments as an undergraduate were working within the essay genre. I cannot tell you how many essays were returned to me with instructor feedback that said things like, "Work on transitions!" or "Where are your transitional expressions or sentences?" Sometimes these comments would be underscored for emphasis, so I knew early on I needed to work on this skill to make my writing more effective, but I was stubborn. I thought my writing was effective without transitions. Typing the previous sentence was embarrassing. (Remember, I do not want to write this article.)

Question 3: Is there one specific instance where you struggled more than other instances in developing your writer-researcher identity?

I had to have a minor at my undergraduate institution, so I chose Political Science. The writing done for English assignments and the writing done for Political Science assignments are very different, something I learned

only after turning in my first essay in a Political Science class. I did not take up the instructor feedback from my Political Science instructor in an effective manner at all. I learned (or so I thought) how to write in the English department, so why were the tools that I had acquired on those assignments not translating effectively into the writing I was doing in my Political Science class? It was then that I realized that learning to navigate the genre of the essay is not discipline specific. Once I learned how to navigate within these two genres, my writer-researcher identity became more diverse.

Question 4: How did instructor feedback develop your writer-researcher identity?

When I think about the development of my writer-researcher identity as an undergraduate, I focus on two aspects of my uptake. First, I think about how instructor feedback assisted in my development on a micro-level. That is, how instructor feedback introduced me to the tools I needed to navigate a specific genre. An example of this type of tool is how I learned to incorporate transitional expressions and transitional sentences in my writing to become a better participant in the genre of the essay. Second, I think about how I took up instructor feedback on a macro-level. I understand that the feedback from instructors I received shaped my writer-researcher identity and aided my ability to perform effectively in a variety of genres, as well as to navigate genres that are new to me.

Conclusion

A diverse writer-researcher identity is fundamental to one's evolution as a student, and one way it can be developed is by paying attention to instructor feedback. My primary goal in assessing uptake from the variety of kinds of feedback (red ink versus black ink, written versus digital) instructors offer on assignments is to help readers to understand how a productive uptake of instructor feedback can lead to a more diverse writer-researcher identity and the development of a wider range of skills and knowledge that, in turn, can help a writer participate effectively in new genres. Instructor feedback also molds one's writer-researcher identity and is most efficiently explored through a CHAT lens. By interviewing myself, I have tried to participate in the genre of instructor feedback by being vulnerable to constructive criticism of my writing. (Remember, I do not want to write this article.) I did not want to write this article because I did not want my writing critiqued. I said, "I do not want to write this article!" three times, I turned around, I looked in the mirror, I tapped my ruby-red slippers together, I prayed to the almighty sun-god, and I wrote this article.

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Filling the Blank Page: Writer's Block and What to Do with It

Tiffany Bishop

When the Internet failed to answer her questions about how to fix her writer's block, Tiffany Bishop turned to CHAT for a solution. The following article is her description of what happened.

Do you know that feeling when it's 10:00 p.m. and you've spent the last four hours either staring at a practically blank Word document or watching YouTube or Netflix in order to avoid staring at that blank document because your head feels like it's going to explode if you have to think about writing this essay one more time? I do. Except, it's not always with an essay, and it's not always at 10:00 p.m. Let's face it, I've wasted days stressing myself out so badly about writing something that in those days all I managed to do was write one or two sentences. And let's be honest, those sentences didn't even make the final cut when I finished the piece. I've struggled to write everything from a text message to a twenty-five-page paper for an English course. Each new or difficult task gives me this gut-wrenching feeling that I can't do it. For me, it consists of one-part panic, one-part self-loathing for not actually getting it done, one-part utter confusion, and one-part pure stress. The worst of it is, sometimes just the fear of writer's block is crippling enough that, even when I get back on track, I get stuck again two sentences later because I'm *scared* I'll get stuck again. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because I deal with this almost every time I write a paper, because I don't think I'm

alone, and because the Internet has failed me when I've turned to it for help, I decided that I wanted to try to solve my problem with writer's block.

So, What Is Writer's Block?

After searching the Internet for a definition of writer's block that I could relate to and after realizing that most existing definitions only cover part of my understanding of what writer's block is, I decided to come up with my own definition of what writer's block means to me. I define writer's block as a period of time when a writer can't figure out what they want to write, what to write next, or how to write what they want to or need to write. Despite what some people may believe, writer's block isn't just something famous writers and poets struggle with. Take me, for example. Unless I have a class with you, you've probably never heard of me. That means I'm definitely not famous. But I face writer's block on a regular basis, and I've been facing writer's block since I was a kid. Writer's block is something anyone and, I'd argue, everyone who writes must face at some point in their life. After all, just about everyone will be asked to write something at some point where they will struggle to figure out what to do next. Sometimes writer's block takes the form of a blank page that isn't changed for hours, days, months, or even years. Sometimes writer's block takes the form of a writer who writes the same paragraph eight times in eight different ways and erases it each time. And sometimes writer's block takes the form of procrastination, and the writer won't even attempt the writing until they absolutely have to (likely because of some kind of approaching deadline). Keep in mind that these aren't the only forms that writer's block takes. They are just the ones I am most familiar with.

How Do We Get Writer's Block?

Basically, when we get writer's block it is because we are stuck, in some way, in our writing. We can be stuck because something in our **writing-research identity** (the unique ways in which we write) doesn't match up with how we are trying to write, because of something in the **activity system** (everything around us that affects our writing, thinking, and being), or because of something in the **genre conventions** (the "rules" or "traits" associated with a certain type of text) of the text we are trying to write. Basically, each case of writer's block will be because of a different reason, so our response to each one will have to be different. This means that before we can solve our writer's block, we first have to figure out why we have it. Maybe this is why,

when I scoured the Internet for an answer on how to fix my writer's block, I found hundreds of suggestions, but none worked.

Writing-Research Identity

The environment in which you write, the things happening in the world around you, and the expectations that you and others have of your writing are all parts of the activity system that factor into how you write and why you write. This means that everything from where we are, to what time of day it is, to any anxiety we might have about an action or interpretation is part of the activity system that affects our writing. These factors can change or reinforce our writing-research identities and the ways in which we define ourselves as writers.

Our writing-research identities, much like our personal identities, describe who we are as writers. The things we do while writing, how we write, the things that distract us from writing, the things that motivate us to write, and the things that motivate us not to write are all wrapped up in our writing-research identities, like tangled balls of string that we have to unwind each time we sit down to write. Each strand of string in your ball is a tool for you to use with your writing-research identity to create successful pieces of writing. Though you may share strings with other people who write in similar ways to you, ultimately, your tangled ball of string is entirely your own. Since each person's writing-research identity is personal to them, it would be impossible for me to describe what works for you. Instead, I'm going to give some examples of some of the quirkier things that I've learned about my writing-research identity and how it affects my ability to write in hopes that you can use my examples as a model to think about how your writing-research identity affects how, where, when, and why you write.

For me, where I work, what I listen to when I work, and how I reward or punish myself for working or failing to work can be huge factors in the success of my writing. Personally, I like to work either on the floor or in bed. Desks are uncomfortable for me because I like to curl up with what I'm working on. Even when there is a desk in front of me, I rarely use it. Instead I put my computer onto my lap and curl up in the chair (see Figure 1). I once had the idea that maybe I "cuddle" my computer because it makes me feel like a loving "parent" to whatever I'm writing. If this isn't weird enough for you, I literally hugged my notebooks when I'd get writer's block as a kid. Before you mock me, hear me out. This "cuddling" had benefits. First of all, "cuddling" my writing got me to stop staring at it and stressing over it; second, it kept the text close so I wouldn't give up on it; third, it was a physical reminder that

Figure 1: Me ignoring a desk.

I do care about this piece of writing even if I'm mad at it. Okay, I get it. I'm weird. Please stop laughing at me now. Thanks.

Now that you're probably judging me, let's try a hopefully more relatable example—music. What I'm listening to when I'm writing has a huge effect on not only the mood I'm in while writing, but also what I end up writing (usually typing) on the paper (or computer). If my neighbors are blasting loud rap music, I find myself slamming my fingers on the keyboard and writing in a kind of factual yet probably sassy or even angry tone. This probably has something to do with the fact that I can't understand the words through the wall and it irritates me. If I'm listening to piano music, I write peacefully, and my writing seems to flow together. When I listen to country music, I focus on the characters of whatever I'm writing and that's when I create some of the strongest characters. When I have to write action, however, I need some kind of pop-punk, rock, or metal mix, or I get nowhere. In writing this, I'm writing with no music playing (unless you count a loud clunky dishwasher) because, at least for this section, I'm mostly writing about my own experience and don't want to alter my perspective with music.

I've also noticed a few other strange things about my writing-research identity. I've realized that if I promise myself food after getting a certain amount of work done, I will do better work (and actually do work), whereas when I don't do that, I might get the work done sooner, but it will need more revising. That, or I just won't get anything done. I've also learned in the last couple of years that if it's 3:00 a.m., I need to just give up on writing academic papers and try when I'm conscious again the next day. However, 3:00 a.m. is the perfect time for me to get any creative writing done because I feel like my brain is in the creative mode that it usually uses for dreams.

Whether you relate to me or not, the point is that you, like me, have places and times and ways in which you work, and write, best. The other point is that understanding those aspects of yourself can help you adjust to new writing situations. Knowing that rap music makes me write with attitude

might encourage me to write creatively when my neighbors are playing it, or it might encourage me to put headphones on to stay on task. Not knowing that about myself would likely result in me continuing to angrily write a poor essay.

CHAT

Unfortunately, one's writing-research identity is only one cause for writer's block. Sometimes the activity system around a writer is what causes it. This is because writing doesn't happen inside any one person; it happens outside of us. Thus, we need to consider how writing is used in the world. To extend the scope past my personal relationship with writing to the activity system of writing, I'm going to try looking at my writer's block through **cultural-historical activity theory** (**CHAT**). CHAT is a flexible theory that has us look at the activity systems around writing and the social as well as cultural implications of writing. In essence, CHAT is going to give me the language I need to discuss the activity that was going on around my writing that caused me to get stuck. First, I'm going to look at the first time I had to write a twenty-five-page paper since I already know where my problem was with this essay. Then, I'm going to look at a current case of my own writer's block (co-authoring a book/manga) in which I didn't know where I was getting stuck until I sat down to write the first draft of this very article.

So, before we start, let's talk about what this CHAT thing is. The basic background of CHAT is that it's a theory for understanding activity in the world. In terms of writing, it helps us look at how people and tools and **genres** (types of writing) all work together in producing different types of texts. The ISU Writing Program uses a version of CHAT that consists of seven different terms: representation, distribution, activity, socialization, production, reception, and ecology, though there is a debated eighth term (trajectory) that I'm not going to discuss. I will give you my own definitions of each of these terms later when I am discussing them in the examples of my own writer's block, but since I think everyone understands CHAT a little differently (in part because the categories overlap, and in part because we are all individuals), I would suggest checking out "Just CHATting" by Joyce R. Walker in the first issue of this journal or "Understanding Language and Culture with Cultural-Historical Activity Theory" by Tyler Kostecki in the 3.1 issue in the archives of the Grassroots Writing Research website (*isuwriting.com*) if my definitions don't click for you.

So, where do we start? That's the real question. Well, because I knew I didn't have enough space in this article to do every step with you, what I

did was I start with the same thing this paragraph starts with: a question. I turned every CHAT term into a list of questions to get myself thinking about how each term would show up in writer's block. Then, I answered the questions and mapped those answers out into a chart (which you can see in Figure 2 and Figure 3). What will follow is what I learned about my writer's block in creating these charts.

The Essay

The first piece of writing I'm looking at is a twenty-five-page literary analysis paper on the poem *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot that I wrote during my junior year of college. It was the first paper I wrote that was longer than eight pages. After completing my CHAT analysis and creating my CHAT map, I realized that **representation** (how people think about, plan, talk about, and conceptualize a text), **activity** (what someone does while creating the text), **production** (how a text is made, what tools are used to make the text, and what genres and structures are part of the text), and **reception** (how a text is understood, used, and repurposed by others in ways that may or may not be expected by the author) were the places where I was most often getting stuck when I wrote this piece.

Since most of the feedback I was getting from my teacher was related to organizational issues, it was obvious to me that something was wrong with my planning of the piece. This led me to rethink the way in which I was representing my essay. Initially, when I thought about representation, I started with questions. How did I imagine this writing? What strategies did

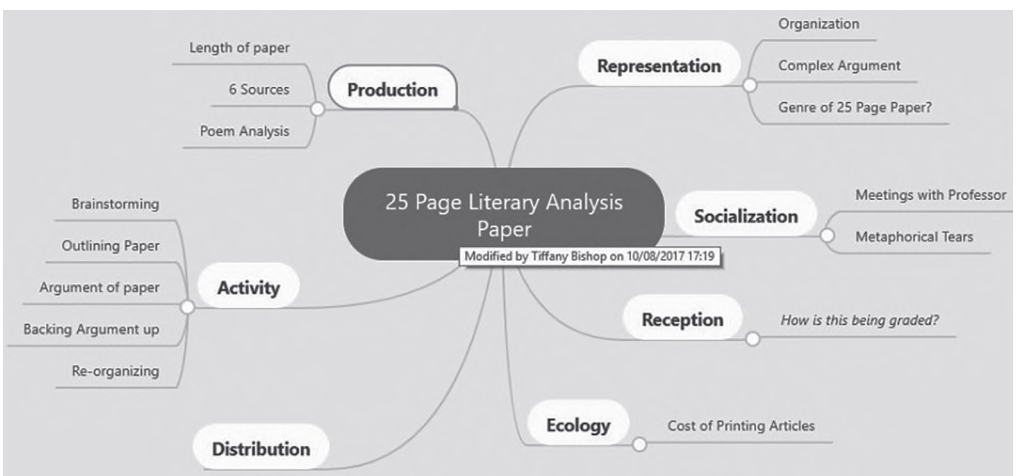

Figure 2: Analysis paper CHAT map.

I know that could have helped me approach this writing? How did I use the feedback that I was given to change how I was imagining this piece? In asking these questions, I remembered first that I had no idea how to organize a piece of this length, second, that I didn't know where I was going in my argument, and, third, I didn't have any strategies to help me organize my work. I also remembered that since I didn't know what I was doing in the paper, I didn't know how to respond to the feedback I was getting. In other words, I was lost, and I didn't know how to start my paper, so when I tried to do it, I failed. I had a lot of decisions to make on what I wanted my paper to look like and how I wanted to put it together before I could write it.

After remembering these realizations, I began to think about how my plans for production changed. While thinking about production, I asked myself, "What is the best way to format this text?" and "What tools did I use to help me create this piece of writing?" Since there were a lot of different ways to organize the text, the first question wasn't easy to answer. In the end, I had broken down my argument into two parts (war and religion), and then I had broken the religion category into two parts again (Eastern and Western religion) before bringing all the loose strings together at the end to make a statement that made some sense. The tools I was initially using for this were my laptop, my fingers, my brain, and whatever stuck out to me about an article. When I decided to change my activity, however, the tools I used changed, too. Since I work best when I can visualize things, I had decided that using the computer to organize my ideas might not be best, so I began with a printer, a highlighter, some blank paper, and a pen.

After I reorganized the paper conceptually, to actively pull my sources together, I had to first decide what was important from each source. This led to me highlighting any piece of the articles that I thought related to my argument. There were papers everywhere. I then grouped the articles according to related topics (all of the war and language sources in one pile and all of the religion sources in another). This cut down on the amount of time I spent searching for an article. Then, I handwrote an outline of what I wanted to say and went through my outline to note which articles would fit where. If an article fit in multiple places in my argument, I wrote the article's name and a number one, two, or three next to it. I also put the one, two, or three in the article next to whatever part of the article corresponded to the number in my outline. When it came time to write the paper, I began with my argument, used the outline to find the sources that were already discussing the part of my argument I was making, and looked through the text to make an argument about things that people weren't already discussing. After a few hours of labor, what was a ten-page paper doubled in size and actually had a point to it.

Though these were the biggest problems I had, I also had one other problem. I am proud of the paper I wrote, but my teacher's reception was different than my own. Initially, I asked, "What does my audience want or expect?" but I quickly turned that question into "How is this being graded?" That's when I was reminded that I was unfamiliar with the teacher and how she graded. Not finding an answer to this question before submitting the paper is perhaps my biggest regret. As it turned out, I got a full ten points taken off for grammar alone. I was so focused on making sure that my argument and organization was well done (because that is what the teacher and I spent the most time talking about) that I forgot to edit for grammar, which is a key part of the "rules" and genre conventions an academic paper is expected to follow.

Though I already knew where I was stuck in writing that piece, looking back on it and analyzing it through a CHAT lens helped me find a way to talk about the places where I was struggling. It also allowed me to see some of the ways in which I've grown as a writer and learned more about my writing-research identity.

The "Book"

Now, for the more authentic example of me trying to work through my own writer's block—the book. My friend, Taylor, and I are co-writing a book. I'm doing most of the writing, but she is helping me develop some of the characters and giving me feedback on the plot. She, after the book is

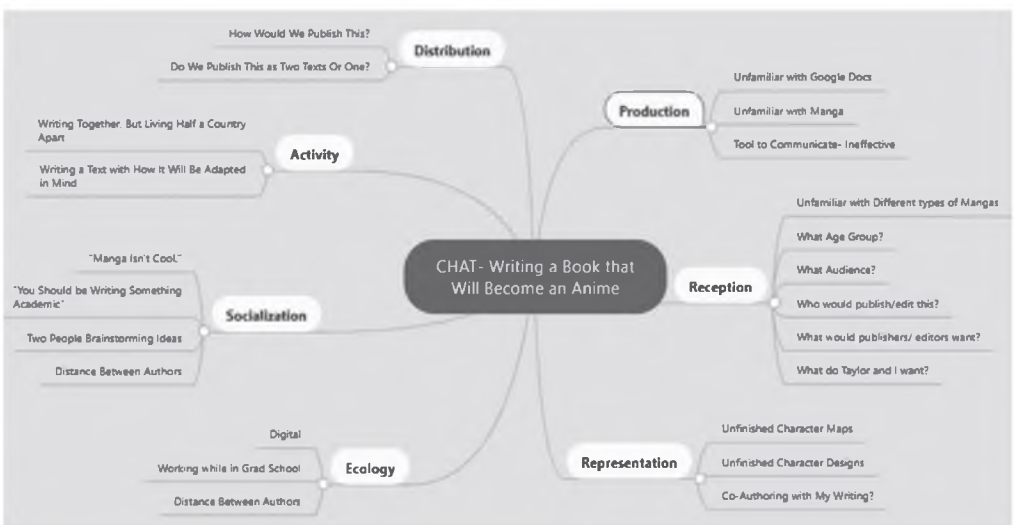

Figure 3: Book CHAT map.

complete, is then going to turn it into a manga, at which point I will help her by giving her feedback. In the first draft of this article, I realized quickly that co-authoring was a problem that showed up under all of the categories on my CHAT map. This meant that it was likely my biggest problem and the one I should address first in confronting my writer's block. The categories in which it was the most significant issue, however, were **distribution** (how texts are distributed, who texts are distributed to, and where texts go), **ecology** (the physical, biological, and environmental factors that affect the text), **socialization** (how people talk about and engage with the text while they are making it and after it is made), and reception.

When I looked at distribution, I asked the question, "How do I get this text to people?" Though initially I was thinking about how I would get this text out to an audience when it is finished, I realized that I also have to distribute the text to my co-author, Taylor, while I am writing it. Because of this, I have to change which tools I use to write the story. In essence, the only option I have is to use a Google Doc, or to send her an email every time I update the story. Since sending an email is a pain and since she doesn't often check her emails, that leaves me working on a platform that I dislike. This makes me less enthusiastic to work on the story.

The ecology of where I am working and how I am working is also a problem. Under ecology, I found myself asking, "How does location and space factor into this writing?" and "How does time factor into this writing?" Since I'm writing this book half a country away from my co-author (who is currently in Maine), it creates a different ecology than when we were co-writing the first chapter together in our apartment a year ago. When we were co-writing before, we were right next to each other and could easily bounce ideas off of one another or give each other feedback immediately. We were also on similar schedules. Now, she is teaching at an elementary school, and I'm taking classes in graduate school, so neither of us really has time to work. Furthermore, the digital platform makes it difficult for me to copy and paste writing that I've done on devices that can't access the Internet, and the digital platform can also cause me to lose my train of thought when I'm writing on the platform with Internet when the Internet stops working.

Because of the problems I have with ecology, I also have problems with socialization. In thinking about socialization, not only was I wondering, "What social structures influence the text I'm writing?" but I was also asking, "How do I co-write a text?" The physical distance between my co-author and myself creates a social distance as well because both of us are horrible at keeping in contact through technology. Add in the fact that neither of us are entirely certain about what it means to co-author, and it becomes really hard

for us to communicate with each other about the book. Furthermore, the fact that manga isn't socially accepted in the culture that I grew up in makes it harder for me to feel excited or proud of my work because I fear negative judgement.

The distance between Taylor and I also makes me fear how she will receive the text. Specifically, the question I was asking with respect to reception changed from "How will this text be perceived?" to "How will this text be perceived by Taylor?" because I suddenly became self-conscious about what I was writing and feared that my co-author wouldn't like it. I also realized that since I couldn't talk to my co-author, if I was writing in a style that made it more difficult for her to turn it into a manga later on, I wouldn't know that until far later which would mean that I would have to rewrite a lot more than if we were working together on it.

All of these factors boiled down to one big result: I feared writing this text, and I lacked the enthusiasm to write it because I lacked the ability to effectively communicate with my co-author. When I came across this realization, while writing the first draft of this article, I called Taylor on the phone—something neither of us ever do—and asked her what she thought about all of this. She and I decided that we should schedule two nights a month to video chat through Skype and talk about the book while I work on writing it. This way, when I have questions or concerns, they are answered right away, and I also have Taylor to hold me accountable to write. Plus, writing on a Google Doc isn't nearly as stressful when I can complain to the person who is waiting to read the document that it is broken. Since editing this article has taken several months, I can say that Taylor and I have had minor success at working on the book. Looking ahead to next semester, it will be easier to schedule times for us to work because the evening and night classes that I will have are, for the most part, a little bit earlier than my current ones. At the very least, whenever we do have time to work, our discussions are much more productive and much more writing is accomplished.

"So, How Does This Apply to Me?"–The Reader

Should you choose to try using a CHAT map to find the source of your writer's block, my suggestions are to start with a struggle that fits under multiple CHAT categories and see how those categories relate, or to look for the answer that seems the most significant or scary to you. I've found that once I start looking into the different categories, even if I start with the wrong reason for my writer's block, I often think of different problems that I am running into, and I can eventually find the one I am hung up on. From

there, you just have to think of a solution that targets the specific problems you are having. This is where the Internet might actually be helpful because with a simple Google search there are thousands of suggestions at your fingertips. I've also found that talking to others, as I did with my co-author and my professor, can be extremely helpful when trying to brainstorm ideas of how to deal with your writer's block.

What I'm hoping is that this article will provide you with some insight into how to think about your own cases of writer's block. I realize that you and I are different people and that your experiences and struggles with writing will be different than my own. I simply hope that by giving you my examples, I have encouraged you to think about how your writing-research identity and CHAT can help you with your own writer's block. Ideally, this article will change how you think about CHAT and help you see it as a tool to use when you are struggling with writing, as well as a way to analyze writing you are unfamiliar with. Last, but not least, I also hope this article might change how you think about writer's block. Anyone can get writer's block, and likely everyone will at some point in their lives, and most people see this as a bad thing or as something to be afraid of. Though I will admit that writer's block isn't fun or easy to deal with, I do believe that it helps us become better writers. Writer's block provides us with an opportunity to learn and grow as writers; it gives us new experiences that we can learn from and that can enrich our abilities to write. Writer's block is a bridge between what we know and what we don't know. All we have to do is determine the best way to cross that bridge.

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Emotionally Authentic Narrative

Elizabeth Calero

What place does emotional authenticity have in shaping digital narratives in the face of finstas and paid social media influencers? In this article, Elizabeth Calero analyzes her Instagram feed through a CHAT lens in order to understand what role her emotions play in creating her own authentic digital narrative.

Breaking Down the Genre

Starting this article has been a little bit like falling down the rabbit hole. My research initiated from the article "Settling in to Genre: The Social Action of Emotion in Shaping Genres" by Faith Kurtyka, which explores how emotion affects the uptake of a writer in new, unfamiliar genres. In the article, Kurtyka works with a student, Jocelyn, who is attempting to operate within the unfamiliar genre of a sorority recruitment video. Jocelyn finds some of the conventions of typical sorority videos inauthentic and wants to create a video that is an emotionally authentic representation of her organization. This article pushed me to wonder how emotion informs my own literate activities. I chose to explore this question within a genre I use frequently, the social media platform known as Instagram. Similar to Jocelyn, I wanted to examine how I resist genre conventions I disagree with, therefore remaking the genre, but also identify the areas where that resistance fails, and, in turn, I am remade by the genre itself. Here, **genre conventions** refer to general rules or expectations a reader may have of a text within a specific genre. In order to do this, I needed to identify the common genre conventions of

Instagram posts, see which conventions I disagreed with, and then analyze my own feed to see if my resistance was successful. The problem with this is the vast diversity of Instagram posts available. There are so many subgenres under the Instagram umbrella that I had difficulty identifying common conventions used in all posts. Even within the subgenres, conventions tend to vary from post to post. A simplistic formatting conventions list for a post might be as follows:

- Header with author's profile picture and Instagram handle
- Photo/video itself located beneath header
- Social interaction options below photo
    - Heart = like
    - Message bubble = comment
    - Paper airplane = send post
    - Bookmark = save post
- Optional caption space below photo/video
    - Caption tagged by Author's handle
    - Caption can feature text, emojis, and/or hashtags
- Comments of Author's followers beneath caption

Pulling out the format conventions of a post itself are easy; Instagram uses a template for posts limiting creative freedom to the content of the post itself and the caption used to describe the post. It is difficult to try to identify trends within the types of posts. Take the generic subgenre of selfie posts, for example. While the category of selfie guarantees a photo (or video) of a single person, usually a portrait of that person's face, there is no wide-ranging regulation as to how these selfies are created. There is no typical selfie post. There may be a trend for a specific user—for example, there may be a user who takes a selfie in the same exact pose every post or always uses a song lyric as a caption. But while that may be characteristic for that user, to me it is not a convention of the subgenre since another user may engage with that subgenre in an entirely different way. This overwhelming diversity of posts pushed me to focus instead on the trends I could spot within my personal feed and how they communicated, or were influenced by, my emotions. I decided to apply a **CHAT (cultural-historical activity theory)** lens to my posts to better understand the emotions behind the production of my posts and my audience's response to them.

The Data

My profile features a total of 1,645 posts since its creation in September 2011 and is available to an audience of 198 followers. My account is set to private, my audience limited to approved followers with whom I have an actual acquaintance. I decided to limit my study to a specific time period within my feed, since 1,645 posts is an overwhelming amount of data to get through. For the sake of tracing an emotional journey through my literate activity, I settled on analyzing posts from the public announcement of my acceptance to the ISU English Graduate Program on April 14, 2017 to a recent outing with friends on October 7, 2017. Over the past 176 days I have posted 174 times, featuring 163 photo posts and thirteen video posts. In order to analyze my posting trends, I created six categories, or subgenres, that my posts could be categorized under that I also found existed in the more public Instagram realm. The subgenres are as follows: Selfies, Landscapes, Food, Pets, Other People, and Miscellaneous. Selfies have been previously explained as just pictures of lil' ol' me. Landscapes are typically photos of natural landscapes but also feature some indoor locations. Food is any photo that features only food and no human subjects. Pets is a category created in order to honor my obsession with my dog, Dory. Other People is a category that includes photos or videos featuring just other people or myself with other people. Lastly, miscellaneous is for anything I couldn't fit in the previous categories, including birthday dedication posts, memes, and photos of random objects. Out of the 174 posts, fourteen fell under the category of Selfies, sixty-eight under Landscapes, eighteen under Food, seventeen under Pets, and Other People and Miscellaneous each had twenty-two. Figure 1 below features the category and percentage breakdown of my findings.

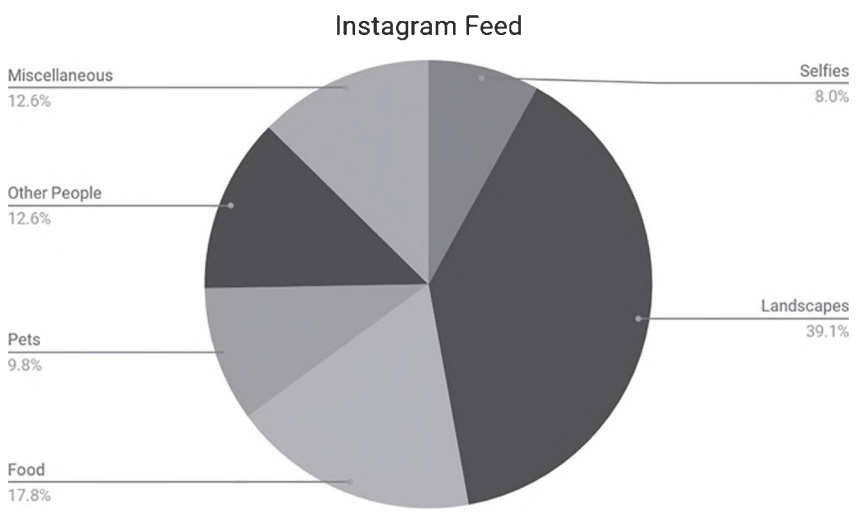

Figure 1: Percentages of each category of posts.

I also wanted to look at my audience's interaction with what I deemed "High Emotion Posts." These were posts that I had created in a time of high emotion relative to the rest of my feed as a whole. For example, the first post in this range of study was a High Emotion Post. What we'll call "ISU Announcement" was for me a celebration of the months of hard work I had put towards my applications and of the exciting future I was envisioning. This post received seventeen likes and three comments, which for my feed is a fairly high number. Out of the 176 posts, I identified nine posts as High Emotion and have provided the audience response and category they belong to in Figure 2.

High-Emotion Post	Category	Likes	Comments
ISU Announcement	Miscellaneous	17	3
Getting a Car	Miscellaneous	9	1
Family Reunion	Landscape	6	0
Difficult Days Ahead	Selfie	6	0
Last Day of Work	Miscellaneous	6	0
The Last Sunrise	Landscape	5	0
Mom & Moving Day	Miscellaneous	7	0
Orientation Complete	Miscellaneous	13	0
How to Student	Miscellaneous	16	3

Figure 2: Category and audience response of high-emotion posts.

Translating Emotion into Posts

After analyzing my feed, I began to wonder if I could identify any specific emotion that was fueling the representation behind my individual posts. **Representation** is one of the ISU CHAT terms that for me means the conceptualization or brainstorming behind the production of a text. In other words, it asks questions like, "What do I want this post to say and how do I want to say it?" It can even ask, "What is the goal of my text?" Now a word about the style of my feed and my posting habits in general: I like to think I have a sort of minimalist posting style. To me this means I try not to alter the original photos with additional filters, and my captions are usually a short few words (only twelve out of the 174 are more than one sentence), letting the photos speak for themselves. I also am quick to post after actually taking a photo. I rarely allow twenty-four hours to go by before the photo is shared on my feed. This is important to note because it means the emotion I felt at

the time of the capture is a relevant motivating force in the representation of my posts.

After reviewing the categories of my feed, I realized that I was motivated to create in each category when I was experiencing a specific emotional range and that my goal was usually to convey this emotion to my followers. Selfies, for example, were primarily born out of a moment of physical confidence. I posted a selfie at times when I felt like I looked good (which feels like a very vain statement to make). I wanted to share or communicate this feeling with my audience through a smiling face and a caption that typically comments on my appearance in a positive way. While I felt this confidence and wanted to share it, I also felt a sort of hesitance in making such an assertion, which is evident in a lot of the captions accompanying my selfies. For example, one selfie caption reads, "This is the nicest I'll look all weekend," and another says, "Orientation time is upon us (which means I have to officially try at work)." While the selfies acknowledge that I feel confident in my appearance, through limiting the post to the subject of my face and using phrases like, "nicest I'll look" and "officially trying," my captions, born out of a self-conscious hesitation, also attempt to reassure my audience that this is a rare occurrence.

Landscapes were usually conceived out of a reverence or awe for my surroundings. I was moved by the beauty of my surroundings and sharing that reverence was the goal of my post. I was the most prolific in this category at sixty-eight out of 174 posts. These posts differ from the selfies in that they have fewer descriptive captions. I felt no need to undermine the beauty of my surroundings, or even explicitly state my reverence. Some have no caption at all, some use only nature-themed emojis (suns, clouds, flowers, trees), and others still have only a minimal reference to a time or place ("Saturday," "Yesterday," "6 am"). While I feel a deeper emotional attachment to these posts, it seems like I try to let the pictures speak for themselves.

Figure 3: Landscape post.

Food seems to be motivated by a feeling of celebration or joy. I love food. It makes me happy, simple as that. Food posts can also be connected to a kind of celebration of companionship. Most

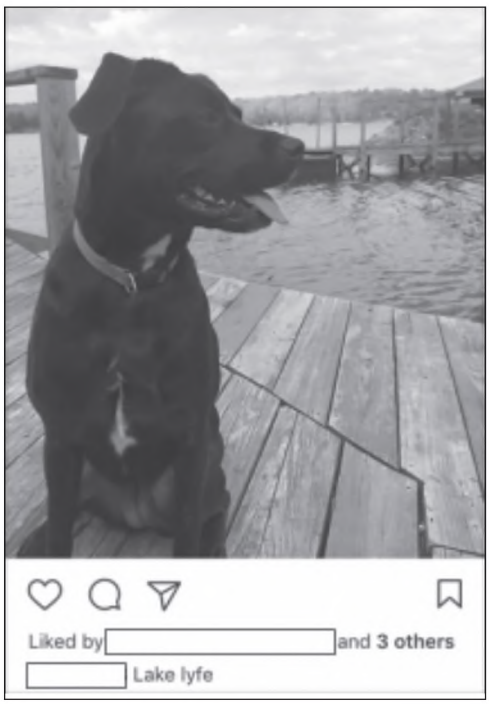

Figure 4: Pet post.

of my food posts are created when I eat food with other people. Eating food and being with people makes me happy enough that I want to share and celebrate that with my followers. The captions reinforce this celebration with words and phrases like, "Out here livin my best life ya'll" under a close up of a cupcake, "Heaven" under an ice cream sandwich, and "Reasons to come home" under the spread at a family cookout.

Pets is a category that comes from pure adoration. My dog is my best friend, my partner in crime, and the cutest being in existence. She is always the sole subject of my Pets posts, with the occasional exception of her best dog friend, Nugget (who I also adore). Her captions are characterized with frequent emojis (hearts, star twinkles, puppy faces, crowns) coupled with phrases and words like, "What a Queen," "Cutie," and "Why you so pretty." Her photos with Nugget are usually set on my Mom's boat with friendship-related captions like, "Best Friends" or "Boat Buddies."

Other People posts are created from a love for my family and friends. These posts feature my niece and nephew eleven times, other family members six times, and my friends the remaining five out of twenty-two. It may be more accurate to say that these posts are created from a place of adoration, similar to my Pets posts. They are characterized by a close-up of the photo's subject paired with captions that try to communicate the adoration or love that I feel. These captions include emojis (hearts, two women dancing, smiley faces, star twinkles) along with words and phrases like, "Bbs," "Cuties," "Sibling Love," and "My favs."

Miscellaneous is the only category I can't ascribe a specific emotion to, due to its wide variation in content. There is some of that celebratory adoration in the birthday posts, which feature the longest captions of any of my posts by far since they combine a collage with an actual narrative or very brief letter. There is relief in the post featuring a photo of my English 402 composition notebook with the caption reading, "Day 1 ya'll. Have survived orientation" accompanied by some festive emojis. My emotional motivations are as abstract as the category itself.

Do You Feel Me?

When it comes to **reception**, a CHAT aspect that refers to how my audience reacts to or interacts with my text, I wanted to examine the response to my High-Emotion Posts. I was curious if I could gauge if the intense emotion I felt or expressed in the posts themselves was felt by my audience. Since social media doesn't allow me to observe the silent reactions to my posts, I can only gauge audience response through likes or comments left on the post itself or direct messages to my profile. These responses may require some translation on my part since Instagram limits its social interactions to these likes, comments, or messages. What I mean here is that knowing my audience, when they like a post that may feature a sort of emotional struggle or frustration, they are really communicating solidarity or sympathy instead of an actual "liking" of my pain. I can only say this of my specific audience, since it is limited to a selection of my personal acquaintances, and I like to think they are better than those that would laugh at my pain.

The three High-Emotion Posts with the highest engagement from my audience were "ISU Announcement," "Orientation Complete," and "How to Student." Each of these photos represented a time of high celebration or uncertainty for me in reality. When I review these posts, I can remember my exact feeling, but it doesn't seem that those feelings were necessarily understood by, or stimulated an equal response in, my audience.

"ISU Announcement," which featured a screenshot of my Facebook post about my acceptance to ISU with a caption of "FYI" and an emoji smiley face, was given a total of seventeen likes and three comments from my followers. It was a post created out of joy and excitement at my accomplishment and what it meant for my future. Two of the comments were from the same user, and the first comment did try to match my emotional high with a "yessss" followed by several emoji hearts. This elongated yes, along with the emoji love, can be read in such a way that it matched the celebratory nature of my post. This single word is the best indicator that my emotional representation was received by my audience. The second comment was a simple response to a

Figure 5: ISU Announcement post.

Figure 6: Orientation Complete post.

Figure 7: How to Student post.

question I had asked. The second user to respond did not leave a comment of a celebratory nature, but one of solidarity. They just wanted to let me know they lived in the area and that my move would make hanging out in person much easier.

"Orientation Complete," which was a photo of a glass of wine set against a backdrop of board games in my apartment with the caption "Orientation complete" and emoji praise hands, gained thirteen likes and no comments. Moving to a new city and interacting with an entire department of new peers was the most daunting aspect of my admittance to graduate school. I was incredibly relieved to have survived the orientation process and looking forward to the opportunity of some social isolation that following weekend. While my followers connected with my success, they were not moved enough to comment.

"How to Student," which was a photo of my planner on top of the desk of my first class of the semester with the caption "Done teaching my first class, now to pretend I remember how to student" with an emoji, has sixteen likes and three comments from the same user. This post was created out of a moment of intense feelings of inferiority. I had always been comfortable with the idea of teaching—I enjoy being in front of a class—but I was incredibly unsure of my capabilities as a student. The photo itself does not do much to convey this emotion, and the caption downplays my fear with the smile of my emoji. The first comment was a recognition of my achievement—"How cool!"—followed by the question of "What are you teaching?" The other comments were just a continued conversation

about the class I taught. While I may have felt intense inferiority and the representation of my post came from that specific emotion, I don't think I did a great job of conveying it to my audience. This may be why the reception of my post did not directly address the high emotion of my post.

It is also worth noting that none of these posts motivated communication outside the Instagram platform itself. I received no congratulatory texts or phone calls mentioning the posts and no one (besides my mom) reached out to see how my orientation process or first day of class went. My audience communicated through electronic hearts and brief comments and left me to fill in the blanks when it came to connectivity. This may also be a reflection of the level of seriousness given to a social media platform. As the author, I'm the only one who has access to the weight of emotion behind the representation of each post. Without explicitly telling my audience, they have no way to know that this may be my only acknowledgement of the event and accompanying emotions.

These High-Emotion Posts are also not an accurate reflection of reception for all of my subgenres. While these three posts gained a reasonably large number of likes, they were not the most liked posts in the range of my study. I have created Figure 8 below that details the average number of likes and comments for each subgenre.

As you can see, the largest measurable success of reception, in terms of likes, takes place in the Selfie category. Most of my High-Emotion Posts fall into the Miscellaneous category, and only one out of the nine fell under Selfie. While I may be sharing these intensely vulnerable milestones in my narrative,

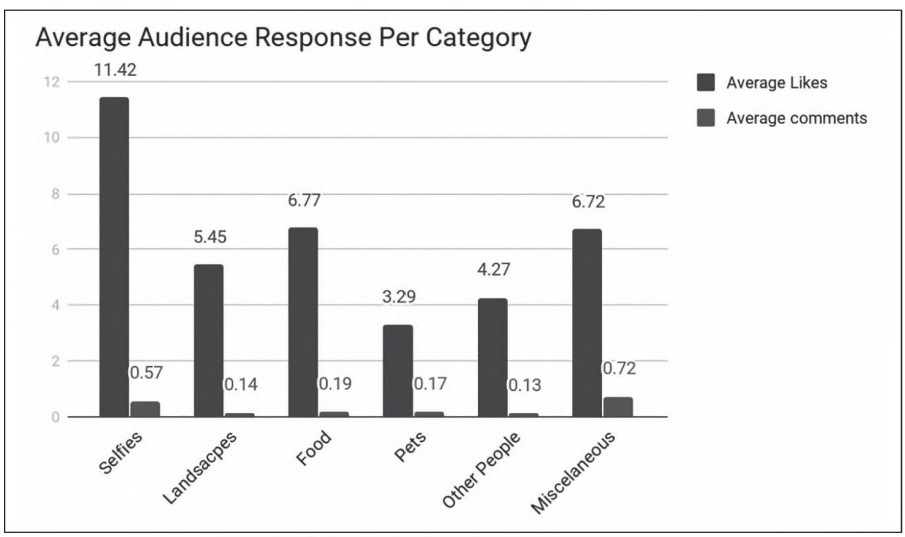

Figure 8: Average audience response per category.

I'm not often using my face to communicate those emotions, even though my audience has repeatedly communicated their appreciation of that style of post.

Authenticity

Looking at these High-Emotion Posts and the narrative they create is the closest I could get to the kind of examination Kurtyka performs in her article. While there are no specific formatting conventions I try to resist in each of my posts, I think that, overall, I try to maintain an authentic narrative. For me, this means a narrative that does not cater to the interests of my audience but, instead, is as true a representation of myself as I can get. Kurtyka says that Jocelyn found "the existing genre to be emotionally inadequate and emotionally inauthentic" (1) in representing her group, which is what motivated her to try to shape the genre of sorority recruitment videos to suit her needs. I think this frustration of negotiating with a potentially emotionally inauthentic genre is an experience we frequently encounter on our social media platforms. In an age of "Instagram models" and paid "social media influencers," I am often left wondering what lengths an author has gone to in order to produce a post and what incentives exist beyond a desire to share their narrative. I'm an emotional creature, and, as I've discussed at length, a large part of my motivation for my posts is to share the emotional markers of my narrative. For others, their representation may be more focused on satisfying monetary or social engagement needs.

I think the data behind my High-Emotion Posts supports my endeavor to be emotionally authentic. I pulled out three posts with the highest interactions in order to discuss representation, but if you refer back to Figure 2, you'll see that most of the posts that I deemed high-emotion garnered fewer than ten likes. Even the three posts discussed are not the most liked posts in the range of this study. Figure 8 demonstrates that my audience expresses the most enjoyment in the Selfie subgenre. In the creation of my High-Emotion Posts, my representation is born from a much more vulnerable position than my more habitual posts, but is not getting a large response from my followers. Yet, I persist. These moments may not be significant to my audience, but they are moments I find to be significant to my narrative. In fact, there would be almost no coherent narrative without them. Just the titles in Figure 2 almost tell their own story: I found out I was admitted to an amazing graduate program; I purchased my first car so I could survive in a newer, bigger place; I celebrated the summer with my family; I experienced financial instability as the state government fell into chaos; I left my job (where I had worked for about six years); I watched the last sunrise over my parents' house; I moved into my new apartment accepting I would be hours from my family for the first time in my life; I survived a week of new people and new mind-

boggling approaches to writing; and somehow I made it through to my first day of teaching and "studenting." The journey of leaving my home of about fourteen years and moving to an entirely new place has been a difficult one, full of highs and lows. These highs and lows are featured in the range of my High-Emotion Posts, with all the regular posts filing in the cracks, detailing the steps of the days in between.

Made and Remade

While I strive to make the genre of Instagram posts into an individual, emotionally authentic space, much as Jocelyn did with sorority recruitment videos, I am still remade by the conventions beyond my control. The conventions related to **distribution**, or the CHAT aspect I think of as the means by and purpose for which a text is sent out into the world, are those I am powerless to change to better suit my own purposes. For example, the interpretation I have to perform for my audience response is necessary because the platform limits their response options. If I use Instagram to send out a post, I cannot alter the option to like, comment, or even save my post. My audience cannot choose a "reaction" with a varied emotional range like they can on Facebook; they can only tap the little heart, choose to say actual words, or keep on scrolling. The narrative also no longer belongs to just me once distributed. Once it is available to my followers, they are able to screenshot, save, and redistribute my content as they see fit. They are not allowed to claim the posts as their own, but nothing really stops a user from redistributing a post. Instagram also has the licensing right to use my content however they desire (for free), including giving it to a third party.

It is in this way that I found myself in a position similar to Jocelyn's. She wanted to produce a text that was a true representation of her organization, but still employed some of the very conventions she wanted to avoid. I am remade by the genre of Instagram posts in small ways, in the loss of some creative freedom with the formatting of my posts and true ownership over the narrative itself, but I am still able to make the genre my own in ways I find satisfying. Despite my audience showing more support for my day-to-day posts, I have continued to use High-Emotion Posts as a tool to keep my narrative as emotionally authentic as I can.

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Elizabeth Calero is ever the emotional creature trying to survive her first year as a Master's student in the English Studies program at Illinois State University. When she's not procrastinating by watching *The Office*, she can be found cuddling her dog, Dory, or laughing obnoxiously in the English hallway with her work wife, Charley.

Sticky Icky CHAT

Danielle Smith

In this article, Smith uses CHAT to analyze The Gum Wall from her hometown. She demonstrates how the wall actually acts like a text in the ways that it uses gum to communicate different messages to different people.

"The world is but a canvas to our imagination"
Henry David Thoreau

Ever since I was little, the White Hen (now known as 7-Eleven) around the corner from my house was my second home. All of the workers knew my mom and I and basically watched me grow up. They even slipped us a free donut or Slurpee every now and then . . . but that's not the point of this. I just wanted to show you how much this store meant to me and maybe brag about the free stuff part. The point of this 7-Eleven is its outside wall. This wall was not just a wall; it was known as *dun dun dun* . . . The Gum Wall. The Gum Wall, as you may have guessed, is covered in gum. Kids would pay a visit to the wall daily making sure to mark their territory, and eventually it became a sticky, colorful work of art. The wall was the number one whacky thing us neighborhood kids liked to keep up on. It has been there for as long as I can remember, probably since I was five years old. Unfortunately, today I cannot say the same. No one has kept up on the tradition over the years; now all that's left is a line of black little bumps in the middle. There might be a clear reason as to why this is. The wall was at its finest in around 2004. During that time, there weren't as many electronics to distract kids

from playing outside. Kids today don't appreciate these small imaginative ideas, like creating a gum wall, as much as we used to. It's pretty sad to think about, but there is definitely some truth to that. One way I can attempt to bring this wall of gum back to life is to write about it and analyze if there is more meaning to it than just a wall of kids' spit. I can now also apply all the wonderful CHAT terms I have learned over the semester. After reading this article I hope you come to realize that a text can be much more than just words on a paper.

How Is the Gum Wall Related to CHAT?

I know what you're thinking, "CHAT is all about analyzing texts. What does a wall full of gum have to do with that? There's no text involved." At first, I thought the same thing. **CHAT** (**cultural-historical activity theory**), as the ISU writing program uses it, is a set of terms used to study literate activity, which, to most of us, means texts. However, with a little inspiration from my teacher, I concluded that a text does not have to include words. All it has to do is communicate a point. Through my CHAT analysis, I will hopefully show you that there is more to this wall than just a sticky, gross mess.

To dive into my CHAT rant, I will begin with the term representation. Imagine you were a kid, around 2004, standing in front of the gum wall. What would make you want to add something to the wall? Would you feel like you were part of something? Making something? Or would you just think, "Someone should really clean that." **Representation** deals with how writers (in this case, people using gum as a communication tool) understand and think about what they are producing.

Figure 1: Side view of the wall before it was cleaned.

Connecting to representation is the idea of reception. **Reception** is how the audience uses the text. In another words, what action did the audience perform as a result of inspiration from the text? For example, if they like the text, they will respond to it in a positive way, or vice versa. In my example of the gum wall, viewers could have many different types of reception. For one, they can choose to participate in it themselves. If the audience thinks the wall looks cool enough, they might want to be a part of it and stick their own gum to it. Some people may even want to take a picture of it. On the other hand, they might despise it so much that it influences them to clean it up or order someone to do it for them (if they have that authority). This whole article is a huge example of reception; I saw something that interested me, so I chose to write about it. Reception is all about what the audience does in response to the text. Some may get confused about the difference between reception and representation. Again, reception is the action the audience takes due to their curiosity of the text. Representation usually refers to the way people involved in composing a text understand, think about, and maybe plan their writing. A great example of representation and reception working hand-in-hand can be seen in Figure 1. The creator of this work of art had to first think about how he wanted to propose to his girlfriend and what he wanted it to look like; this is an example of representation. After visualizing his plan, he strategically placed each piece of gum to make a sign that would read, "WILL YOU MARRY ME NIKKI J." His planning and composing are all part of representation. The girlfriend's response of the message can also be seen as reception. After she reads it, she'll either react negatively and say no, or say yes with a big smile and a happy dance. I mean you'd have to be heartless to say no to that masterpiece, but that's just me.

Figure 2: A marriage proposal.

Representation and reception are both connected to socialization. **Socialization** is a term that focuses on the ways that humans, and ideas, and traditions and texts all interact. Some of you may only see this gum wall as an ugly mess, but I see it as a form of communication. The wall is a form of graffiti. I think of it as a way for people to tag themselves. In other words, it's another way to write "I was here." Think about when the second piece of gum went up; it's like saying, "Hey, I saw your piece, so I put mine up too." This reminds me of middle school when writing messages to people on desks was the big thing, at least where I live. At the beginning of the week I'd write "hi" on my desk and by the end there would be a whole conversation between me and the anonymous person that sits in the same spot during other class periods. I think people did it because they liked the anonymity of it. It's just like the gum wall. This anonymity influences people's participation; there can't be any consequences if you can't identify who did it.

Let's See What Happens When I Google "gum wall"

Here comes the research part. I searched up "gum wall" and got some pretty amazing results. It turns out there's a real famous one in an alleyway in Seattle. It's called the Market Theater Gum Wall. As you can see in the photos below, it's extremely huge and colorful. People went as far as shaping the gum into pictures and words. I love how people took this wall and made it their own. Apparently, the theater workers tried scraping off the gum after TWENTY YEARS due to an infestation of rats. "I just hope that the citizens of Seattle don't hate me for removing the gum wall," said Kelly Foster, general manager of Cascadian Building Maintenance, the contractor hired by Pike Place Market to take on the cleaning" (nypost). Even the people cleaning up the wall were sympathetic about the whole thing. However, after a whole three days of trying to end the wall of gum for good, they ended up receiving an even bigger response from the gum stickers in the first place. *Time Magazine* says, "On Saturday, a flash mob met to begin re-gumming the wall. The event turned into a show of support for Paris in the wake of Friday's attacks . . . the group used gum to create a peace sign with the Eiffel tower in the middle, replicating the image that went viral over the weekend" (Grossman). And the *New York Post* wrote, "Since then, the 'gum wall' has expanded beyond one wall and onto other walls of an alley, pipes and even the theater's box office window" (nypost). It's so cool how something so simple can turn into something so huge. Reception is evident here due to the huge response of people sticking their gum back on the wall. This wall started to mean something to people. It's interesting how they thought of shaping the gum to represent things. Looking at Figures 3 and 4, I can

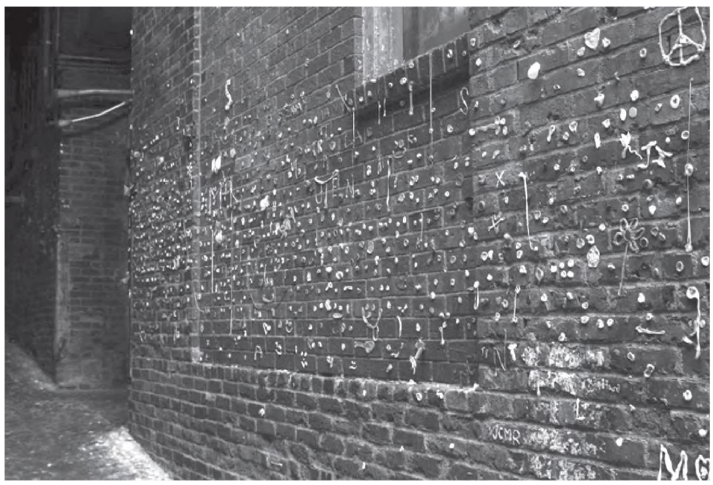

Figure 3: Peace sign in the upper right-hand corner.

see the peace sign mentioned, some flowers, hearts, and smiley faces. This is a great example of how the gum wall is being "socialized." The "text" of the gum wall is impacted by the actions the flash mob, but also by the group connecting in to the Paris shootings. People are not only sticking their gum to it out of boredom, but also communicating to others with it as well. As the article mentioned, they were responding to the attacks in Paris by making peace signs. This symbolized that no one was alone during this hard time. The gum wall has a sense of community.

Figure 4: A woman adds her piece to the collectio

The Public Responds

I found a bunch of interesting reviews on this magnificent wall from *Tripadvisor.com*. These reviews remind me of the term I introduced earlier, representation, because of the many different views and opinions of the sight. Once again representation is all about what the audience thinks about and how they might use a text. One unimpressed visitor stated, "Wow, I got to see gum on a wall. Stupid, disgusting, and honestly should be cleaned up. Once again I just don't get Seattle anymore . . ." (TripAdvisor). This

Figure 5: A newly married couple poses in front of the colorful wall

man obviously thought the visit was a waste of time. Another visitor had a different perspective. She said, "To us it looked pretty cool! It's amazing how anything can get turned into art or an attraction. If you can look beyond the yucky angle, you will be able to appreciate the art side to it. We liked the colors and the designs and people actually wrote stuff with gum! That's fun!" (TripAdvisor). I love how she brought up the point about how anything can be turned into art. That is what I hope is going through your mind while reading this.

Feedback from My Interviews

After reading these reviews from online, I went ahead and started interviewing people around me. I showed them pictures of the wall, such as the ones above, and asked questions like, "What do you think when you see this? What would you do if you saw something like this or visited this exact wall?" Some of the people I interviewed were my English 101 classmates, random students around campus, high school students, visitors of the gum wall, teachers, and other adults. I added in gender and the students' majors to see if there was any link between them, hoping to see some different answers between all the categories of people.

Eng 101 Classmates

1. "I would a take picture of it and put it on my Instagram. I'd definitely chew some gum and put it on the wall. I would also tell other people

about it. I wonder how it started in the first place and why people put it there" (female, Early Childhood Education).

2. "If I were chewing gum I would put some on there. The gum wall is pretty interesting" (male, Music Education).
3. "The bland brown brick background really brings out the colors of the chewed and spit out gum. Also, who's gonna clean that?" (female, Arts Tech).
4. "It's pretty creative. I would stick some on there too. It's interactive, engaging, uniting, and artistic. It also incorporates abstract expressionism" (male, Photography).
5. "I would think it's disgusting and push someone into it" (female, Political Science).

Among these students there were some similar answers. Most of the comments were positive. Looking at the comments from the Arts Tech and Photography majors, I saw more artistic point of views. This makes sense because having an artistic outlook is a big part of these majors. Focusing back on CHAT, I saw a lot of representation when each student stated what they thought of the wall. Some even wanted to join in. Turning thoughts into actions results in reception. I was disappointed no one from class used any of these CHAT terms.

Other Students

1. "I hope they had permission to do that" (female, English).
2. "I would take hella pics but I wouldn't touch it. It looks cold though" (male, undeclared major).

People That Have Experienced the Gum Wall

1. "It was cool but nothing special, great photo ops" (female, Physical Therapy).
2. "It's really nothing special in my opinion. It's just a wall where people put their gum. It's really pretty, though, and there's gum friggin everywhere. I went to the theater there and watched the worst improv show ever" (female, Actuarial Science/Economics).

High School Students

1. "It's so weird, you're kind of drawn to it. I would probably buy some gum and add to it" (female, senior).
2. "Well it's a little gross, but it's pretty cool, like every couple leaves their mark on the wall, and it's, like, oddly satisfying" (female, junior).
3. "I'd be confused, then look at it for a little, but then walk away" (male, sophomore).

Adults

1. "Ew, I wouldn't want to touch that or participate in it. Why did people start doing that? How did the cascading participation start? How did it develop into this phenomenon?" (English 101 teacher).
2. "I would think of all of the people who have been in the very same spot as me. I would actually touch it, because it would be hardened and have a lot of interesting textures. I am not put-off by the fact that it is gum; it seems to transform into something completely new and different than chewed gum. It makes me think of childhood and the goofy, loopy drawings that kids make. These shapes and colors are similar to the shapes and colors I see in the gum wall" (Art 176 teacher).
3. "If I saw that in person, I would say that's disgusting and leave. That's a wall of disease" (friend's mom).
4. "It's a very creative idea. There's lots of chewing involved. Will they clean it up? I'm glad that's not my house. They could've made the whole wall into a design or picture like graffiti" (Grandma).

Discussion

I found the opinions were not very different between age groups. Also, gender did not play a role in the difference in answers. No one in my English class used specific CHAT terms like I initially predicted. Even though they didn't mention any terms, little did they know, they used many of them. For example, when one girl said, "I would a take picture of it and put it on my Instagram" she exemplified the term socialization. By sharing it on social media she is creating an opportunity for conversation. Even the people that didn't put much thought into their response demonstrated

CHAT concepts. For example, one student said, "I'd be confused, then look at for a little, but then walk away." Even though there's not much to take away from this person's statement, they're still using representation. A lot of people interviewed had mixed feelings about it, but almost all found interest in it in the end. I like how my art teacher mentioned that it reminds her of childhood. I think that's why people are so into it; the bright colors and act of playing with gum brings them back to a much simpler, innocent time. These opinions show how the gum wall can be connected to a text. Readers can interpret a text in many different ways just like the people in my interviews had many different interpretations of the gum wall. The gum wall created feelings of confusion, disgust, and curiosity. A text can create all these same feelings.

Why Have You Been Reading About Gum for the Past Ten Minutes?

I chose to write about a gum wall because I wanted to take a different approach to CHAT than the rest of my classmates and people in the *GWRJ*. I wanted to find something that didn't include any sort of writing to prove that a text could be something other than what people would assume. I wrote it to open people's minds. This is a big concept I've learned from taking my English 101 class. Everything, including song lyrics, graffiti, bumper stickers . . . and even gum, has a deeper meaning and can be used as communication. Also, since no one ever thinks twice about a shriveled-up piece of gum, I thought it was kind of fun to take it so seriously. Lastly, I wanted a way to grab students' attention while they're aimlessly flipping through the journal during class. I want them to be intrigued about why the heck this is even in their English book.

So, let me remind you again why the heck this article fits in. Even though the people I interviewed didn't always realize it, they were responding to and evaluating the gum wall as they would any other text. For example, they demonstrated the same emotions as they would when the plot changes in a book. They had many different opinions, analyses, and connections. The gum wall caused people to communicate just as they would about a text. Because this gum wall spurs communication and gets people thinking, it can be considered a text. Not only is this wall a text, it also gets people to use CHAT without even knowing it. For example, that girl that wanted to post a picture of the gum wall to Instagram was demonstrating socialization. What this shows is CHAT is just a way to give us terms to describe what we're already doing when examining texts. You're using CHAT right now as you read this. You have your own thoughts about the article (representation). If

you liked it, you might want to tell a friend to read it, or if you thought this whole thing was a dumb waste of time, you might want to rip up this page and throw it away. Whatever you decide to do with this text is an example of reception. Therefore, no matter how hard you try, you can never escape using the concepts of CHAT.

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Peer Editing: Nobody's Peerfect!

Hayden Sanborn

Hayden Sanborn reflects on his daunting experience involving peer editing. With his knowledge from English 101 and the applications of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), he is able to take readers through the genre of peer editing. Sanborn provides insight into the practice of peer review and how writers and editors can expand their understanding of peer editing and how it is best accomplished.

Like many college freshmen students, I began my college career with a list of overwhelming challenges, including making new friends, adjusting to dorm life, finding classes, and being one student in a classroom of over 200 students. Who would have thought that being asked to write an article for *Grassroots Writing Research Journal (GWRJ)* in my English 101 course would be at the top of my list? My first attempt at drafting this article was very difficult. I repeatedly thought, "How do I even start this assignment, let alone complete it on time?" This is an impossible task.

How I Chose Peer Editing

All I could think of was the comments I received from the last time my paper was reviewed. One of the comments was, "This needs a lot more work." How could that be after I spent many hours writing and working on my paper? I felt like I was not a good enough writer. After all, that was one of my first college papers, and I knew it would not be my last paper either. To this day, when an assignment involves writing a paper, I am not excited to write

it. I usually have no idea how to write it. Regardless of my uncertainty, I had to choose a specific topic for this article, devise a plan, and begin writing. Surprisingly (or not), I chose the genre of peer editing. I am proud to say that I do not regret my decision.

Peer Editing as a Writing Genre

Before we begin, let's think about the term **genre**. If you're like me, you probably think of genre as a category of music, film, or literature. For example, writers are familiar with the main genres, such as romance, mystery, or fiction. As we began to use the term more and more in English 101, I realized this not the only definition of genre. To gain a better understanding of the meaning of "genre," I turned to our program's glossary. It states that genre is used to refer "to kinds of texts that can be produced" ("Genre"). With that being said, students (including myself!) are familiar with many writing genres, including text messages, essays, laboratory reports, book reviews, posters, and so on. But how does this relate to peer editing? To be honest, I had not considered peer editing as a writing genre. But it is! It is simply producing a text about another's writing.

I was then faced with a very difficult question. How do I convince you that peer editing is a writing genre? There has to be a procedure or convention for peer editing. So, I searched the Internet and with more and more hits came lists of guidelines and questions to be addressed by any peer editor. The guidelines from the University of New Mexico's website are a prime example (Figure 1).

Now, I must point out that many of these questions are not simple yes or no questions, but, rather, open-ended questions that require a written text that can be produced. Voila! That is a genre—as we know it from our English 101 class! So now that I have defined what a genre is and how peer editing can be a writing genre, I will move on to defining peer editing, which is the heart of this article.

What the Heck Is Peer Editing?

Like many of you, I have been asked several times throughout my education to review written work for one of my classmates. This is a technique called peer editing, also referred to as "peer feedback, peer evaluation, peer review, and peer response." I have noticed that peer editing has become more and more prominent in my high school and early college courses. Now, I must

State what you think the purpose of the essay is. Be sure to respond to the specific comments of the author regarding the paper. Then answer the following questions in complete sentences however creatively you wish (within reason!). Remember to be constructive and respectful.

1) If you were reading this paper for the first time, would you grasp its purpose? Is its main idea clear? Do the points support it? Are the tone and style appropriate for the audience (college students and their professor)? Is the language appropriate?
2) What thesis directs the whole essay? If you can't find one, can you suggest one? If the thesis isn't strong, suggest a way to strengthen it.
3) Is the introduction interesting, clear, and easy to follow? What is the best feature of the introduction? How could the introduction be stronger?
4) Is the topic sufficiently narrow for a paper of this length?
5) Does the support for the thesis follow in a logical manner? How so? Does the writer follow through with examples to support his/her thesis? Can you suggest ways to further support the thesis?
6) What more would you like the writer to tell you about the details of the significant incident or issue?
7) Are the paragraphs themselves (internally) organized well? Are some too short/long for their subject? Which is the best paragraph and why? Which paragraph needs the most work and why? Mark those paragraphs you think need work and explain why.
8) Where does the writer make generalizations? Does he/she support them with specific details/facts? How so? Are there any places where s/he could use more? Can you suggest any?
9) Is the conclusion a good ending for the essay? What is particularly good about the conclusion? How could the conclusion be stronger?
10) What seem to you the essay's major strengths? What major weaknesses stand out?
11) Comment on the style in this essay. It is simplistic? Sophisticated? Explain. Is there a variety in sentence structure? Do they flow? Are there any that can be made stronger or clearer? Suggest ways to improve them.
12) Are there any striking grammatical problems in this essay? Mark any of the following that need work: spelling, grammar, punctuation, connection between thesis, body of paper, conclusion. Explain your reasons for claiming these need work. Can you make any helpful suggestions?
13) Are there any parts of this essay that confused you, leading you to think the writer needs to explain a bit further?
14) Give one argument or example that the author has overlooked that could strengthen the essay. Give one argument or example that could best contradict the author's thesis.
15) Does the essay meet the requirements of the assignment and the objective the author gave you? If so, explain why. If not, suggest what you would do if you were going to re-write the essay so that it would meet the author's objective and the requirements of the essay.

Figure 1: Peer review memo guidelines from the University of New Mexico website.

confess that I was not aware of the complexity of this practice until I began to look at it in more detail for the purpose of this article. Peer editing is much more than correcting grammatical errors. It's an activity that a person or a group of people can participate in, but the texts that get produced when we do peer editing activities can be understood as a genre. So, to better understand the complicated writing genre of peer editing, I have chosen to incorporate several different aspects of **cultural-historical activity theory**, or **CHAT**, in particular the version of CHAT that the ISU Writing Program uses to describe and study literate activity.

Reception is a CHAT term that deals with how a reader, not always the intended audience, receives and uses the text. It is this aspect that causes me the most fear. How will others view my writing? Will they understand it? When asking these questions, it is apparent that peer editing is all about reception and how others will respond to your writing. The reception I get from my peers after reading my article is important. Peer editing is not based on one's opinion on a topic, but rather the reception and feedback on one's work. Peer editing is defined as "a teaching technique in which students read,

and comment on each other's written work" (*Wiktionary.org*). Another way to look at peer editing is to define each word separately. As defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, peer means "one that is of equal standing with another" while edit means "to prepare something, such as literary material, for publication or public presentation" (*Merriam-Webster.com*). It makes sense then that peer editing revolves around the reception of text and how a reader (or peer) will use it. After you read a written draft, you have some feeling about it. It was good, it was bad, or just so-so. Or maybe there were way too many errors, which had a negative impact on your reception of the writing. But keep in mind that the reception aspect of peer editing is much more than correcting just trivial errors such as grammar and spelling. The reception of a text is an important aspect of peer editing because the author uses it to improve their paper in lots of ways, including making sure it is readable and well-organized. The writer must also be receptive to the editor's comments. In this case, they must keep an open mind about the editor's comments and understand that the comments are directed towards helping the writer improve their text.

To Share or Not to Share

As the writer of this article, I had to think of and find the order in which I would include different aspects of CHAT and how they all related to the technique of peer editing. Hey! I just realized that I have employed one of the CHAT terms, **representation**. Representation is a valuable CHAT aspect that highlights how people who produce a text think about it and plan it. Writing an article for potential publication in GWRJ requires thinking and planning by both the writer and peer editor. There are many steps leading to peer editing, all of which have to be planned. It is expected that a writer will engage in the activity of research and that they will write and edit their own work. I know as a writer I spend a lot of time thinking about what I am going to say, how I am going to say it, and wondering if everything sounds okay. I then spend time reviewing my paper. What I have found, though, is that my ability to edit my own work is not good enough. My rough drafts have been returned with many highlighted mistakes and questions. I have learned that, when reviewing my own work, it is very easy to overlook obvious mistakes such as spelling errors, punctuation and grammar errors, and other stuff I simply miss, such as simplifying run-on or unclear sentences (like this one). Further, by the time I finish writing something, I usually know what I am trying to say. It is easier to have a person reading the draft for the first time point out when my writing just does not make sense. Others have found peer editing beneficial because it encourages student participation and improves reading and writing skills.

Despite its perceived benefits, some of us cringe at the idea of having others review and edit our writing. But why? Well, for me, I can say that I fear my peers will be overly critical of my writing, remembering the comments I received on one of my first college papers. Other students may feel as though peer editing is not useful. As stated in the article, "Why Students Hate Peer Review" by David Gooblar, when students are asked about their previous experiences with peer review practices, their answers are "almost always uniformly negative." It can be a no-win situation. Editors may do something that damages another person's self-worth or may even be seen as being overly critical or nitpicky. I find it hard to believe, but one of the biggest complaints Gooblar reports is that the peer editors are usually too nice. This secondary source states that editors may not feel comfortable providing descriptive feedback addressing the weaknesses in another's draft. One reason is their desire not to hurt a peer's feelings, while another reason may be an unwillingness to think critically about the writing, or it could be a combination of both. I have learned that peer editing may have adverse effects on the writer if the practice is not performed properly. It can be like a game of truth or dare.

Through the Eyes of an Editor

After you've decided to take the risk of peer editing, the next step is **distribution**. Distribution involves discussing where texts go in the world, how they get there, and who might take them up. In this case, the writer surrenders the draft to an editor, which, nowadays, may happen online or the old-fashioned way from hand to hand. The editor is then faced with doing a lot of representation work, including thinking about whether or not to make suggestions, asking questions, or providing any sort of feedback. If the editor chooses to make suggestions (after all, that is the intent of peer editing), the editor must think of how they can provide feedback in a positive way (I'll get to that later).

I believe that when investigating the genre of peer editing, **activity** and representation go hand-in-hand or even overlap. As a component of CHAT, activity encompasses the actual practices that people engage in as they create text. Peer editing is an activity of its own. In fact, getting peer review is included in ISU's description of activity. Upon digging deeper into the fascinating technique of peer editing, I learned that peer editing is very complex and composed of multiple activities. All of these activities help to shape how peers should edit another's work.

An editor must be able to think and plan how to respond to a peer's writing. This requires the editor to perform a series of activities to improve

the article. One activity is answering questions. Often, these questions take the form of a checklist-style worksheet that includes questions like, "What is the writer's main point?" and, "Are any parts confusing or unclear?" or, perhaps, "What do you want to read more about in the essay?" More specific questions like, "Is there a title? Is it catchy?" and, "Are the references cited and do they follow MLA format?" may also be found on the checklist. These follow-up questions not only encourage more critical thinking and engagement on the part of the editor, but also help lead uncertain editors (such as myself) to give more constructive and thorough feedback.

Next is the tricky part. The editor must choose how to offer suggestions. A quick Google search turned up an interesting PowerPoint slide deck titled "Peer Edit with Perfection" (*Readwritethink.org*). Granted, the presentation is intended for students in grades 3–5, but I like the strategy. The tutorial outlines three important activities for peer editing. including (1) providing compliments, (2) making suggestions, and (3) making corrections. That's it.

(1) Providing Compliments

It is never a bad idea to give a compliment if you want to make something better. That rule not only applies to life in general, but is also true to peer editing. As studies (and probably you) have found, people like it when others are nice to them. I know when I receive a compliment, it encourages and motivates me to do even more. It is proof that others recognize good things that are done. Thus, it is important for a peer to begin editing with a compliment. This could be, for example, "I like your choice of topic. It's very interesting." On the flip-side, you may receive negative comments that you do not want to hear. One response could be, "This needs a lot more work." But can this message be conveyed differently? YES! A better way of stating this would be in the form of a compliment, such as, "This is a good start, but where will you take it?"

(2) Making Suggestions

The next activity is making suggestions that would improve the writing. Peer editors should ask polite questions if the writer's message is unclear. The editor should be respectful. Editors should feel free to specify weaknesses and strengths, too. It's often tempting to say, "looks fine to me" or "meets standards," but how useful are these comments? I want my writing to be great! Pushed to provide a response to a writing, editors may resort to something like "??" or "be specific?" I have seen these comments scribbled before where it is very difficult to imagine what an example might be or what exactly needs to be clarified. In these cases, the writer can learn nothing unless they ask questions.

A good peer editor will focus on how to make the paper better. Opinions are fine, but should not be used in editing a paper. We all have a right to our opinion. For example, a paper might include a sentence, "The ISU Redbirds are a better team than the WIU Leathernecks because there stronger." A good editor would catch that *there* should be *they're*, but they would also question why the Redbirds are stronger. A not-so-good editor (I'd rather not call that person a bad editor) may reply that the Leathernecks are better, and there's no reason to believe otherwise. The difference is that the good editing comments provided suggestions on how to make the writing better, whereas the other comments focused only on the writer and differences in opinion. Peer editing is not just hard for the person getting their writing edited, but also for the peer doing the editing. It's difficult to withhold your opinion after reading pages explaining something that you interpret differently.

(3) Making Corrections

The third activity is pretty straightforward and deals with making corrections. We have all been trained and expected to identify errors associated with spelling, punctuation, or capitalization. It's too easy, right? Not really. As college students, we have not practiced spotting such errors for years and are less likely to catch them. Or who knows, we may have never been taught these skills. But that's ok. At this point, any corrections would help peers to make a paper stronger and improve the skills of both the writer and the editor.

Socializing–Writer vs. Editor

Socialization, another CHAT component, is the interaction of people that can impact or be impacted by the production, distribution, and use of texts. Peer editing is a social means where the writer and editor work together and with genres, like written drafts, make the writing better. People are open to talking about their writing, discussing what led them to a certain subject or choice of words, and sharing ideas on what can be done to improve their writing. Social interaction is bound to occur. In fact, there are several dissertations that focus on the social aspects of peer editing. For example, Cynthia Kruger bases her Master's thesis on "Social Interaction During Peer Editing: Does It Make a Difference?" and a comparable study of two classes on the effect of social interaction in peer editing. As an editor, I have the opportunity to see the work of others and their approach to rough drafting, which, in turn, may help me catch errors that may unexpectedly appear in my own writing. Peer editing allows for all of the students to share, explore, and identify different approaches to responding to a writing assignment. The

socialization is very important. If there is no socialization, there is no peer editing.

My Experience–Good News!

By this point, you may have noticed that I repeatedly bring up the comments that triggered my interest in peer editing. It just so happens that these comments were received only a week before I was given this assignment. That's right. I had to have not one, but *two* reports written and subjected to peer editing within the same time frame. I guess a few of you may be wondering how that other report turned out. Well, after several email exchanges with the peer editor, I took it upon myself to meet one-on-one with the instructor of that class just last week. As we reflected on my first draft, the instructor gave me suggestions to make my paper better. Not only that, but she made it clear that my paper was not as bad as conveyed in my peer's emails. To fast forward, the instructor gave me ten bonus points for my efforts and told me that I did not have to rewrite the paper after all. Another thing I am happy to report is that, at the time of this writing, I am in pretty good shape to receive an A in the class.

I must admit that before meeting face-to-face with the instructor, I was not aware that direct interaction and conversation are (and will always be) critical components of peer editing. But they are! Thus, I will value any given opportunity for peer editing. I truly enjoy working with others and find that peer editing enables just that.

It's Your Turn!

Peer editing was intimidating to me. So, you may be shocked to learn that I am now a firm believer in the practice of peer editing in the classroom. Through this writing article, I have learned that, while performing the act of peer review, I develop more and more as a writer and an editor. After all, peer editing is producing a text about another's writing. If we go back to the peer review memo guidelines from the University of New Mexico's website, peer editing is a written text to answer questions about another's writing. I can say that by analyzing the process of peer editing with CHAT, I am a more effective peer editor. Not only that, but, by reflecting on the work of someone else, it has forced me to reflect even more on my own work. I believe that my activity in peer editing helps me and my peers improve our writing and gain confidence in the submission of articles.

I look forward to the support and especially appreciative comments and suggestions provided by my peers. I also realize that I will continue to receive feedback on my writing, and that I have no control over another's reception. But now, instead of being shocked by the comments of my peer editor, I will remind myself that it is one person's suggestion. Either I can accept it and see what I can do to correct it or leave it as it is.

As I write this closing paragraph, I can proudly say that I have met at least two of my three goals for this assignment. I have been able to (1) write the article and (2) complete it on time. My third goal is to provide all of us with a better understanding of the dos and don'ts of peer editing. Ultimately, if you are the writer or the editor, I urge you to think about my suggestions and to approach the paper with one goal in mind—to make it better! Now, whether or not I meet my third goal is up to you, my peer.

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Real Heroes Don't Always Wear Skates: Alter Egos in Roller Derby

Amber Laquet

Women's roller derby is a unique sport in many ways, including the athletes taking on an alternate persona or alter ego. When considering an alter ego, there are many questions a skater may consider when choosing and, thus, revealing their new identity to the public. This article will explore the history of the sport and how the components of the genre of the alter ego continues to shift while applying the theory of cultural-historical activity theory, or CHAT, to see how the production, representation, distribution, reception, socialization, activity, and ecology have shifted over the last 80 years to become what we now know as the alter ego in modern women's roller derby.

How They Roll: What Exactly Is Roller Derby?

Before diving in, it might be important to understand the general rules of the sport. Flat track roller derby is a played by two opposing teams, with five skaters allowed on the track from each team wearing quad skates and protective gear. Each team has four blockers on the track and one jammer. The purpose of the game (or "bout," as each individual match is called) is for the jammer to lap and pass the opposing team's blockers and jammer to receive points. The bout is composed of two thirty-minute halves consisting of two-minute jams. During the jams, the jammer and blockers are constantly switching between offense and defense to advance their jammer, but also to block the opposing jammer from passing and scoring more points. This requires coordination and a tremendous amount of teamwork and diligence. Within the sport, each individual team member goes by an alter ego or alternate name. Usually the name is a play on words and very personal to the individual, but more on that later. The sport did not always look this way and took over eighty years to get to what we know as modern roller derby.

History of Roller Derby

Women's roller derby origins are a much different species than roller derby today. Some of the earlier skating races, considered roller derby at the time, debuted in the 1920's ("WFTDA History"). Early derby began in 1935 on a banked track and acted as a filler at the Chicago Coliseum, featured a man and woman, and debuted with the promoter, Leo Seltzer, worrying that "the mainstream press would not consider his sport legitimate or worthy of their coverage" ("Roller Derby Timeline"). Fortunately, roller derby became popular for several decades. The heyday of early derby was in the 1940s to 1960s, fizzling out in the late 1970s. There were attempts to resuscitate the sport in the '80s and '90s with extreme gimmicks and storylines (think pro-wrestling), and it did catch on nationally ("WFTDA History").

HOLDING: EVALYN KARRAN GRABS "MA" BOGASH'S ARM AS SHE TRIES TO PASS

Figure 1: "Ma" Bogash

One thing to note is that early roller derby did not put an emphasis on the alter ego. While some teammates and coaches had nicknames, the derby name craze that has become a cultural phenomenon was not center stage. For example, early skaters are listed on the Roller Derby Hall of Fame website as having names like Josephine 'Ma' Bogash, Midge 'Toughie' Brasuhn, Charlie 'Specs' Saunders, Arthur 'Buddy' Atkinson, SR., and 'Wild' Bill Reynolds, just to name a few ("Original Hall of Fame Members"). Figure 1 features one of the Hall of Famers, "Ma" Bogash, and emphasizes her nickname. Other skaters were listed with their "normal" daily names.

Modern Day Roller Derby

Modern roller derby began in the early 2000s with the emergence of the Texas Rollergirls. As the banked tracks and roller rinks of the past took time and money to build and develop, the Rollergirls adopted the flat track as only a large flat space would be needed to play ("WFTDA History"). According to the WFTDA (Women's Flat Track Derby Association) league information web page, there are now "404 full member leagues and 54 apprentice leagues" in Illinois, alone, having six WFTDA sanctioned teams ("WFTDA Leagues"). Over the last ten years, popularity has been gaining in smaller

cities and communities. Due to the surge in popularity, there are several "local teams" within a 50-mile radius of Bloomington, such as Twin City Derby Girls in Champaign, Capital City Hooligans and Midstate Mayhem in Springfield, Peoria Push in Peoria, and Soy City Rollers in Decatur, just to name a few ("WFTDA Leagues"). The women, and men, run the operation from within. Dues, countless volunteer hours, and a supportive derby community within the city help the team thrive.

The Importance of the Alter Ego in Modern Derby

Part of the excitement of women's roller derby is the concept of these everyday women shedding their day jobs and becoming someone else. As seen in Figure 2, the women featured on the Twin City Derby Girls website are part of the fittingly named "Alter Egos" and "Evil Twins" teams. The

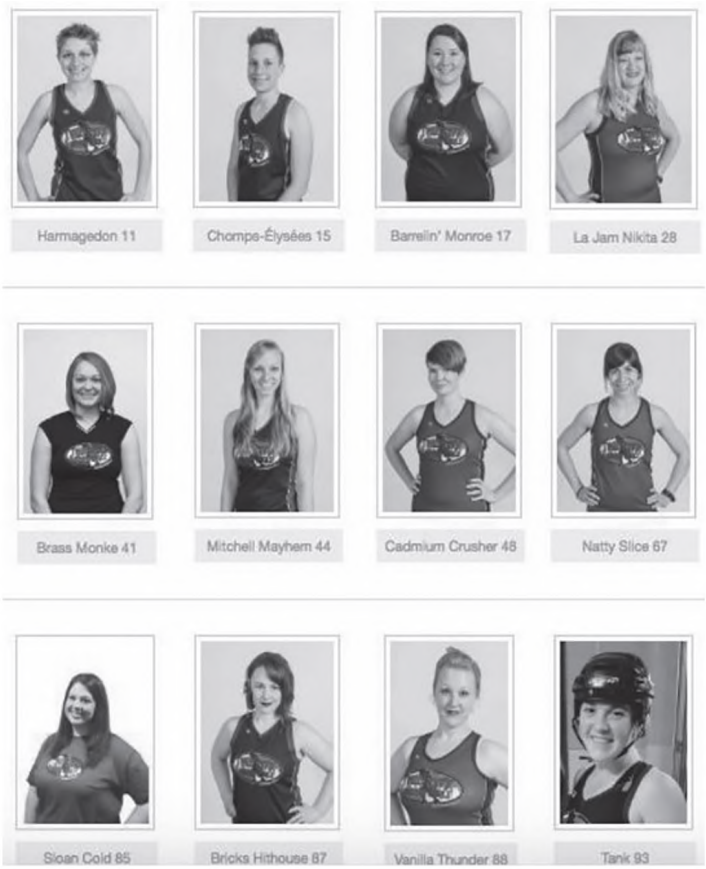

Figure 2: Screenshot taken from the Twin City Derby Girls website. Names include: Harmagedon, Chomps-Elysees, Barrelin' Monroe, La Jam Nikita, Brass Monke, Mitchell Mayhem, Cadmium Crusher, Natty Slice, Sloan Cold, Bricks Hithouse, Vanilla Thunder, and Tank.

derby league in the Champaign-Urbana area had a play on words with the levels of their teams to show the importance of the dual lives these women lead ("Dead Ringers & Alter Egos").

There have been several articles about the "average" every-day woman becoming a superstar athlete by night. One article from San Jose's *Mercury News* focused on just this aspect. The author referred to the players by their aliases alone, noting that "Linsday LoHanded . . . Terribelle Demise, Angel of Mourning, Bandita and Lady Kiss-off" are "teachers, secretaries, and mothers" when not skating (Carvey). Another local article to Australian derby fans is titled "Roller Derby Skates Bring Out Alter Ego" and focuses on a male derbyer, "Stiff Richard," and his girlfriend, "Candy Contusions" (Cunningham). Both articles highlight the humble origins of teams just starting out and highlight the heroic perseverance of the athletes to band together and promote their sport.

Another article from a website called *The Cauldron* said it best when talking about the ferocity and ego an alias can have. The author notes, "these tags are like noms de guerre—names warriors once used to feel more ferocious in battle—or alter egos" ("The Power of Roller Derby Skate Names—The Cauldron"). The idea of being someone else or playing a role transforms the skater from a lady on skates to a warrior ready for battle, and derby is definitely a battle. Players create a new identity, carefully crafted with their own personality, team, audience, and even family in mind. The "correct" derby name for that player can shape the audience's perception of just how terrifying they will be out on the track. Choose incorrectly and the identity of the skater may become lost and confusing to themselves and others.

Let's CHAT About Roller Derby

When we think about why genres change or alter over time, we have to think about all components that make up the genre. One could apply **cultural-historical activity theory** (**CHAT**) to modern roller derby to look at how the idea of the alter ego in roller derby has taken a much more prominent role. First of all, what is CHAT? To be brief, CHAT "refers to a set of theories about rhetorical activity [how people act and communicate in the world] . . . that help us look at the how/why/what of writing practices" (Walker 71–72). According to Walker, there are seven terms used when thinking about how to apply CHAT to literate activities: production, representation, distribution, reception, socialization, activity, and ecology (Walker 74–76). Let's break down some of the literate activities within the roller derby system using CHAT to understand the complexities of the alter ego.

Production: How are literate activities like derby names produced? Many times, derby names take time, wit, and an ability for deep self-reflection to produce. The names range from non-fictional and fictional characters, books references, music, video games, and much more. All WFTDA sanctioned players must register their names. No two names are exactly the same; however, when looking at the roller derby taxonomy poster from names registered in 2015, there are some similar references with slight discrepancies: "Coll of Duty" versus "Call of Derby" ("A Graphical Taxonomy of Roller Derby Skate Names"). Figure 3 below focuses on separating the taxonomy of famous derby names based on music, books, people, and tech, to name a few.

Representation: There are roller derby forums, websites, blogs, and even an official Facebook page dedicated to all things derby. Questions are posted almost daily where new derbyers ask "How do I choose my name?" Again, this is not something to be taken lightly. Once the programs are made, the jerseys are made, and it costs money to change a name. So, people do research, navigate Facebook, look at puns, maybe even ask some friends and family before the name is selected. This may also fit into the active part of the literate activity of choosing a name, due to others being involved in the process, as well as the athlete taking time and possibly modifying the name before settling on their derby name for life.

Distribution: In a community with a local derby team, there is a good bet that in a bar, restaurant, or even yoga class you will find bout posters on their bulletin boards. Pictures of the skater with their alter ego are on the posters and in the programs passed out to audience members. Based on the image of the athlete, coupled with their name, the audience makes quick work in deciding which athlete they will root for during the bout. The audience must proceed with caution, however, as many names can be deceiving. The jersey is another place the derby name is distributed. Typically, the athlete will have as much of the entire name as possible on the

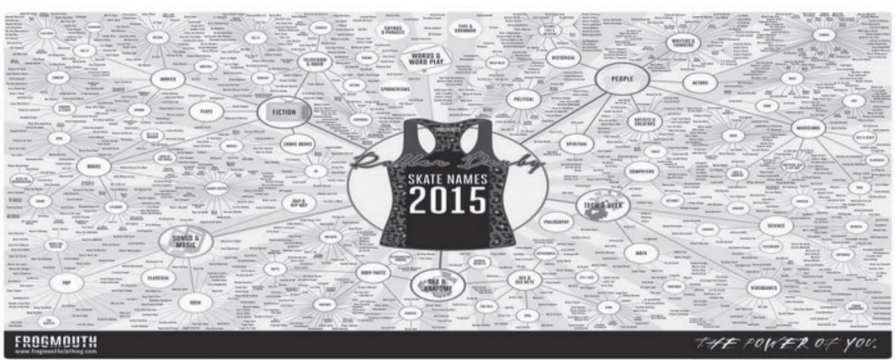

Figure 3: This poster (for sale for $20) is from the FrogMouth website (a retailer for derby apparel).

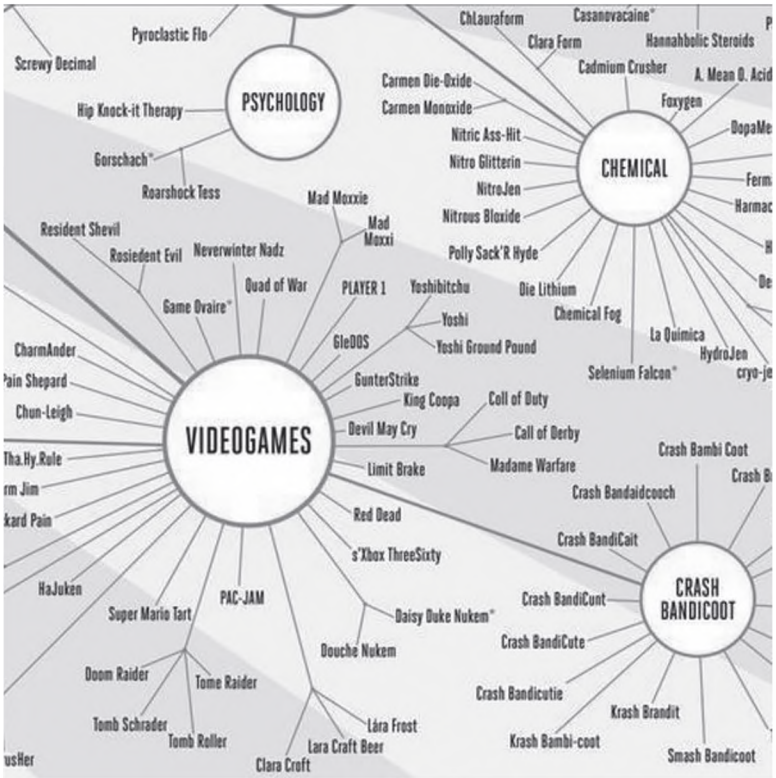

Figure 4: This is a zoomed in portion of the poster on the previous page. Here you can see the taxonomy of the names connected to videogames.

back. When a player has a name where the entirety will not fit, it will need to be shortened. At times, even that can cause a play on words.

Reception: Derby names can be tricky in the reception of the audience. The section on distribution briefly mentioned the audience's reception of the derby name and how that affects who they are intrigued by and will want to cheer on during the bout. At times, derby names can unfortunately have a negative impact, depending on the audience reception. Sometimes the name is too political, pushes the boundaries too far, or is a not so subtle sexual reference that makes someone feel on the edge of saying "Can they say that at a family friendly venue?"

Socialization: As mentioned before, the alter ego is empowering to the athlete, but it also keeps the audience coming back for more. The audience asks questions like: Will "Bruisie Quaddro" live up to their name again? Or, will "LL Kill J" take down "Biggie Brawls"? Roller derby teams are smart about their marketing, play on words, and use of community to thrive. The derby names help with a sense of camaraderie within the derby community.

One question asked when skaters from opposing teams meet for the first time is often, "What's your name?" Ironically, many skaters spend countless hours with teammates and opponents, sometimes never knowing their real names. Facebook friends from years past pop up on a skater's feed, making them pause, wondering, "Do I know them?" only to realize, of course! That's my derby friend and teammate.

Activity: The process of creating a name can fall under activity. But other factors like trying to register a duplicate name and/or wanting to change a derby name (due to changes in life or negative reaction from audience members, for example) fall under the process of activity. The name itself can be an activity, as it is moving from the skater's own perception or *reception* of their identity, as well as the audience's. The name has movement through word of mouth, distribution on posters, or in pop culture.

Ecology: The venue and all components that go along with a bout can enhance or deter a derby name. For example, if you have a large venue with access to suicide seating (where audience members sit on the floor near the rink at their own risk), the audience will chant names of their favorite players, boosting the confidence of the athlete. However, if the venue is closed off, the audience and skater participation is minimal, with both parts missing the interaction of the skater high-fiving before and after the bout. The announcers, also part of the ecology of the bout, can really emphasize the skater's name, thus making a hero or even enemy.

The Crossover of Literate Activities

The crossover is not just a basic skating technique. Looking at some of the literate activities within the alter ego, it is easy to see that CHAT is complex, and these activities work together closely and are very dependent on one another; therefore, each can cross over and deeply influence the other. For example, when choosing a name (located in the representation section), having a community of people giving the skater feedback on proposed names can influence her final decision. This specific component of the alter ego has now become part of the socialization of alter egos. Another example of cross over is the derby poster of taxonomy names. What I used to illustrate the production of a name, one could argue, has now become part of the distribution, ecology, socialization, and even activity surrounding alter egos, as it is being shared on websites and hung on walls in its poster form. Ultimately, any time there is a flux or shift in one part of CHAT, there can be a change in the other parts. Much like a jammer jumping an apex and weaving through blockers to score extra points during the jam, the skater

must understand the flux the alter ego will incur. By applying CHAT, we are able to see how intricate the alter ego is to the skater, the audience, and, potentially, the history of roller derby. It takes the skater from the center and moves her to an interesting position in which something she originally had 100% control of is no longer only hers.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the athlete has an interesting dynamic. How does one gain control of something they may no longer be the center of? How does CHAT alter the athlete's perception of their alter ego? At times, there is a pressure to give the audience what they want. This is what every entertainer wants to do. But what about the performer? How is their identity compromised when they become an alter ego? Is this something they want, the audience wants, or all of the above? By looking at alter egos through a CHAT lens, I think it is safe to say that the identity of the skater is not lost, but they are no longer at the center. The name shifts from being something very personal to the skater to something owned by the audience. As my CHAT analysis has shown, the author of an alter ego is decentered from the literate activity of alter egos. This is not necessarily a negative thing for the skater. In fact, it may be beneficial to the skater to create a name with CHAT in mind. The next time you are at a roller derby bout, cherish and appreciate the wit, sweat, and intellect that went into the alter ego. And, remember, be supportive of your local teacher, doctor, or store manager who lives a dual life, as real-life heroes don't always wear skates.

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Adults These Days: How Technology Subjugates All Generations

Sara Koziol

This vignette offers some reflections on a Grassroots Writing Research video, originally produced in May 2017. The original video, "Adults These Days: How Technology Subjugates All Generations," dealt with the question of whether different generations use technology differently. The video can be viewed here: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38Zh9bDGioU.* The author, Sara Koziol, reflects on the process of doing the original research and discusses how some of her research questions (and possible conclusions) have changed over time.

About a year ago, I was assigned a project in a writing class that gave me free reign to research and write about anything I wanted, so long as it reflected on some aspect of literate activity. As a freshman in college, this was incredibly intimidating, since I'd never undertaken a task with so much freedom and so few boundaries. Daunting as it was at first, this "task" soon turned into an infatuation, and I became utterly immersed in the process. I knew from the beginning that I wanted to do a video because I truly enjoy the filmmaking/editing process (as minimal as my skills may be), and also because the *Grassroots Journal* seemed to be lacking examples of this genre. I landed on the topic of technology and the different ways people use it and decided to interview people of different ages (including my family members and my boyfriend) to investigate if there truly are differences in the ways older and younger generations use technology. I felt certain of my ability to come up with a solid video, but what really shook my confidence was the idea of collecting my own data and analyzing it all by myself. I know that may sound pathetic, but I had never conducted my own research before,

Figure 1: QR code for original video.

and that's kinda scary for a new college student. Despite my initial research jitters, I found that, as the process continued, I was having more and more fun. I couldn't have picked a more perfect project—I got to talk to people I love *for fun*, do voice-overs, edit stuff, and (gasp!) engage my critical thinking skills! The most gratifying parts about the project were the epiphanies and revelations that made me go, "Ohhhhh! I understand this better, now that I have actually thought about it and engaged with it." By the end of the project, I was convinced that the conclusions I had drawn were concrete and unchanging, and that I had uncovered a profound secret truth: that all generations use technology the same way, despite what each may believe. However . . .

Writing-Research Remix

I recently sat down with one of the *Grassroots* editors to discuss potential publication of my project, and she presented a riveting idea to me: perhaps people do, in fact, differ in the ways they use technology, and maybe these variations are found not across different generations, but within individuals. Here's where I will throw a couple of useful **cultural-historical activity theory** (**CHAT**) terms at you: **representation** and **trajectory**. In a nutshell, representation is how the producer of a text engages with it (conceptualizing it, thinking about it, talking about it, etc.), while trajectory deals with what texts do and how they move around in the world. Just like all other CHAT terms for studying literate activity, these two connect because they typically result in some kind of *change*, and these changes can become interconnected. My representation of this project evolved drastically once I realized my data could be interpreted differently; there was a new take on my personal data, and that felt refreshing. This took my project in a whole new direction for me, subsequently altering its trajectory—it could now take on an entirely new meaning and could therefore affect how audiences interpret it. I also experienced this change in trajectory on a second level, as well: my project was now going to be officially published, and that idea changed how I felt about its future. Although I had hoped that my project would someday get published in the journal, my main priority at the time was meeting the class deadline, and the instructor was the main intended audience. Now that the audience has changed, it is slightly nerve-racking to imagine hundreds of readers watching my video and reading this article. But, hey, that's trajectory for ya.

To investigate the idea that technology is embedded in individuals' identities, I conducted a follow-up interview with my loved ones, consisting

of one single question: What types of texts do you read and write in a typical week? The results were illuminating. I found that their answers to this question alone could tie together the data I previously collected in the original interviews. Although the questions I had asked in the original interviews were important and maybe said a lot about human behavior on a sociological level, they were still not enough to come to significant conclusions about technology's role in literate activity. At the end of the day, I needed to find out what types of texts my subjects were reading and producing on a weekly basis. I found that their answers varied according to what was important in their lives. For instance, Jim, 67, uses a tablet just like Nick, 26, does; the difference is that Jim uses the tablet to read daily stock reports, whereas Nick uses the tablet for researching scientific projects. Both Sheree, 62, and Lili, 14, use their phones regularly; however, Sheree tends to use it for things like games and recipes, whereas Lili uses it for talking with friends. We can see that there are, indeed, differences in their habits and practices because *people are different* (I stress again that these differences are due to individuality and not age).

All generations think they are unique from the rest, and based on my data, I don't see that notion changing any time soon. Although I initially concluded that all generations use the same technologies, it is now, a whole year later, that I am realizing that people use these same technologies in different ways, which is actually based on their own individual identities—not generational identities. This is not to say that the way one person uses technology defines them as a person, but the texts they generate and the tools they use can speak to their values, which affects the way they interact in the world. There will always be differences in identity and, therefore, differences in the types of literate activity people engage in and produce.

Sara Koziol is a junior studying History Education. It is her goal to demonstrate to her future students that reading and writing are embedded not only in historical thinking, but also in our everyday world. When she is not taking pictures of her pets, you can find her taking pictures of someone else's.

Rocking Writing Practices at Waiting Room Records

Cristina Sanchez-Martin

Through the Illinois State University Writing Program's Professional Literacies Project, Cristina Sanchez-Martin talks with Jared Alcorn, owner of Waiting Room Records in Uptown Normal, about his writing practices as a record store owner. They discuss various tools and modalities used in his writing, as well as research methods used to ensure he's reaching his community effectively.

CRISTINA: Can you tell us a little bit about yourself? So, who you are, where you work, what's your job title?

JARED: Yeah, my name is Jared Alcorn and I own Waiting Room Records in Uptown Normal. I'm the owner and manager there.

CRISTINA: And for how long have you been working at Waiting Room?

JARED: Let's see, this summer it will be 13 years.

Figure 1: Waiting Room Records logo.

CRISTINA: Wow, that's impressive. So, what does your work involve?

JARED: A lot more than when I started. My job now entails ordering from various different venders that we have, invoicing, I'm also the head accountant. I do all the purchasing for used stock coming in. I also make house calls for those things; I'm always out and about doing that. I'm the janitor (laughs). I do all the online packing orders and stuff like that when all those invoices come through. We do a lot of online shipping so that's part of it. Sometimes I feel like I'm just in email jail some days. I'm just answering emails for hours. That part is not a lot of fun, but. . .

CRISTINA: It's necessary?

JARED: Yeah, very necessary.

CRISTINA: Email jail. I like it.

JARED: Yeah (laughs).

CRISTINA: Wow, so it sounds like a very diverse, very complex job. Cause you do all these different things. So how many people work with you? And what are their roles?

JARED: It changes from time to time. We have one full time volunteer and then I have a couple of part time volunteers. And then I have usually every semester I have an intern. The head volunteer, his job primarily is to assist me on things that I might need. And then his other things are making sure that our items are getting listed correctly and on the correct online sites for sale. And then from time to time we have daily online promotions. I'll go over to him and be like, "hey, promote this, these sites, or these channels." And then he does a lot of artwork for the store as well. And then right now our intern as of last semester, her job was social media captain. And she was in charge of all of our promotions and things like that. She set up when we had the *Stranger Things* listening party, she set that up. She did a lot of work for us for record store day; trying to keep the public up to date with our stock as it was flowing throughout the day so people in line could make adjustments with what they needed.

CRISTINA: So, it sounds like they do a lot of writing as well.

JARED: Yes, very much.

CRISTINA: So, for your job, what types of writing do you do on a day-to-day basis?

JARED: Well, there's email jail. So I'm writing emails all day long. And those are usually to vendors or responding to questions people have on our online

sites or even through social media like "hey do you have this in stock?" "Yes." If they have very specific questions on the color of a record or something like that, I can help them out with that. We're part of an independent record store coalition and sometimes there's questions we have to get answered through there. And then every day I have at least 40 vendors that are sending me information that I have to read and sometimes respond to or do data entry. That's most of it, I'm just typing stuff into our database all day long.

CRISTINA: And what tools do you use to communicate to do those types of writing?

JARED: Well there's regular email. We have multiple accounts that I try to follow through on. We use social media, so Facebook, and Twitter, Instagram, things like that. Also, everything in my store has a description so we're writing descriptions of every release. We don't necessarily write all of them, but I do check them. Usually when we get it, it might just be a normal paragraph of a band but I like to highlight and capitalize things that might stick out to people. Especially bands if it's like, "sounds like this band," I'll highlight that band so people's eyes will catch that first and maybe be more interested in reading the rest of it. That's about it.

CRISTINA: I'm wondering, do you use the computer, or a laptop that you have in the Waiting Room or maybe do you use your own phone to do these types of writing?

JARED: The interns and volunteers use their phones. I'm getting older so I want to put my phone down way more. I'm the one that does most of the actual emailing and what not. And then for the online stuff for Facebook and the social media, I usually set them on it, they're quicker about it.

CRISTINA: How about Instagram and the videos that you post on Instagram and Facebook, what do you use to record those?

JARED: Phones, usually.

CRISTINA: So, you've talked about your social media presence already, your interns do most of the work, although you're the one responding to questions and comments by your customers, how did you decide to do Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook? And why did you decide to use those types of social media?

JARED: At the moment, those are the most successful and quickest ways that we know to get to people. I do change what we're gonna put on either/or. So, I know for our demographics, if I'm gonna take a photo of some new releases, I know that this release might be a little bit more curated towards an older demographic so I'll probably put it on Facebook vs. Instagram. But if

I'm gonna shoot something for our 20-somethings or what not, I'll probably put that on Instagram and then Facebook, but it will definitely be shot towards Instagram more. I don't want to waste time and just promote to air, so I want to make sure it goes to the correct people that will follow through.

CRISTINA: So, there is a purpose and there is a reason why you choose either Facebook first, Instagram first, or both.

JARED: Yep. And with Twitter, both accounts are linked to it, so whatever I post, it automatically goes to that.

CRISTINA: We also saw that you're the author of some of the blog posts on the website: how do you go about writing them? Or how do you decide to write about those specific topics?

JARED: Usually it's a part of some sort of promotion we're doing with labels or bands or for our coalition I was speaking about. We have certain titles that are put into programming every month that we are supposed to highlight in certain ways. They'll send us web banners, we'll put them up, and I usually try to throw in the description of the album. Or if it's something that's gonna be close by—we do a lot of work with the Castle Theatre—I'll try to highlight some of the bands they are bringing in if it corresponds with an album coming out or not.

CRISTINA: Do you do a lot of research before writing the posts and while you're writing the posts?

JARED: Sometimes, yeah. Most of the time that I do research on any sort of thing is for interviews with GLT. Every now and then they have a segment called "What's in your Turntable?" and, if I'm going to be speaking, I want to have some sort of an idea of what I'm talking about, so I'll sit down and write out kind of an outline of what I'm going to say. That way it makes it easier when doing an interview to kind of follow. I'm pretty good at changing course really quick, and I don't want to do that. I want to stay focused, and writing an outline really helps out.

CRISTINA: Do you know the bands and the albums that you're writing for? Or do you have to maybe listen to the album a lot of times before writing the post? What else do you have to do before writing the post?

JARED: Sometimes there's kind of a snippet the label wants us to say, so, honestly, I'll cut and paste it, but if it's something we're promoting. I try to find relevant things. You know, like this band's touring now, new album out now–I try to link it to something else that's important. Sometimes if we want people to read some interesting articles, we'll highlight it. There was

an article not too long ago about the Riot Grrrl movement, and we had just unknowingly ordered a bunch of great Riot Grrrl stuff, so we're like, "hey check it out we just got this, and here's a link to an amazing article that will explain all these bands and why they are important."

CRISTINA: You said that you work with the Castle Theatre and the Independent Record Store coalition. Do you feel like those bodies control your writing sometimes, or they have some influence on your writing?

JARED: Not necessarily. Sometimes you have to say specific wordage on specific things. For instance, when Record Store Day comes around, there are bands that put stuff out on Record Store Day, but they are not actual Record Store Day pieces, so you have to be very careful how you word those things. I honestly don't want to confuse a customer, and that can easily happen if you don't phrase things correctly. And so, if it's something like that, something that's really important, or if there's a color variant or some sort of pressing variant that's out there, I want to make sure that I word it correctly so you know, "oh you're buying the white vinyl version vs. the black vinyl version, or this one's some sort of rainbow color, or whatever." I want to make sure that people can see the difference between the two.

CRISTINA: And so, they know what they might potentially buy.

JARED: Exactly.

CRISTINA: You've talked about record store day, so do you do special types of writing for those events? And if yes, what are those types of writing that you do?

JARED: Usually we do a lot of heavy flyering for that. And that could be online or actual physical going out and stapling it to a wall. We kind of try to highlight some of the things that we're gonna do. It's like looking at a flyer for a concert or something like that. I don't want to overflow it with information, but give enough to where you'd want to either check it out or look into it further.

CRISTINA: And how about label for the coffee in the beer bottle?

JARED: So, every year on Record Store Day I've been trying to work with another local business somehow to do something that supports all of us, and Coffeehound came down to us last year and donated hot coffee for everybody in the morning, which is really nice. This year we talked about it and decided to up the ante, I guess, and they made a limited edition cold brew coffee, and we discussed how it should be promoted and thought it would be better if both of our logos were on there. So, they took an image we had from our

Record Store Day flyer, and we spliced that up and were able to have enough room to say what kind of cold brew coffee it was. We sold out, so it went over well.

CRISTINA: Yeah, it was really cool. And the coffee was really good, too. So, who designed the label?

JARED: That one was Trevor.

CRISTINA: The intern?

JARED: He's the full-time volunteer.

CRISTINA: Cool! So, how did you come up with your album inventory? What albums get picked, and which ones don't, and why?

JARED: I've always wanted my store to be probably bigger and better than it can be. I don't want to hone in one particular genre. I'd like at least to have the best of every single genre. So, anybody can come in and be semi-happy with finding something. I tell a lot of people that we have classical and metal and everything in between. My shop isn't big enough to do what I want to do, and we might not have the people power to pick up certain genres, but even with things like classical, it doesn't move very well, but then 6 months later there's a huge dent taken out of it, so I'm like, "oh, I gotta hunt more down and find some more for people." I'd like to get better with every genre, but I try to build it up where I can. When it comes to used stock, you're kind of stuck with whatever the town is bringing you. When it's new, I can kind of curate it a little better for what I need. But for what does come in and what doesn't, sometimes that just history. So, I could hear a lot about a band, and I'll bring a bunch in, and if it doesn't sell very well, I might not be so keen on bringing it in next time. Or sometimes it's the opposite—we'll sell a ton, but music changes so fast that 3 years from now that band could not be relevant anymore. That's happened a lot more than usual where I'll order heavy stock thinking it's gonna sell. That or it gets bad reviews, which hurts as well. It's always a game of checks and balances. Try it out and see what happens. I'd rather, I guess, get rid of something than have to get more, but I also want people to come in and have the thing that they're looking for.

CRISTINA: Because you never know.

JARED: You never, ever know. I could never, ever figure it out. There's never gonna be a day where I'm like, "I nailed it. Got it. Figured it out."

CRISTINA: And you mentioned that you start hearing about a band a lot, for example, how does that happen? Do you listen to radio programs? Do you go online? Do you read blogs? Podcasts?

JARED: I don't have time to do most of that, but a lot of it comes from email jail where vendors will be soliciting information, and I kind of read their . . . well they just call it a "one sheet." It's one piece of paper that explains everything it can about the album. You know, give you song tracks and some sort of biography of the band and pictures and then maybe tour support. Basically, as much as they can to help me understand why I should be paying them for it. And then I have to take that information and hand it over to the customer so they can also understand. Some labels will send us play copies of records. That's usually the best way because I can put it on and see if anyone cares, or, if I like it a lot, I'm like, "I think I can help some people find this record."

CRISTINA: So, like if you're in the store and you're playing this record that you got from the label, do you look at the customer's reactions and see how they feel about that specific album or maybe you get questions about it, how does that work?

JARED: Sometimes I feel like it doesn't happen as much as it used to, but sometimes people will come up and talk to me about the record. I like that the most because we can interact and have a discussion about what we are listening to. But sometimes I think that people just go, "what's this?" I assume they type something on their phone and walk out. Maybe they're going to do their own research, which is totally fine. But if I can see, sometimes it's almost like being a DJ, if there's a lot of people in the store, and I'm playing something and kind of gauging the room and seeing, "ok, no one is into this." If I have a bunch of—not that they don't listen to this—but if I have a bunch of moms and dads come in, I'm not gonna be blasting metal. Unless they don't seem to be bothered by it, then I'll turn it up. But if I see that they are getting a little agitated, I'll switch it up. And that's just DJing; you got to figure out what people are doing. But at the same time, I try to know my customers really well, like personally. I like to know their names and things like that. That helps me figure out what kind of music they listen to. So, if I've listened to some of those promos and they come in, I can be like, "hey I've got something I want you to hear," and then I can play it and if they like that, I can find other things for them and what not.

CRISTINA: That's really cool. So, do you have a background in DJing?

JARED: No. Not at all. I've DJed twice in my life. And then every day at the shop.

CRISTINA: How about international albums? Do you get anything from outside of the US?

JARED: We do get a lot of imports. We get a lot of imports for jazz and electronic music. When it comes to full on international music, that's one genre I'd really like to do better with, but my knowledge on it is very thin. And then there's so much that I wouldn't even know where to begin. But I try to, if people are looking for it, I try to sit down with them, and we can figure it out together.

CRISTINA: In our program we are interested in transcultural and translingual genres which are like types of writing that include more than one correct way of speaking English and different varieties of that language, and different languages, so which cultures and languages do you think are represented in your inventory? Including domestic cultures in the US that get represented through music?

JARED: I'm sure we're missing quite a few. I think it would be probably a lot better if we had a wider international section, but even with any genre, we'll have it from all over the world, so if we go back to like metal or punk, I have stuff from all over the world. It's not just bands from the US.

CRISTINA: And electronic, do you get anything from Germany and Italy?

JARED: Yep. Germany, Italy, France, Spain, UK, sometimes there's stuff from Poland. Lots of stuff from the Netherlands.

CRISTINA: What do you get from Spain?

JARED: It could just be pressed in Spain. I've got a few vendors that carry a lot of international music. But it's primarily gonna be just straight international stuff or it will be electronic music. And so basically when it comes to writing, whatever they say, I can find some pinpoints that people might be interested in.

CRISTINA: And you've said that maybe the albums were pressed in a different country, but that doesn't mean that the music is from that country, right?

JARED: Correct. In fact, quite a bit of Capitol Records, that record label, well not just them, but quite a bit of stuff from the major labels is pressed in Mexico, or a lot of CDs are pressed in the Netherlands and shipped here. The new Gorillaz album I'm pretty sure was pressed in the Netherlands and sent over here.

CRISTINA: Very interesting. I wonder how that happens, but that's another conversation. So how about the media of music distribution? What are the preferences of the customers? And your preferences? CD? Vinyl? Cassette? Digital?

JARED: It was a lot easier when I started my store because the only format that people were looking for was CDs, so now it's a little more of a battle of how many CDs and records and cassettes am I ordering of any title. So, I kind of have to split up my money a little bit. And there's gonna be titles where I think we'll never sell and CDs of those, and then I'll never sell any of the records, and people keep asking for the CDs, so I'm like, "aw man." Every band is completely different with that. There's no way to figure it out.

CRISTINA: But all of them are present?

JARED: Yes.

CRISTINA: So, you try to anticipate the customer's reactions and what they are going to buy by deciding I'm going to divide this into this many CDs and these many records? Anything can happen?

JARED: Yeah. A lot of times for cassettes, it comes down to that I don't want to rip my customers off, so maybe with vinyl and cassettes, I might not order it or I might cut down. For instance, there's this band called Gas, and they've been around forever, and they have a new album that's coming out. Well the CD is gonna cost the customer 15.99. No big deal. The record is 60 dollars. That's a huge jump, and 60 dollars is actually the store cost, which means it's gonna be more than that. And I just can't justify charging my customers that much money for anything. Some cassettes if they're like 10 dollars and under, yeah, I can do that. But there's been cassettes with list price of 15–23 dollars for a cassette and I'm like, "no." If they really want it, I'll get it for them, but I just, as a human being, I just don't want someone to like come into my store and be like, "bleh."

CRISTINA: So, you don't think that's ethical?

JARED: For me it's not. I don't like ripping people off, so that would go a lot into what I'm ordering. If the price is too high, then I might cut down on it, or not at all. But unless someone specifically wants it, I'm like, "are you sure? 'Cause here's the price." And then there's also the factor that records are non-returnable. So, if I buy them, they're there. That's it. I'm stuck with them. Cassettes and CDs I can send back for credit.

CRISTINA: So, if they spend 60 dollars on a record, that's on them.

JARED: Yes, and it's out of my store.

CRISTINA: So that leads me to ask you about online shopping. How do you deal with trends of online shopping? Do you embrace them? Or do you negotiate ways to go around them? How does that work?

JARED: A little of both. We do sell online. I'm not opposed to it. I prefer people came into my store, but I know that we don't live in that era anymore. And so instead of hating it, I try to join in with it. We sell on many different sites. We're very meticulous how we list our stuff. We want to make sure you get exactly what our description says, so you're gonna get it and be happy. There's certain standards out there on grading certain things, and we always kind of over grade so we make sure that when people get it they are going to be a little happier. There's some variations you can have with some of the grading, and we just really try to go overboard on it. And usually it makes the customer happy. And then when it comes to regular online selling, we do a lot of mail order. We'll also do mail order for local communities. Like if you live in Champaign and you want something, we'll mail it to you. It's no big deal. And then we'll have some customers, like we have a lot of stuff that's not on the floor, that's in our basement warehouse, and I'll give out our online site information to certain customers and be like, "hey, we have an industrial section and it's very small, but we actually have tons of industrial music, it's just in the basement. We're just not in an area where that's relevant anymore." And I have people come by quite a bit and be like, "hey I saw this on our site," and I'll be like, "cool, but don't buy it on the site. You're here, let me go to the warehouse and get it and then we can bypass fees and tariffs and all that stuff, but you're still buying from a shop and you don't have to worry about anything else." So that's how we can kind of still embrace online and have the local shop at the same time.

CRISTINA: Right. So, it seems like the relationship with the community is important in your business.

JARED: Very.

CRISTINA: Can you tell us a little bit more about why it's so relevant? What is the relationship with the community like?

JARED: It's always been important to me. I didn't realize how important it would be when I started my store until I started the store. When I first started, I didn't really have a lot of stock or money or anything for that matter, and I had members of the community, some people I knew, some people I didn't, come in with boxes of stuff and drop it off and be like, "it's yours, good luck." And when people do that that you don't know, that's pretty huge. That's why we try to make record store day not just all about commerce and stuff like that. It's more about people having fun and hanging out, and that's why there's beer there, and we're gonna start to integrate live bands so people can have fun instead of it being just about the money. I want my store to be more of a place to enjoy than . . . yes, I'm gonna need to pay the rent, but at the same time, it's a nice place for people to meet and hang out and talk.

CRISTINA: So, we call this socialization and it's a part of writing, so when we produce writing we also engage in different interactions with different people and it sounds like you actually want to promote these types of interactions with the community and among different people in the community.

JARED: Very much so. With having the community as well, that's why I try really hard to work with other local businesses. We are all a lot stronger if we work together.

CRISTINA: Yeah, and it works out really well. We enjoy record store day a lot. So, does a small community help an independent business from your experience?

JARED: Yeah, I think so. You're always gonna have the big chains and corporate companies making things, or trying to make things so much easier, but at least for my life, I like going to whatever businesses I'm going to and knowing the person that runs it. Or the person that's working there or something like that. It's just, I don't know, it just feels like you're living in a cool place if you're like, "that's Mary the baker, and I'm buying my food from this actual farmer in town, like I know these people." It just makes living a lot better to me.

CRISTINA: For sure. Can you tell us a little bit about the sorts of writing you did before the Waiting Room and how does that compare to the writing you do now?

JARED: I didn't honestly do a lot because the Internet wasn't as big as it is now, I guess. Before I started my business, I worked at another record store, and the most writing we did, we didn't have like a weekly email blast or anything. It was just descriptions on the bin cards for the bands. And that was very helpful for customers because there was no other way than you having to hunt down a magazine to find a review. This would be the best way to read up on how bands worked. And so that's why I have bin card information. Anytime I go to another record store, if I see that they are doing something really cool or really neat, I'll try to put that in my business as well to see if it helps out.

CRISTINA: Interesting. So, does that mean you go to many other record stores to kind of like gauge what they do?

JARED: I usually go to shop and then while I'm there, I'm like, "oh, I like what they did here, and, "oh this is cool, I like that," and if the owner's there I'll try to talk to them about it, and it could be no big deal to them, but I'm like, "oh I didn't know this." It could be something as simple as, I saw a

display at a record store once and I'm like, "I like how you guys made this 3-D, how did you do it?" and he was like, "you just fold it like this, dummy." But it was still helpful and I started doing it at the shop.

CRISTINA: Genre research. That's what we call research. And finally, what is your favorite band, song, album, anything?

JARED: Dear lord.

CRISTINA: We knew it was gonna be difficult.

JARED: So, my favorite band is Fugazi. And the name of my store is after the song "Waiting Room" by Fugazi. Favorite song, that can change any day. Favorite album, that can change any day. I do have, you know, favorite band is always going to be Fugazi, just kind of how it formed my idea of music in general, and they have really good ideology on how to look at life. But, you know, there's also tons of other bands that I love equally. I'm always gonna love John Coltrane and Albert Ayler and Unwound and Ten Grand. Those are probably my favorites. And if I thought about it, I could name bands for like a half hour, but I'm not gonna do that.

CRISTINA: Well I think that's it. Thank you again for joining us and this wonderful interview, because it was really, really useful.

JARED: Thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

Cristina Sanchez-Martin loves asking questions, so she tries to do that as much as possible for her job as the Professional Development Coordinator in the Writing Program at Illinois State University.

Frank Macarthy is the Writing Program tech coordinator. Please restart your computer before contacting him with questions (as he has told Cristina to do many times).

Jared Alcorn is the owner and manager of Waiting Room Records.

Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*

GWRJ Editors

Our Mission Statement

The *GWRJ* is dedicated to publishing articles by writers and scholars whose work investigates the practices of people writing (and acting) in different writing situations and in a variety of different genres. We encourage both individuals and groups to submit work that studies and explores the different ways that writers learn how to write in different genres and settings—not just within the boundaries of academia, but in all kinds of settings where writing happens.

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

General Information

Submissions

Articles can be submitted to the *GWRJ* at any time. However, we do have deadlines for upcoming issues. For issue 9.2, which will come out at the beginning of the Spring 2019 semester, articles must be submitted by May 15, 2018. The deadline for consideration in our 10.1 (Fall 2019) issue is February 15, 2019. Please contact the Associate Editor at grassrootswriting@gmail.com with queries about possible submissions and to submit your work.

Queries and Drafts

The *GWRJ* has a strong commitment to working with interested authors to help them prepare for publication. So, if you think you have a good idea but

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

Honoraria

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

Style and Tone

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

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

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

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

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

5. Tone or content that situates the reader as a certain kind of writer (whether as a master or novice) with certain kinds of shared experiences can be problematic because the readership of the journal constitutes a wide variety of writers with different writing abilities and experiences.

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

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

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

Media, Mode, and Copyright Issues

The *GWRJ* can publish both visual and digital texts. We encourage multimodal texts, including still images, audio, video, and hypertexts. However, authors working with these technologies need to be careful about copyright issues as we cannot publish any kinds of materials that may result in copyright infringement. We can sometimes seek copyright permissions, but in the case of materials such as works of art or graphics/images owned by large companies, this is often not possible. This is true for print-based articles that use images as well. We can, however, include materials that are covered by Fair Use; see *http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html* for Fair Use guidelines.

Also, video/audio of research subjects can require special kinds of permission processes, so you should contact the *GWRJ* editors before beginning this kind of work. Research using subjects who are considered "protected" populations (people under eighteen and medical patients covered by HIPAA, 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," and then taking the time to investigate that practice in some detail.

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

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

Investigating Genres

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

Personal Explorations of Literate Practice

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

Composing Practices

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

Literate Activity in the Wild

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

Case Studies of Individual Literate Practices

This type of research focuses very closely on particular individuals and the kinds of literate practices they engage in in their daily lives. Some of our previously published articles that take this 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 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 Sanchez-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 Translingual in 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've listed above can be useful for focusing a topic.) So the second question an author might want to answer is: "How will I go about finding what I want to know?"

Step Three

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

Step Four

Because *Grassroots* articles are a fairly unique kind of writing, authors may find it useful to consider past writing experiences that they might be able to draw on as they write. We call these "antecedent genres," and they can be important to think about because these prior experiences always shape how

an author writes, especially when he or she is writing in a new and unfamiliar genre. While these antecedent genres will certainly be useful, they can also cause problems because aspects of an author's past writing may not exactly fit with the style, tone, or content that is appropriate for *GWRJ* articles. Some questions to ask here are: "What kinds of writing do I already know how to do that I can use to help me? How are they similar and how are they different?"

Step Five

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

Step Six

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

Step Seven

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

Step Eight

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

Step Nine

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

Step Ten

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

Questions?

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

Works Cited

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.