GRASSROOTS WRITING
RESEARCH JOURNAL

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From the Editors

Sarah Warren-Riley

The *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* has a long tradition of showcasing truly robust writing research projects that engage with the complexity of literate practice in the world. Throughout the history of the journal, we have been grateful to have contributors continually demonstrate an increasingly complex understanding of terms, concepts, and theories in their writing research projects, ultimately expanding our understanding of what citizen writing research can be. As we enter our eighth year of publication, we are pleased that the thirteen new articles in this issue—which range from traditional genre analyses into new genres, studies into genre subversion and ownership of Facebook posts, to considerations of the role of materiality, intertextuality, and even failure, in writing—are no exception. We are excited to share Issue 8.1 and are fascinated by the ways that our contributors continue to find innovative approaches to shaping their own writing research identities and sharing what they have learned, as well as continuing the trend of showing, yet again, just how in-depth and complex writing research can be.

Issue 8.1 kicks off with four articles that delve into aspects of writing that haven't been fully explored previously in the *GWRJ*. First, **Gabrielle Litwiller** investigates the concept of "genre subversion" in her analysis of the unique (and entertaining) evolution of Amazon product reviews for Haribo's Sugar Free Gummy Bears. Then, **Jenn Colletta** examines how her own writing research identity is ultimately shaped by her own materiality (literally how her body is positioned in space when she writes). **Hannah Kroonblawd** considers the intertextuality involved in her travel and the notes she makes in her *Lonely Planet* travel guidebooks. And, **Sidney Ybarra** investigates the concept of transmedia storytelling, using the multi-platform *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as an example to show how complex this concept really is.

Tackling a different dimension of writing research, the next set of articles dive head-first into the concept of failure and how it relates to writing. First, **Katherine Peterson** provides an in-depth exploration of the ways that her initial (and repeated) attempts to write a *GWRJ* article failed due to differing understandings of the concept of clichés and how she ultimately came to recognize why that was. Then, **Shane A. Wood** shares his perspective (based on personal experience as both a student and a teacher) on embracing failure as a productive tool in the

composition classroom. Both of these articles highlight the various ways in which failure might actually be a critical component of the writing process, in the sense that it can help us to continue to expand, grow, and improve.

Following this, the next four articles apply cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) to analyze a variety of genres through a variety of approaches. First, **Braeden Weiss** uses CHAT to uncover the secrets to the success of Buddy Ryan's 46 defense. **Mackenzie Flowers** then shares her experience using a Bullet Journal and shows how CHAT (and particularly socialization) helps to explain how popular (and useful) this genre is. **Becky Holdsworth** investigates the genre of the "Toilet Talk" flyers posted in Illinois State University bathrooms to uncover how the representation and distribution of these flyers is critical to their successful reception. Then, **Sarah Lyons** starts her investigation with a hunch about the role of book covers in determining who purchases them, which gets complicated the longer her investigation into the genre continues.

Finally, the last three articles in this issue consider the complexities of writing (the different types of writing used, the forces that work on that writing, and ultimately, what writing does) in a variety of places and spaces. First, **Andrew Del Mastro** contemplates ownership of posts on Facebook, the role that Facebook's ecology plays in this, and acknowledges how complicated it can be to determine control of social media posts. Then, **Mackenzie Flowers** and **Maddi Kartcheske** interview Patrick Sweeney about the writing involved in his career as a juvenile detention center administrator and provide a transcript of a Q&A session with students in Delores Robinson's class at IVCC. Finally, **Addie McMullen** analyzes the genre of reality TV (in particular, *The Bachelor*) as she attempts to determine the conventions of this popular genre.

We end Issue 8.1 with another reprinting of "Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*," which we hope will inspire writing researchers to share their work with us at the *GWRJ*. As always, we invite prospective writers to submit their rigorous investigations of how people, tools, and situations affect writing in complex ways. We cannot thank our contributors enough for their curiosity, dedication, and creativity. We look forward to continuing to receive new submissions that explore a variety of unique genres and forms of literate activity from a diversity of perspectives and to sharing those investigations with you in future issues of the *GWRJ*.

Genre Subversion by Gummy Bears and Explosive Diarrhea

Gabrielle Litwiller

Litwiller looks to *Amazon.com* to understand the concept of genre subversion. By tracking the Amazon reviews of Haribo's sugar free gummy bears, she discovers something more sinister than bowel movements—she discovers how genres change form.

What the crap is this title doing in a writing journal? I am so glad you asked. In my quest to understand how new genres develop and how they morph from one form to another, I went to *Amazon.com*. A few years back my older sister visited home from college and read aloud a couple reviews of Haribo's sugar free gummy bears listed on Amazon at the dinner table[1]. These reviews had little to do with manufacturing information, price points, or product presentation, but everything to do with painful bowel movements and the hysterical story behind them. (Yup, my family is weird; we talk about poop at the dinner table.) Thinking back to this product and its reviews, I want to discover how and why one standard genre, the review, was subverted into another, a hybrid-review. How did the Haribo gummy bears go from this, their very first review back in 2006:

> They're delicious, but after I ate a few handsful, a couple hours later
> I started to feel really sick. I spent the whole rest of the day suffering
> painful gastrointestinal distress. I believe this is an occasional side-

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[1]If you would like to explore all the reviews for the Haribo's sugar free gummy bears, follow this link and enjoy: *www.amazon.com/Harido-Sugar-Free-Gummy-Bears/dp/B008JELLCA/ref=cm_arp_d_dp_opt?ie=UTF8#customerReviews.*

effect of the sugar substitute (branded Lycasin(tm)). If you don't have a problem with Lycasin, go right ahead and munch away. If you don't know, I'd try them in small quantities first to make sure they don't cause you any problems. (Meyer)

To this, a short and amusing story:

> . . . I boarded the train and found a seat next to a woman dressed in business attire. She was also going to NYC for a meeting and we struck up small talk about our fields of expertise. I must say she truly was a wonderful acquaintance on the trip and who's to say I eventually wouldn't be able to work myself up to the task of asking her to grab dinner later that night! We continued to talk about everything and anything, really hitting it off. That is until about 25 minutes into our journey when I felt a small rumble roll across my stomach. It was nothing too painful, but definitely felt like the start of what could be considered a very uncomfortable experience. My stomach then continued to rumble and gurgle like a dying whale calling out to it's mother. I began to sweat heavily and my new traveling companion asked me if I was feeling okay because I started to turn pale. I tried to play it off best I could and excused myself. (Bill B.)[2]

The jump between these two Amazon reviews is what I want to explore. But before we can move on, we need to have a couple things straightened out. First, what exactly do I mean when I say subversion? **Subversion**, according to the OED, is "the challenging and undermining of a conventional idea, form, genre, etc." In this article, subversion is when we approach a text with assumptions about its genre and the conventions it will follow, but instead we find elements that don't belong. We also need to understand what I specifically mean by review. I mean comments on products that are discussed in an online forum, specifically as seen on Amazon. I'm not talking about book or movie reviews. Those have distinct conventions that Amazon reviews don't have, such as giving a summary without a spoiler. We'd be quite annoyed if we read a cliffhanger on how well a product works. As we'll see later, the Amazon reviews for Haribo's sugar free gummy bears (henceforth to be known simply as gummy bears) change shape and are a subversion of the usual review. I'll be using hybrid—a genre with mixed characteristics (OED)—to describe this sub-review. This hybrid-review looks like a short, humorous story, which in some cases is hard to believe or simply not believed.

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[2]To read Bill B.'s whole account go here: *www.amazon.com/gp/customer-reviews/R32W7DR55CRCYP/ref=cm_cr_getr_d_rvw_ttl?ie=UTF8&ASIN=B008JELLCA.*

The Grand Plan

To start out this experiment I needed a control, so I did some virtual shopping on Amazon. I checked out several non-food items and their reviews to see what was typical. Then I looked around at various edible items (yes, you can order your entire pantry on Amazon). I first needed to understand the **conventions**— the features and elements that make the genre recognizable (*ISUwriting*)—of an Amazon review before I could determine what exactly it was that made this hybrid-review stand out. Once I gathered up my list, I headed for the gummy bear reviews, and I had my most enjoyable research experience ever. I read as many reviews as I could (there are nearly 1,000) and took note of any oddities. Lastly, I had to determine if this new form of review really was a review, so I considered what conventions of a traditional Amazon review were still present.

General Amazon Reviews

To give you an idea of the layout for Amazon reviews and formatting features that will be mentioned later, I've included a screenshot (Figure 1) of reviews for a hedgehog pencil holder.

Figure 1: Amazon review format example.

- Amazon's visual formatting
  - Star rating and graph (overall and individual)
  - Review title
  - Date posted
  - Name (or username)
  - Verified purchase label (if applicable)

- ° "Was this helpful" vote and count

- ° "Report Abuse" option

- ° Comment tab

This visual appearance is used for reviews across all Amazon products, from electronics to clothes to food, and the appearance doesn't change throughout the whole hybrid-review transformation. Even though the content is changing, the visual conventions (as listed above) are all still there, making this not a new genre, but just a morph or shift of an existing genre. As I shopped around, I created a list of review qualities including short length (typically three to five lines), sentence-styled prose, evaluative word choice in consideration of performance, straightforward tone, consideration of price and quality, packaging or presentation, and, where applicable, size, fit, weight or quantity of the product. Also, the subject matter was always focused on the product, and any additional information was to further the argument. The most helpful reviews are very specific about what happened. Not every Amazon review has each element, but typically several are present.

Food Specific Amazon Reviews

To understand how the gummy bear reviews fit into the review circle, I needed to know what people were talking about in other edible reviews and what common topics were brought up. I looked up foods such as beef sticks, candy boxes, apples, water, and more. Below are common conventions for Amazon food reviews in addition or adjustment to the ones above.

- Taste

- Texture

- State of food: was it rotten, stale, fresh, bruised or in an opened bag

- Portion size: was it too much or too little (for example, perfect snack size for kids)

- Health: did this item cause illness or food poisoning

- Nutrition of the product: was it correctly and clearly labeled, was any information deficient

- Dietary restrictions: users will comment if it is in accordance with their specific diet plan

Now that we have a good list of what defines an Amazon review, we can move on to the long awaited gummy bear "cleanse."

Subversion by Gummy Bears

For a genre to form there must be more than one text that belongs to that genre. There must be a patterned occurrence and a history of the genre. Genres go through a period of being **active** and "in-flux" before they reach a solidified or **inscribed** state (*ISUwriting*). Today we see social media platforms adapting and changing. Facebook today doesn't look like what it did when it first appeared. Even its wordage has changed; before, you wrote on someone's "wall," but now you write on their "timeline." Facebook is an active genre, whereas the resume, for example, is an inscribed genre. The resume's conventions haven't changed in years, while Facebook is always in a process of updating. The typical Amazon review is an inscribed genre, but the hybrid-review we see on the gummy bear page is active and developing. A genre-history also implies that there is more than one example of said type of text. Now, if there were only one hysterical review for the gummy bears, we could write it off as an anomaly. Thank goodness for our own enjoyment that it's one of many reviews that skirt the requirements for the usual review.

To tackle the ordeal of the gummy bear I read the reviews from first to last. My goal in this was to see where exactly the change took place; where did the explanation turn elaborate? This occurrence happened about one year from the first review. On April 16, 2007, Andrew Schaefer reviewed the gummies as follows:

> I bought 10lbs of these bears while I was doing the "Atkins thing" . . . and I found the same gastric issues that others experienced. However, we like to keep them around the office for newbies to experience. They're so tasty that people will sit at your desk and snarf down a whole bowl full. We'd warn them not to eat too many, but they'd just nod and keep munching. The next day they're a believer in moderation. Apparently we're all masochists as we ate all 10lbs in a month regardless of side-effects. (Schaefer)

Here we find the bend in rules or conventions starting to happen. There is a practical joke element, which implies humor. Schaefer tells us the effect of an upset stomach, but does not say much else about the product. I can understand by the practical joke that Schaefer enjoyed his purchase, but he doesn't add to the conversation of the product. He doesn't give new insight into the bears, just an unintended use for them—office initiation.

A few months after Schaefer's review we have one by Allyson N. Wright. Wright uses literary techniques such as an introductory sentence and foreshadowing in her first sentence, "getting stabbed in the stomach probably would have been more pleasant than what happened to me a couple hours after eating a handful of these." Traditional Amazon reviews are too short to

make use of an introductory sentence and are to the point, which nixes the need for foreshadowing. She also ends with sarcasm and writes, "basically, if you want to induce flu-like effects and spend at least 6 hours in excruciating pain, eat these with reckless abandon." By including literary techniques, she enhances the text, making it more colorful. Wright could have simply ended her review with, "I don't know why anyone would eat these," but instead her sarcasm boosts her message.

Though these two reviews aren't a prime example of the hybrid-review, they do show the introduction of elements that are then used in future gummy bear reviews. The humor elements and the literary elements are both heavily used in the new review. These reviews provide inspiration, a small stepping stone for the hybrid, to help create a platform where the hybrid-review will be accepted and widely received. I should note that while all the morphing reviews are being posted, so are the traditional reviews. These include positive reviews as to the flavor and texture of the item, with no mention of any gastric affects, as well as negative reviews for the very effects stated in other comical reviews. You should know that these are present and continue the whole life of the gummy bear reviews, but I don't want to make you read that boring crap, so we'll focus on just the hybrid-reviews.

Of all the gummy bear reviews, my absolute favorite encapsulates nearly all the conventions of this hybrid-review. Gregory Craff[3] wrote his review, "The rocket fuel has low specific impulse," in 2013. He also includes foreshadowing by writing, "After my first enjoyment, I experienced something less enjoyable." However, his most impressive literary effect is his use of metaphor. He writes, "the gummi bears, hereafter referred to as The Fuel," which he uses to frame and illustrate the rest of the story. This metaphor adds to the humor; the master bath is no longer the master bath, but is now "the Launch Facility," with the toilet as the "Launch Pad." All of this description (even down to the brand of toilet) is stated well before we get to any relevant gummy bear information. Craff is fully invested in his metaphor and elaborates on "unneeded" details. "Thrust built rapidly to the 100% rating of the nozzle. The exhaust thundered against the parabolic shape of the Launch Pad and reverberated back upwards, buffeting the structure of Space Ship Me." I put "unneeded" in quotes because this information is frivolous for the traditional Amazon review, but furthers Craff's tale immensely as a hybrid-review. Other metaphorical phrases include "nuclear Armageddon" and "atomic bomb" (The Informer, Amazon Customer).

One other interesting inclusion in the subverted reviews is pop-culture references. Though this is not found in every hybrid-review, it is more common

[3] To enjoy Craff's entire review go here: *www.amazon.com/gp/customer-reviews/RDGJA7YL703CG/ref=cm_cr_getr_d_rvw_ttl?ie=UTF8&ASIN=B008JELLCA.*

here than in traditional Amazon reviews. Craff refers to the Saturn V launch as well as Star Trek: "'The engines cannae take any moor, Cap'n!' (I have no idea why my arse has a Scottish accent.)." C. Cooper's review also includes pop-culture references ("Scenes from the movie 2012 could have been filmed inside my gut") and likens the bloating to the NBA finals and "the blueberry girl from Willy Wonka."

One last unusual aspect of Craff's review is that it was remediated into a video clip of a dramatic reading[4]. **Remediation** is when content crosses genre boundaries. The content or message is still the same, but the form it's presented in is different. In the dramatic reading, we still have Craff's gastrointestinal adventure, but the mode it's distributed in is a short video clip instead of static words on a screen. It also becomes an auditory experience because it's being read in a Russian accent. As the adventure is remediated into this genre, it becomes even sillier as the accent accentuates the circumstances. Now, remediation sounds a lot like subversion, so how are they different? In remediation, the content, or story, goes from one form to another, whereas in subversion the content changes, but the genre does not. Thus, we have the hybrid-review, which is changing the content conventions but not the Amazon review genre itself.

We also see the gummy bear review change the content conventions of the Amazon review by messing with the star-system. Given all the stories of sickness and ill health, this product should be a one or two-star product. But because people are rating the adventures by writing skill, edge-of-the-seat attention, and humor, the review (not the product) deserves a five-star rating. The rating becomes confused and unreliable. Amazon realizes that there are some inconsistencies in the rating system and so tries to balance those with an algorithm. When you hover over the "3.9 out of 5 stars[5]" of the review you get this disclaimer pop up, which Amazon puts on all their products:

> Amazon calculates a product's star ratings using a machine learned model instead of a raw data average. The machine learned model takes into account factors including: the age of a review, helpfulness votes by customers and whether the reviews are from verified purchases.

However, this calculator takes a beating considering that it tracks which reviews people found helpful. When 56,624 people find a review helpful because it went viral, it distorts the real rating. Any kind of "gastric issues"

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[4]Brian West uploaded the video, entitled "Rocket Fuel," to *Vimeo* in 2013. Here is a link if you would like to view it: *vimeo.com/73300452*.

[5]The gummy bears were reviewed for 3.9 stars as of October 8, 2016. Though this item is "currently unavailable" and has been since I started my research in September, it is still being reviewed months afterwards.

would bring the stars down, but other customers thoroughly enjoyed the joke or humor aspect of the gummies. Though the reviews describe the incident, it seems that it's really the story that is rated. The star-system is misused, like using a chair as a stepping stool. Customers found a side benefit for the gummies, but didn't focus on the intended benefit of the gummies (which is to taste good and be a fun snack).

Concluding the Case of Diarrhea

Even though our hybrid gummy bear reviews sounded so different from traditional Amazon reviews, we can still put them in the same genre of Amazon review because the basic elements are still there. Both traditional and hybrid Amazon reviews carry the same look, and the visual format and elements are all present. Relaying the information through sentences is still used, but the hybrid-review is prose with more elaboration and color. Humor is a part of traditional reviews, but it takes a back seat and is seldom utilized there, while the hybrid-review must have humor in order to not be a flop. The hybrid-reviewers know the rules of Amazon reviews and therefore know how to break them successfully.

As you journey into the big world of genres, explore what is right in front of you. Don't take any genre for granted, but consider its history. Appreciate when the genre is kept intact and when the rules are bent effectively. And always be on the lookout for Haribo's sugar free gummy bears.

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Gabrielle Litwiller's claim to fame is sadly not her own viral gummy bear review, but she has cycled across the USA. If she is not biking or snuggled in a blanket with a book, she is either experimenting the perfect cup of espresso with her husband, Josh, or throwing a paper towel roll around the house with her dog, Molly.

I would not like writing here or there—I would not like writing just *anywhere*: Exploring the Materiality of Writing Research

Jenn Coletta

In this article, Jenn Coletta discusses how she developed a writing research identity by becoming more aware of the spaces and places she inhabits. While she has often completed writing assignments on the floor, she did not realize the significance to her learning process until coming to ISU. Coletta unpacks the ways that space can help or hinder our writing, but more importantly, how analyzing our preferences allows us to grow as writing researchers.

"May I sit on the floor?" I asked.

"Of course! We even have a basket of purple yoga mats in the next room if you would like to use one," replied Illinois State University's writing program director, Dr. Walker.

It was the Wednesday of what proved to be a very intense, overwhelming, but ultimately productive orientation into ISU's writing program as a new PhD student. On that particular day, our coordinator gave us about 30 minutes and asked us to map out our teaching plan on a piece of paper. While everyone else eagerly started working, I was uncomfortable. Yes, I was stressed, but I mean *physically* uncomfortable writing at the desk I was sitting at. So, I quickly asked if I could sit on the floor, and to my delight, was not only given permission, but a yoga mat in my favorite color. I moved to a lovely little piece of floor in the corner and began to write. Three things came from this small change: First, I realized that I was the only one who moved, and so I started wondering if my preference for the floor was weird. Second, one of the more senior writing program instructors came by and asked why I was on the floor. I shrugged and said simply, "I always write on the floor. I don't know why." She responded:

"Hmm. You should write about that, you know," and walked away. I thought about that for just a second, but I quickly put it to the back of my mind. After all, I only had 30 minutes to complete a pretty substantial task. And finally, the last thing I realized was that I wrote, and I was productive. And I don't mean just kind of productive; despite all of the great activities and assignments they gave us during orientation, that was the single most helpful thing I did and it is what still sticks out to me eight weeks later. It was also the only time I worked on the floor that week. In thinking about this more, I realized this was part of what made up my writing research identity.

According to ISU's Writing Program, **writing research identity** is basically the ways we think of ourselves as writing researchers. This becomes important when we need to **transfer**[1] our writing skills; if we have a strong writing research identity, we know we can conduct research in a bunch of different ways. They also focus on understanding "how your experiences have shaped you as a writer and as a researcher," as well as reflecting on our attitudes regarding writing and learning. When I was thinking about this, I noticed a gap: they don't explicitly talk about our physical bodies or our physical spaces. This led me to consider the impact our bodies and the spaces we inhabit have on our identities as writing researchers. This consideration also fits in with writing research identity insofar as it encourages us to "look closely at the writing process and try to understand all that goes into it" (ISU Writing n.p.). Ultimately, I think it is just as important to consider the physical spaces we take up when writing, and so I set out to discover how these spaces can either help or hinder our writing—and how being aware of our individual preferences will influence and help solidify our identities as writers and researchers.

Fun on the Floor

I guess I've always enjoyed working on the floor. While I can't remember exactly when I started doing this regularly (it was *certainly* by the time I started college), I do have very fond memories of picking out my carpet square to sit on in elementary school when we'd gather in a circle at the teacher's feet for story time. We kids seemed to love it, but I don't recall any adults ever joining us on the floor. I'm sure at the time we assumed that, at 25, they were just waaay too old to be sitting on the floor with us anyway. Bad backs from old age, probably. If they sat down with us, they probably would never be able to get back up again.

Fast forward to the first time I can remember specifically and habitually researching and writing while on the floor rather than a desk, my bed, Starbucks, or literally anywhere else. It was my junior year of undergrad and I was taking my first upper-level literature class in which I was required

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[1] Transfer refers to the (super important) process of taking knowledge we learn and applying it in a new situation.

to write my very first literary analysis that needed to include peer-reviewed sources. Up until that point, it was by far the most difficult thing I'd had to write and I was excited . . . but also low-key freaking out. I found myself not only researching that entire project sitting on the floor of my apartment, but for some reason (the professor couldn't find his keys, maybe?), I ended up talking with my professor about corrections—you guessed it—on the floor outside of his office. That project became the first of many, and in fact, in a long roundabout way, is why I ended up at ISU doing this whole PhD thing.

By the time I got to grad school, this was just the norm for me (see Figures 1 and 2). It didn't seem that weird because my friends in my master's institution happened to also be floor-writers. We would regularly get back to the dorms after class and immediately put on our trusty Hollins sweat pants (because you gotta rep your school) and pile into the hallways for writing sessions.
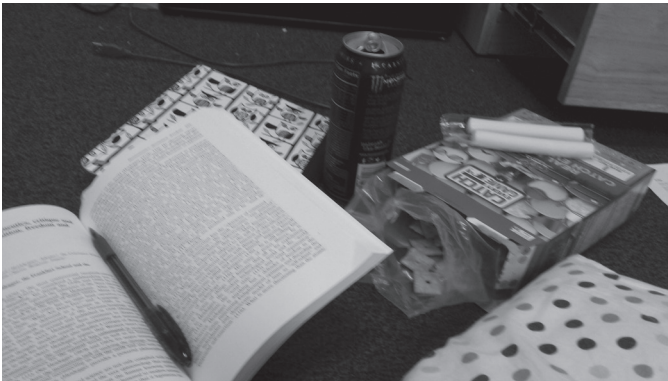
Figure 1: This is what most of grad school looked like for me.

Figure 2: This was toward the end of my final semester of my master's degree. I am standing in the spot where I completed most of the work for my last term paper.

OK, We Get It–You Like to Write on the Floor. So What?

Until I got to ISU, I never thought much about my writing research identity aside from the fact that I considered myself a strictly critical writer. Period, full stop. Even though I engage in numerous different literate activities every day (texting, email, Facebook, and Tumblr just to name a few), I never paid much attention to them. There are many reasons for this, not least of which is how the academy often privileges more traditional forms of writing. I'd never been told that other, nontraditional forms of writing merited attention, so I just blindly continued on my way. On top of that, though, was my **antecedent knowledge**; that is, the things we already know how to do, even if we aren't conscious of having learned how to do them. This hindered me when it came to writing because there were plenty of things, both traditionally "academic" and things more progressive, that I would never be able to explain to someone else.

> Someone: "How do you know a comma goes here?"

> Me: "Uhh...I just, ya know, kinda...feel it?"

A huge step in learning to embrace your own writing research identity is being aware of yourself! Once I realized that there are myriad ways to be a writer, I was able to be more self-conscious, and look at my own writing and research practices in a new light. In the past, I would have said that I do all of my writing assignments on the floor and would have just left it at that. Now, though, I am able to parse out how my mind and body react to different writing activity systems and genres depending on my environment, location, and/or **ecology**[2]. Understanding that there aren't finite ways to be a writer has allowed me to assess myself and observe some interesting patterns about my writing behavior: When I write critically, or research in order to write an academic paper, I always sit on the floor. Whenever I write creatively, write emails, use social media, read for pleasure, or even read for a class that is not directly connected to writing, however, I sit at my desk or on my couch, or I might lay on my bed; basically, unless it's specifically and traditionally related to academic writing and research, I have little preference for location.

Why Might This Be?

When I started thinking of ideas for a *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* article, this was certainly not my first idea, mostly because I had no idea where to start. I just assumed I was a little weird, but that it didn't matter much. However, one night in class, the professor offered us the yoga mats to sit on.

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[2]Ecology is a CHAT term that includes the physical and biological forces that exist beyond the text. While this can sometimes refer to weather, it can also mean the environment more generally. So for my purposes, ecology is very important!

I don't think he knew my proclivity for working on the floor, this was likely just a coincidence. Once I excitedly accepted the offer, though, he asked, "Have you ever thought about theorizing this writing practice?" I hadn't. Not really, anyway. But his excitement for the project, along with the support from my classmates, made me think that there might be something here worth exploring. But how would I even start doing something like this? He suggested I look into other studies regarding how our bodies interact with learning, so that's exactly what I did with my good friend Google.

When I begin any research project, I often start the cursory search on Google. This time, I searched all kinds of things, trying to find studies regarding reading, writing, and/or studying in various locations. What I discovered from my cursory search was interesting: there have been many studies done about studying at a desk, especially juxtaposed with working on a bed. Even more articles discuss the need to do away with traditional classrooms that still have 32 desks in single-file rows. Overwhelming, though, was the amount of information—some from credible, scientific studies and some from the sages of wisdom that can only be found via Yahoo Answers—about posture and how your body's position affects your ability to concentrate, learn, and recall knowledge. Very little was said about the floor, except a few articles and the occasional nods to elementary classrooms. What little I did find, though, was fascinating.

Will the Floor Heal Me or Kill Me?

In the midst of my research into how our physical bodies respond to the environments in which we work, I was encouraged to find an article titled "5 Reasons Sitting on the Floor is Good for Your Health." (Yes! My hippie ways are finally paying off.) This article purports that sitting on the floor will contribute the following five things to our lives: naturally improved posture; a connection with how human bodies evolved; improved strength and flexibility; a longer lifespan due to said strength and flexibility; and finally, humility (*Alternative Daily*). That's right, folks. Humility. While this made me laugh a bit, it didn't answer my question. I still wanted to know how our bodies interact with spaces to influence our learning and the development of our identities as writers. To be clear, I didn't realize that I was actively seeking out floors to work on until I started reflecting on my own writing practices—it just felt normal. That said, even though it wasn't very relevant, this article had me feeling pretty strong about my life choices. This thing that I was going to do regardless is actually good for me? That's like realizing that you actually enjoy the taste of broccoli without all the butter and cheese.

However, this excitement was short lived because I soon came across a concept I'd never heard of: active/dynamic sitting vs. stagnant sitting.

According to Wikipedia, active sitting encourages the person seated to move (think rocking chairs, those chairs with the medicine ball in the middle, etc.). Stagnant sitting, on the other hand, is when the seat is "rigid and results in sustained mechanical tissue loading" which is "widely thought to contribute to negative health effects" (n.p.). Admittedly, I don't know what "sustained mechanical tissue loading" means, but it certainly doesn't sound good. And since my floor isn't exactly flexible, I found myself back at square one. Is it good for me, or devastating for my posture, bones, and muscles? Did it really matter? If I knew without a doubt that it was bad for me, would I stop? To be honest, I'm not sure that I would. There is something about writing and researching on the floor that is so deeply engrained in my writing research identity (even if I'm just now ascribing these words to it), that I would certainly not give it up without a fight.

Let's Talk Writing Research

By reading "The March of the Llamas: Or, How to be an Effective Note-Taker," in the 7.1 issue of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, I realized that, rather than continuing down the rabbit hole I was in, I needed to focus and find more reputable sources. It can be very easy to get lost in the sheer amount of information that is available to us, particularly online. While it can sometimes be useful to explore these tangents, being a PhD student doesn't exactly afford you all of the time in the world. So, I quickly decided that I should be looking for what other writing researchers have said about embodiment, location, and environment. Like Nathan Schmidt in "The March of the Llamas," I turned to Paul Prior and Jody Shipka, two experts in genre studies and activity theory, to start. They explain that "self structuring is achieved through environment structuring" (n.p.). They argue that "literate activity is about nothing less than ways of being in the world" and more specifically, "the ways we not only come to inhabit made-worlds, but constantly make our worlds—the ways we select from, (re)structure, fiddle with, and transform the material and social worlds we inhabit" (n.p.). According to them, the way that we take up space in the world is directly related to our literate activities. Furthermore, how we structure our spaces might very well affect how we structure ourselves. In short, our environment matters! How we position ourselves in our environment matters!

But it was the last part of their quote that I was most taken by: I have a world in front of me that I didn't have much control in choosing. Yes, I bought my house, but I was limited by budget, distance from campus, the fact that I needed yard space for my dogs, what was on the market at the time I was looking, etc. And yes, I bought most of my furniture and did so because

it was stuff I liked at the time. (And I still do—mostly.) But more deeply and significantly, there are a ton of forces at work, which are out of my control, that put me in my current space—a space that I then exert a modicum of power over by, as Prior and Shipka say, (re)structuring, fiddling with, or transforming it. Basically, the idea is that our own consciousness is tied up in our ability to manipulate our material spaces. Maintaining control over these spaces can look very different depending on our varied preferences, but it is nonetheless significant in the formation of our writing researcher identities. For me, it's the floor. For you, it might be that you need music playing, Netflix in the background, a special pen, or any number of things. The important thing to note is that, according to Ernest Boesch, it's this control that converts *spaces* into meaningful *places* (157, emphasis mine). While this might seem to you like a silly semantic difference, in spatial theory, the difference between space and place is actually kind of important (and cool!): space is typically thought of as abstract, while place is more concrete. Place is the goal, I think, for conducting all sorts of literate activity—we want somewhere real, somewhere we can get our proverbial hands dirty. (And, let's be honest. Where better to do that than on the floor?) My deviation from the norm of sitting at a desk, therefore, is theoretically my way of managing and creating my identity through a personalized, important, and (hopefully) productive place.

On a related note, Prior and Shipka also discuss Environment Selecting and Structuring Practices, or ESSPs. As I mentioned above, structuring your environment can help you structure yourself, but Prior and Shipka actually go on to say that these ESSPs are "the ways writers tune their environments and get in tune with them" (n.p.). This all goes into the different literate activities in which we each participate daily. I like to think of it as a feedback loop: my writing environment affects me *and* I affect my writing environment. And this happens largely because writing is a material activity and I am a material person. (Think "real"/ "tangible" here, not Madonna.) All of these real-life things act on and impact other real-life things, and we all interact with different real-life things differently depending on our real-life perspectives. And, if your head is spinning, let's just boil it down to a common quote from YouTube personality Hank Green: "All simplicity is a lie!" Things are complicated and messy, but I think it's a pretty beautiful thing when we take something that so many people blow off as meaningless and realize that maybe this is worth looking into after all.

Let's Wrap This Up

Vera John-Steiner posits that "sustained, productive work requires more than mind for sheltering thought. It requires a well-organized and well-

selected workspace" (73–74). Through my investigation of my own writing research practices, I have realized that the way I select and structure my workspace is not only unique, but vital to the construction of my writing research identity. Prior and Shipka say that these choices can either "promote or impede our actions," so we should take care to choose wisely. For me, the choice is clear: sitting at a desk, on a bed, or on a couch impedes my action as a writer. I become distracted, uncomfortable, or sometimes fall asleep. On the other hand, my preferred floor location promotes productivity. Even though I'm not sure exactly when or why I started this habit, at this point, I have imposed meaning onto the floor as both a productive, abstract space and concrete, controlled place—when I sit down with my books and/or laptop, my consciousness somehow understands that it's time to get busy.

If you've made it this far, I want to reiterate something I said earlier: you don't have to replicate my writing research environment. Rather, I hope this encourages you to pay attention to the places that you inhabit. Do you have a consistent spot to conduct writing—specific kinds of writing, or all kinds of writing? What about research? Does this spot promote or inhibit your activity? Remember that there are innumerable ways to exist in and change your materiality and even more ways to be a writer. The key to being a good writing researcher and establishing a solid identity is being self-aware—aware of not only your writing space, but everything about your writing process.

P.S. – A Few Pitfalls

I want to quickly give you a few warnings and/or tips, one writing researcher to another:

1. When I was in undergrad, I developed a slight back problem which prevents me from lying on the floor on my back. As I mentioned earlier, it probably wouldn't have stopped me from working on the floor unless it was extreme. Luckily it wasn't, but it became a factor nonetheless. I mention this only to say that whatever your preferred writing environment is, make sure you are keeping yourself healthy and comfortable.

2. If you're going to be on the floor, take this opportunity to do some stretches and mini-yoga sessions! Be well, friends.

3. One final caution—if you work on the floor and have pets, this could be your fate (Figures 3 and 4):
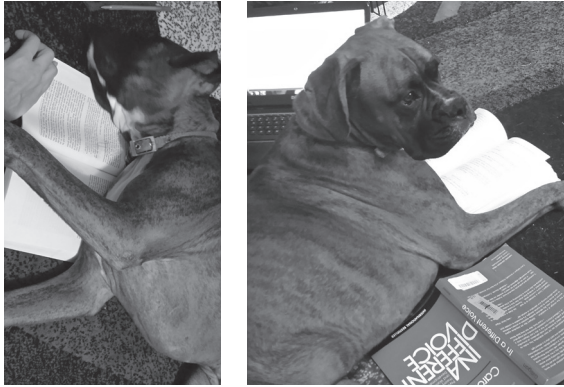
Figures 3 and 4: My baby, Harper, taking over my work space.

She's such an adorable, adorable spot thief!

Also, sometimes she just comes over and stands on me. And other times she and my other pup wrestle on top of me. Don't say I didn't warn you.

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Solo Doesn't Mean Alone: Travels with Lonely Planet

Hannah Kroonblawd

In this article, Hannah Kroonblawd considers how a specific kind of text, the *Lonely Planet* guidebook, influences action, and how both text and action can be changed by context. Central to Kroonblawd's project are ideas of intertextuality, CHAT-based theories of activity and socialization, and recognition of antecedent knowledge.

If you've ever walked through the travel section of a bookstore, you've probably seen them, all lined up in a long row of white titles and blue spines: *Lonely Planet* travel guidebooks. Maybe you're not a big traveler, but these books awaken a monster in me—the kind of monster that forgets about student loans and groceries and rent payments and decides to book the next flight to the Faroe Islands. "Read me," *Lonely Planet* whispers, "and you will soar like a sky lantern over the city of Taipei." My traveling experiences are so closely intertwined with *Lonely Planet* that I can't separate myself from them. It's a problem, I know.
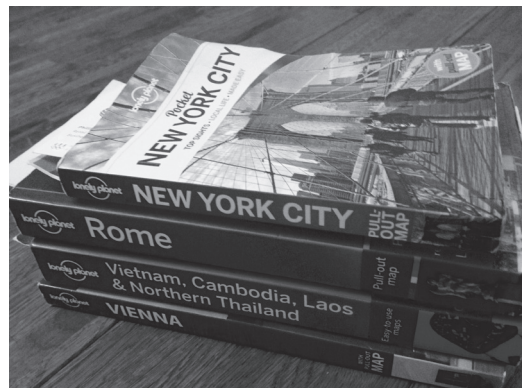
Figure 1: My stack of *Lonely Planet* guidebooks.

For this *Grassroots* article, I decided to take a closer look at my own use of contemporary guidebooks, specifically those published by *Lonely Planet*. It's a

funny genre—part encyclopedia, part food critic, part history book, part map. I've used *Lonely Planet* guides on five different trips, both inside and outside of the United States. My first trip using a *Lonely Planet* book was in February 2013, and my most recent trip was March 2016. I've used their multi-country guides, city guides, and pocket guides. I lent one regional guide to a friend, and it was never returned. I'm still bitter about that one. I tell people that I trust *Lonely Planet* with my life because, after fried tarantula in Cambodia and the Museum of Communism in Prague ("you couldn't do laundry, but you could get your brainwashed"), I do.

In considering my use of (and strong attachment to) these guidebooks, I decided to focus on two main questions:

1. How does the intertextual nature of a *Lonely Planet* guidebook affect the actual traveling experience of its audience (and vice versa)?

2. What reader-text interactions occur between the day of purchase and the end of the trip?

To analyze the intertextual and interactional nature of a *Lonely Planet* book, I looked at two different city guides—the *Rome* city guide and the *New York City* pocket guide—and thought about how I worked with the text as I traveled and how the text worked with me. Travel is not static. The action of traveling is something that changes day by day, moment by moment. We can consider travel the same way that we think about texts. People, place, and language all come together at a specific moment with the intention of experiencing something new or different, much in the same way we approach a new or different kind of text.

When it comes to traveling, whether close to home or far away, we have websites like Yelp and TripAdvisor that help do a lot of the "guiding" legwork for us. These sites have compilations of traveler-recommended restaurants and hotels and attractions, with any amount of personal anecdote on the side. We can get a pretty good idea of what our travel experience will be like before we even step out the door (or go online to buy plane tickets). There isn't a whole lot of mystery left when it comes to traveling, unless you decide to go internet-free and scrap the guidebook altogether.

It sounds like fun, going off-grid while travelling, but I'm the kind of person who likes to have a plan—a flexible plan that can change whenever I'd like, but a plan nonetheless. And, while the internet is great in terms of having anything and everything about a city or a country just a click away, I like having a book in my hands.

Enter the *Lonely Planet* guidebook.

Intertextuality, or What's Between the Pages

The moment I open my *Rome* guidebook, things start to fall out of it. Literally.

Here's what I have to catch, two-and-a-half years after returning from Italy:

1. A "100-minute integrated ticket" for the Rome bus system.

2. An Italian/English map of the Roman Forum, Colosseum, and Palatine Hill.

3. An Italian/English map of the Vatican Museum.

    • Another bus ticket falls out of that map.

4. An English map of the "Case Romane Del Celio" (underground houses).

Apparently, I shoved these between the cover and the first page of the book. Later on, a receipt from La Casa del Caffé is being used as a bookmark between pages 196 and 197. On it I'd written, "the time I finally ordered the right way (pay first, give receipt back to barista) lol." The date on the receipt is 04-04-14.

There is something comfortable about this guidebook. Perhaps it is the font and color choices: bright blue headings, red numbers and icons, serif fonts for descriptions, sans-serif for time/location/directional information and inset textboxes. Paragraphs are generally short, there are lots of pictures, and there are maps every 15 pages or so. This is a young-adult-friendly book, with its **representation** (how the idea behind the text is put into practice)

Figure 2: Items within the pages of my *Rome* guidebook.

geared specifically towards readers who are used to *Google Maps*, emojis, and hipster coffee shops. Take, for example, this description of a bar near the Piazza Navona: "It's laid-back and good-looking, with occasional jam sessions and original French country décor—think wrought-iron fittings, comfy armchairs and a crackling fireplace" (*Rome* 103). Only a certain readership is going to be concerned about "comfy armchairs."

The *Rome* guidebook is about 400 pages long. Despite the length, its comfy-ness (no escaping it now) led me to treat it as a scrapbook of sorts. I annotated the text itself with my own code:

- Green highlighter indicates places I wanted to visit (highlighted during planning time).

- Checkmarks next to headings indicate places I actually visited (checked after visiting). (See Figure 3)

- Circles on maps indicate places I needed to be able to reference quickly (so that I wouldn't look *too* much like a tourist).

- Two stars indicate my favorite gelato shop (there is only one, and it is Fior di Luna in Trastevere). (See Figure 3)

FIOR DI LUNA ✔ ✗★
(Map p372; ☎06 6456 1314; Via della Lungaretta 96; gelato from €1.70; ⊙noon-11pm Tue-Sun winter, to 2am summer, open daily Dec; ☒or ☒Viale di Trastevere) This busy little hub serves up handmade ice cream and sorbet – it's made in small batches and only uses natural, seasonal ingredients, such as hazelnuts from Tonda and pistachios from Bronte.
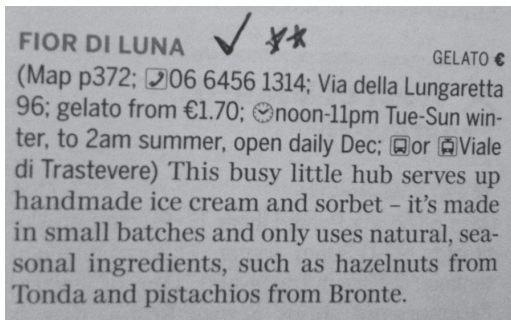
Figure 3: Annotation example.

I must have read the book nearly cover to cover in the months leading up to the trip given the amount of green highlighter. And, in retrospect, there is no way I would have been able to do it all in seven days. Tracking my highlights, I notice that I highlighted nearly everything one would expect to see in Rome: the Colosseum, the Spanish Steps, the Trevi Fountain. I highlighted lots of churches, especially those with well-known artwork inside, and lots of gelato shops. Comparing highlights to checkmarks, I'd estimate that I visited less than a quarter of the places I hoped to see. There are also checkmarks floating outside of highlights—I didn't always stick to what I had planned. What I did while traveling (eating lunch or drinking espresso or
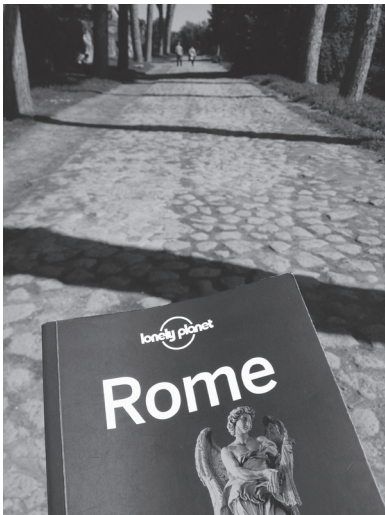
Figure 4: Walking the Palatino with my guidebook.

viewing paintings) changed due to the context of each day. But these aspects of **socialization** (my interactions with the wider world as I use a text) were also very much guided by the book I carried. Keats-Shelley House? Check. Figuring out how to order pizza by the kilo instead of the slice? Check. Using the train station kiosks to buy a ticket to Assisi? Check.

And this is where intertextuality comes into play. **Intertextuality** is the action of texts working within or alongside or against one another. In CHAT terms, we use the word **activity** to describe action, whether text-action or people-action. In my travels, intertextuality takes the shape of my annotations within the guidebook, my own thoughts and experiences on top of published, "objective" recommendations. It is also the texts that I've chosen to keep within the pages of the guidebook—the tickets and maps that fall out when I open its

pages. Intertextuality allows me to exert my own authority, gained both as I plan and as I visit the places I read about. In the act of annotation, even annotations as small as a check or a star, I become both writer and reader of a single, integrated, intertextual guidebook. My activity as a reader, as a writer, changes the way I use the guidebook itself.

Rome vs. NYC

One of the most interesting things about the *Rome* guidebook is that buying the book was the impetus for buying my ticket to Italy. I remember standing in an English bookstore in Hong Kong (I was living in China at the time) and holding three *Lonely Planets* in my hand: *Rome*, *Paris*, and *London*. You already know which one I ended up buying. But here's the thing, holding this book in my hand solidified the trip for me. It made it real; it made it possible. The idea that someone (or, in this case, multiple someones, as *Lonely Planet* guides are written collaboratively by multiple authors) had been to a place and taken pictures and gained enough knowledge to tell me I could do the same was enough to convince me to *actually* do the same. I bought *Rome* in November of 2013 and visited the city five months later. Here, again, is where activity is in full force. The actions of someone else visiting and then writing about Rome helped me to do the same.

The opposite happened when buying *Pocket New York City*. I didn't buy the guidebook for NYC until the week before departure. The pocket guide is a half-size version of the larger *Lonely Planet New York City* guidebook. It has many of the same features as the full-size text; it still includes top sights, neighborhood descriptions, and "best of" lists. It also includes a pull-out map, which I did actually pull out of the book. But nothing falls out of this guidebook as I open it. There are three bookmarks, all firmly wedged in place: a business card from the AT&T store in Times Square, a movie ticket for *Deadpool*, and an Ellis Island + Statue of Liberty ticket. There are no highlights, no check marks, no stars. I didn't write in this book at all, not before, during, or after the trip.

Figure 5: The very clean pages of my NYC guidebook.

I was in New York the exact same amount of time that I was in Rome, even during the same time of year, but the NYC trip was different. I was traveling with two friends. Because I wasn't alone, because there were two other people with two opinions other than my own of what to do and where

to go and what to eat, the text itself lessened in importance. I wasn't as tied to this book as my go-to authority because I was traveling with one person who had visited NYC multiple times before, because I was surrounded by people I knew (or at least assumed) were English speakers, because I knew that NYC's streets went up in numbers the farther north you walked, etc. Socialization was integral to this part of my travel experience. My interactions with others took priority over writing in the guidebook.

Not What I Expected

This project surprised me. I thought I was going to be comparing how these texts affected context, how they changed the way I traveled. And maybe the *Rome* guidebook did. But I'm realizing, as I write this article, that it was in fact the opposite, that context changed how I used the texts, and that I changed the *Rome* text as I traveled. My trip to New York City was very different from my Rome trip, so I used my guidebook differently. I was in an environment that was more familiar to me—the country where I was born, my native language as the primary one spoken, a city with a history and culture that I've grown up learning about and reading about and watching unfold.

Here. Maybe a chart will help clarify my thoughts.

New York City	Rome
Traveling with 2 friends	Traveling alone
Local language = native language	Local language = unfamiliar language
General understanding of city layout	No knowledge of city layout
Driver's License necessary for identification - identifies me as domestic tourist	Passport necessary for identification - identifies me as foreign tourist
Emergency protocol is natural (i.e., call 911)	Emergency protocol???
Family/friends within an hour's drive	Family/friends on the other side of the ocean

This isn't a perfect experiment. Perhaps it would be more effective if I had actually gotten the full-text copy of the New York City guidebook instead of the pocket one, if I could use one city as a "control" (probably New York City) and attempt to mirror my exact activity in the other city. But that's not true to life or true to travel. And maybe the "perfect experiment" doesn't matter so much as the conclusions I can draw from an imperfect one: that

unfamiliar contexts bring me into closer relationships with texts, especially texts created with the intention of allowing me to navigate unfamiliar locations. I felt more comfortable in NYC, not because of my guidebook, but because I had stronger **antecedent knowledge** (prior understanding, both conscious and unconscious) of the city, which meant I didn't have to rely on the guidebook with the same intensity as I did in Rome. And, on the flipside, making physical alterations to the *Rome* text was, perhaps, helping to ground me, giving me a sort of control over the unknown both before I set foot in Italy (through highlighting places I wanted to visit) and while I was there (by checking places off once I'd visited them).

What does this—looking at my use of guidebooks prior to, during, and after two very different trips—teach me about literate activity? It means I can't expect that texts will always have control over a given situation or context. But it also means I can't assume the opposite. Textual use varies according to context, according to the situations I find myself approaching, or in the middle of, or already leaving behind. Textual use changes depending on whether I am alone or alongside others, whether I have a lot of antecedent knowledge of my situation or very little or none at all. Much of the activity that happens as I travel stems from the amount of socialization I'm engaging in—maybe a lot, as in New York, or maybe a little, as in Rome.

The other question is why I wrote in *Rome* in the first place, especially as I was also keeping a separate journal of the trip. Sometimes it was to help me find my physical location or destination, like those circles on the map. But more often it was with the understanding that this text can help connect me to the future, when maybe, *hopefully*, I'd get to visit Rome again. Then I wouldn't only have the guidebook to help me. I'd also have the writing I did on top of the guidebook text, the intertextual writing, to influence my choices. The reader becomes writer, taking an active role beyond that of passive reading. Writing on top of writing is not just a present act, but also an act that carries both the reader/writer and the text itself forward. Intertextuality works as a time capsule and a time-travel machine at once.

Lately I've been reading a lot of articles that talk about how a text is never just a text in isolation. A book is always in conversation with its author and reader and context and genre and history and other books. And the same is true of me, even if I'm traveling alone. I'm in conversation with the texts that are around me—the signs I read, the menus I peruse, the guidebooks I carry—which in turn help me to be in conversation with the unfamiliar and uncertain contexts I find myself in. Sometimes, like with the NYC pocket guide, the conversations are short, almost non-existent. At other times, like with *Rome*, the conversations begin and never really end. Even now, pieces still fall from between the pages.

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Hannah Kroonblawd is a PhD student in the English Studies program at Illinois State, focusing on creative writing and poetry. She used to teach middle schoolers in southern China, where she lived for two years without a guidebook. And those were two of the best years ever. Go figure.

Transmedia Storytelling: Social Media Keeping the Story Alive

Sydney Ybarra

In this article, Sydney Ybarra uses genre analysis to examine the multi-platform based genre of transmedia storytelling. Transmedia storytelling is a new modern approach to storytelling in a more technology based society. She discusses the elements of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), looks at genre conventions and characteristics, and analyzes a video series (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*) to support her findings about the appeal of transmedia storytelling.

Storytelling is an age-old activity that has been practiced for thousands of years throughout many different cultures. Along the way, there has always been room for variation and improvement. One way I can tell you a story today is verbally (if you can stand me talking for that long). Another way I could would be by some lengthy post on Facebook (you might read half of it). Maybe I could even tell you a story by sending out tweets of things I found amusing throughout my day (which probably would only be funny to me), or even by posting pictures to my Snapchat story (but who wants to click through all of those?). However, you might only find yourself interested in what I am talking about if it is a good story. The idea of telling a story across multiple platforms is called transmedia storytelling. By sharing what is going on in my life, in essence, you are experiencing my story through my personal social media outlets.

Now that I think about it, I realize that I have come in contact with the activity system of transmedia storytelling many times without even knowing it. The reason I became suddenly aware of this new way of storytelling is because of a video series I have watched: *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. This multi-platform modern adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* that started

in 2012, focuses around the year-long fictional vlog (a blog of video content) of Lizzie Bennet, a 24-year-old grad student with mountains of student loans who still lives at home with her parents and two sisters (Jane and Lydia). This story can be experienced and interacted with in a variety of ways—through the video diaries on YouTube, on Twitter by tweeting the characters, and, if you make a cool enough Tumblr blog, their official Tumblr might even follow you. It is one activity in the system to watch the series on YouTube, but the many other activities include commenting on the videos, interacting with characters on Twitter, or even researching how to create your own fan-based blog about the series.

This series was introduced to me by one of my lovely best friends, who also has a deep love for *Pride and Prejudice* (it's my favorite book), and I have since watched the 100-episode main story, grand totaling around 9 hours, twice (which doesn't include the other videos like Q & A, Lydia's personal videos, the Collins & Collins videos, Gigi Darcy's videos, etc.). I first read the charming, and ever so romantic tale of *Pride and Prejudice* my freshman year of high school and have grown to love it even more since. I've watched the movie adaptation at least a hundred times and I've always fancied the idea of finding a Mr. Darcy. But, before I go all fangirl over the web series (and trust me I will), you might be wondering about the way that transmedia storytelling works, and as someone who has done extensive research about the topic, there are many interesting surprises to be found.

Green Bean Gelatin?

Whenever presented with a new genre, or anything new for that matter, the best thing one can do is research. Since I had no idea what transmedia
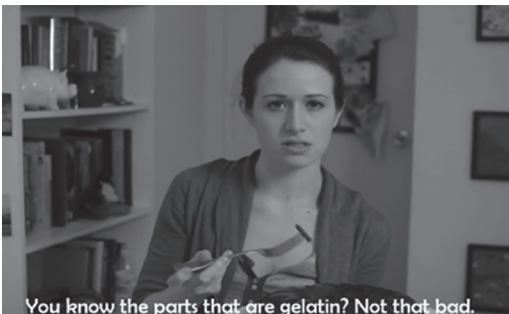
Figure 1: From Episode 19: "The Green Bean Gelatin Plan."

storytelling entailed, or what it even stood for, I did what any other basic human being with access to the internet does . . . asked Google. Google gave me a basic definition: "Transmedia storytelling is the technique of telling a single story or story experience across multiple platforms and formats using current digital technologies" (Transmedia Storytelling). That seemed to make enough sense to me. I mean I'm not overly tech savvy, but I can work a computer on a good day. But, for me, this was not enough information to totally grasp the whole concept of transmedia's content, form, and why it works the way it does. Sometimes it is difficult to sift through to

find the "good information," like how Lizzie worked her way around the green beans to get to the important "gelatin" (see Figure 1). That is why I decided to look up articles about transmedia storytelling, how it functions, and how it is made.

When trying to understand something new, I personally like to know a bit of history behind the idea to gain insight on how it has formed over time. Although transmedia storytelling might seem like a new practice in this digital age, the idea of it goes back as far as the eighteenth century. One of the first articles I read talked about the story of a fictional girl named Pamela. In 1740, Samuel Richardson published *Pamela*, one of England's first best-selling novels. Richardson initially circulated his book manuscript around a small group of female friends who gave him feedback, after which he made corrections based upon. The story of *Pamela* is about a 15-year-old maid servant who ends up marrying her aristocratic master. At the time the novel was written, the story seemed as if it could be "plausible" and it was based on the idea of the highly sought after "good life" that many people desired. What made *Pamela* effective, like with many transmedia stories, is that there was a blurred line between what was nonfiction and fiction.

But, what happens when you move from a written text to other representations of the story, and how does that change the perception of a story? People loved the story of *Pamela* so much that there were group readings, people sold *Pamela* merchandise (such as paintings, fans, prints, playing cards, waxworks), and preachers even preached about the book at the pulpit (Prior). Ask yourself this, why do you buy merchandise of your favorite television shows? Maybe because it shows that you support the story they are telling and want to share that with others. The reason Pamela's story was so compelling was due to the way that people immersed themselves in the story and made a connection with it. They believed in the story as if it could be real life—their own life even. Actively involving readers like this in a story is what is going to make it the most successful.

I Have Done the Research!

In this day and age, storytelling through transmedia might be even more effective. Since we are now living in a very technologically adapted world, this type of learning about a story through multiple forms of media should be well accepted. To try and understand a transmedia story, you need to look at the key conventions that go into making one. In an article by Anders Gronstedt, he explained that, "Effective storytelling requires a powerful plot line with realistic and relatable characters faced with adversity that go through a journey

of transformation" (Gronstedt). He also says that you have to make a world that is so appealing to people that they become entrapped within it. It cannot be extremely linear, but it must be intricate, which allows for exploration of different plot lines within the story. It has to allow for the people who watch it not to be simply users, but to be part of the creative process. It has to be able to be experienced individually on its respective platforms, but then they all have to work together as a collaborative experience. And, the main platform has to be able to channel all the important details on its own, so that a viewer can get the majority of the experience from it. In other words, not using the supplementary platforms will not make you miss crucial story points, rather they are just there to elaborate further upon them (Gronstedt). When reading a book, you are only aware of the conversations that the author gives you and not the exact dialogue from the implied ones. So, when looking at *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, Lizzie's story is told through the YouTube videos, but additionally, there are supplemental interactions between characters on social media platforms like Twitter. Think of it as an added bonus of private, made-up conversations that are either not directly from the original story or expand on implied conversations.

The tools and practices needed to make this type of **production** are things like the cast and crew as well as the use of social media interaction. It does not always require an excessive budget for casting, props, set, and technical equipment, but when transmedia stories are made, they do require different media outlets like YouTube, Twitter, or Tumblr. If you are using YouTube, this might require a set, cast, script, and camera at least, and Twitter and Tumblr would require content for the posts that would be made. With a site such as YouTube, almost anyone can make videos for themselves on any budget, even if it is just you running around with your camera phone. (Admit it, everyone has once attempted a do-it-yourself video and failed— or maybe that's just me, at least for the failing part). Most of the props in this series the cast or crew made or owned, same goes for the outfits that they wore. For *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, they had actual casting auditions for the characters and they cast who they needed chronologically. For example, Darcy, who doesn't come into the videos until episode 59, wasn't cast in the series until after almost half of the episodes had been filmed. The reason they didn't cast everyone beforehand is because they were not sure if the series would even take off, but to their surprise, the number of viewers and fans kept (and still are) growing. To be filmed as a higher quality production, it required all the components most video productions would need: actors, wardrobe and makeup stylists, writers, sound people, camera people, video editors, producers, and directors. It took on an effect that was almost like a TV show, which is something we are accustomed to today. While some episodes were being filmed, others were being written, edited, or rehearsed. And even

though it was being professionally done, they had to find a way to edit the videos to still give it that do-it-yourself look to make it plausible and relatable to the life of an average girl filming a video of her own life (thestylishvids). The **activity** of making a transmedia story also plays into the production. The writer has to take a story and remake it to fit into the specific conventions of each platform. They have to first research their story and see how they can make it relevant and applicable to the social media outlets they use.

How the story is able to stretch across multiple media outlets is what makes it truly unique and what makes it transmedia. Not only is the *Lizzie Bennet* series on YouTube, but you can interact with the characters as well through Twitter (like the character tweets seen in Figure 2), Tumblr edits (Figures 3 & 4), and Facebook posts. Figure 2 is an example of my earlier discussion of how implied conversations are elaborated on and shows how Twitter is being used for the supplemental content. Tumblr also falls into the

Figure 2: Tweets between the characters Lizzie and Charlotte.

supplemental outlet category and since I am an occasional user of Tumblr, I decided to go to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* official blog to see what is still going on. I found reblogs and other reposted content of tweets from people that couldn't believe that the show had ended three years ago (March 29th, 2012), fan-made art of the characters, and photo sets from different episodes. Once people have received this bonus content, then that reception allows for them to do with it as they so choose. **Reception** is about how people re-use a certain text and with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* the audience can interact with this type of visual information by talking about it, giving feedback, or by sharing it with other people. In my research, I found that there were also

people, and the blog itself, still reblogging pictures of the cast, screenshots from episodes they loved, gifs, and people still making fan art, and writing fan fictions (I may have spent a good hour scrolling through).

In essence, the story and the reactions are being used over and over again. The writers know how and when the audience is supposed to react to something, so they make sure that the video or post is in the proper context to achieve the desired reaction. This goes back to the idea of a blurred line between fiction and nonfiction and heavily plays on the **socialization** aspect of transmedia—people engaging with the story and being somewhat of a co-author is what makes it most successful. If they don't interact, then the story dies. In this case, people are still talking about how this story has impacted their lives. And the wonderful thing is, they can continue to do this through the form of available platforms, and by doing so they can keep the story alive.

The Internet Is Forever

Figure 3: Edit from Tumblr.

What made the *Lizzie Bennet* series so successful, and what made the fan base grow, was the story they were telling and how they were telling it. The fact that the creators, writers, and producers took this beloved story, broke it up, re-wrote it, and adapted it for a modern audience is incredible. They had to live up to and meet the expectations people would have of these iconic characters. It was an experiment into how to tell a story with the possibility that it could go horribly wrong. This also makes me wonder, when the story changes from text to visual representation, does that change it entirely to make it a whole new story altogether? In some ways, it is a new story, but it still holds on to the roots that allowed it to grow. As someone who has read *Pride and Prejudice*, the language and Austen's writing are not the easiest things to comprehend, since most of us were not around in the nineteenth century (at least I hope). To have proper **representation**, the writers and producers had to decide that this was the way they wanted to tell a story. They crafted their stories in ways that appealed to the audience. It had to be able to capture their attention and keep it, while also incorporating the audience. The predisposition many people have about *Pride and Prejudice*, is that it is just a love story, which is not technically wrong. The great thing about *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is that it is

not solely focused on that part of the story. The series dives into aspects of Lizzie Bennet's life that would apply more today than just finding love and financial stability through marriage. The episodes start with an overview of her life and the people who are currently in it, like her best friend Charlotte and her two sisters, Lydia and Jane. Love is not ruled out entirely, it just gradually comes as she is figuring out the rest of her life. What matters most is the connection that a viewer can make to the show. For example, maybe your major is Mass Media like Lizzie's, or you have an annoying younger sister, and of course, there is always relationship drama. The lives of the characters had to be relatable to trials and adventures and the jokes we are accustomed to today, like the important boy questions Lizzie asks in the Tumblr edit in Figure 3 and the unexpected trials of life in Figure 4. According to Zerne, "The massive popularity of the YouTube series suggests that many viewers find this story to be plausible; they accept that women should gain success in both career and love." In much of Zerne's article, she talks about how plausibility plays a significant role in whether or not a story is accepted and how that is a factor the show had to work with.

The **ecology** (which refers to the environmental factors and forces that affect a text) of a transmedia story determines if the story is accepted by viewers depending on if it is set somewhere they can relate to or somewhere they deem plausible. Because of the time period and social culture *this* story takes place in, rather than the original setting of *Pride and Prejudice*, it is easier for viewers to position themselves in the environment. One major question that is tackled by all the characters in the show is whether a woman's success and happiness depends on financial security, stable relationships, or both. The series suggests that a combination of both is what we should work to achieve, whereas the original book says love should lead to financial stability. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* puts positive development of one's career before relationships. It challenges the role put on women of performing a successful balancing act between their career and personal relationships. The new context of the series is appealing to the modern-day person.

Figure 4: Edit from Tumblr.

Overall, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* storyline focuses on finding the career that is best for you, and then finding someone who supports you in it (Zerne). It suggests

that even with all the conflict, you can still achieve the happiness you are looking for. All of the situations that Lizzie and her sisters go through the audience can connect to and they serve as almost modern-day role models for young women of this generation. Hopefully, it is a story that we will be able to experience again and again and look back on for advice thanks to our forever internet.

Convoluted Plans

So, in a way, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is a new story. It may have the same characters and concepts from the original story, but it has been fashioned in a way that is totally new. Most of the **distribution** of transmedia is done online, therefore it has the potential to reach all types of audiences imaginable. The content of the story is put on a media platform and then it can be accessed by the general public. Interaction allows them to distribute the story even farther. Even though you can watch the videos for free on YouTube, and you can make free accounts on Twitter and Tumblr to interact with it, these are not the only way that the story can be viewed. You can buy the entire series on IMDb, iTunes, Amazon, Google Play, or on DVD from the DFTBA (Don't Forget to Be Awesome) website owned by John and Hank Green. Also on the DFTBA website there is other fan merchandise you can buy like mugs, posters, buttons, and even a printed copy of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries Pride and Prejudice* book adaptation. Or if you are like me, you can buy stickers for your laptop from Redbubble (see Figure 5). There have also been two other books written to go along with the web series: *The Secret Diary of Lizzie Bennet* (by Bernie Su and Kate Rorick) and *The Epic Adventures of Lydia Bennet*. These bonus content books give greater details and different interactions with other characters in the series who might have been seen onscreen, like

Figure 5: My laptop sticker from Redbubble.

Charlotte, or had just been referenced to, like Lizzie's father. These things bring up the question of whether or not transmedia is a type of branding because of its underlying or convoluted purpose. In the article "Transmedia Storytelling in Higher Ed," by Gregory Cohen, he explains that:

> Whereas a brand strategy hopes to leave an impression and provoke action, transmedia storytelling recruits the audience as co-authors of the brand narrative, without knowing for certain where it will lead . . . in transmedia terms this means building brand 'worlds' or mythologies that tie every communication and experience back to a brand's underpinning values, offering up a different part of the world or story in the different places it populates (Cohen).

The series may have first started off as just a story, but it has since developed into its own brand. And since it is transmedia, it has the ability to market across its platforms to different consumers by including them in the story. What Cohen tries to explain is that the audience helps direct and distribute what type of brand they want. Transmedia is an extremely effective way of getting across the message and has recently been used not by just *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, but by more marketers and companies for product sales.

I Regret Nothing!

In Jane Austen's opening lines of *Pride and Prejudice* she says, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a person in possession of the internet and social media, must be in want of communication!" Well, maybe she did not say that specifically, or really at all, but I believe she would agree that excellent communication helps a story thrive. All the ideas of transmedia storytelling rely on whether or not a story can be effectively communicated through its conventions. Not only does transmedia storytelling have its own conventions, the story it is telling also has to be flexible enough to follow the conventions of the various media platforms that it uses.

Thinking of transmedia in terms of CHAT really helps to shed light on the great amount of effort it takes to produce such a work. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is an excellent example of successful transmedia storytelling, it won a Primetime Emmy for outstanding creative achievement in interactive media for Pete's sake! (Outstanding!) It's also a great learning opportunity if you have ever been daunted by the idea of reading *Pride and Prejudice*. Think of it as an explanation of the book in language and form that we can understand and then can apply to the actual understanding of the original text. It also makes for a great lonely weekend of sitting in your bed all day with your computer, in pajamas, surrounded by popcorn and candy wrappers (not that I've done that). Or a great excuse to spend excessive amounts of time on social media instead of fulfilling your responsibilities (not that I've done that either . . . I'm just trying to learn, okay?). Being able to analyze all the aspects that this genre can offer by looking at its conventions and characteristics has helped me to develop a deeper appreciation for the good social media can be used for (but still not my boring Snapchat story, you can't win everything!).

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Clichés and Other Stressful Components of Writing

Katherine Peterson

From reading and writing fiction, Peterson has observed the negative connotation that surround clichés in different genres. Here, she discusses the mistakes and assumptions she made in her initial research into clichés and how it affected the way that earlier drafts of this article were received by *Grassroots* editors. Through an analysis of what the definition of a cliché really is, the article explains how a cliché's acceptance is strongly associated with genre, audience, and socialization.

Defining the Cliché

To me, clichés are like that concept that your professor talks about in class and you're like, "Oh, that makes sense. I get that." . . . but then when the time comes for the test, there's a question about that concept, and suddenly you realize that you really don't understand how it works. I thought that I had a strong grasp on clichés when I started writing this article, and, sure, the process of writing it improved my grasp, but here we are nine drafts later, and I'm still discovering how complex clichés are. For one, everyone has different definitions of clichés. There are a few reasons for this, which I'll get to later, but let me begin with what I knew (*or thought I knew*) about clichés going into the article.

Before the Article

"Cliché" is a commonly used word in the realm of writing fiction, especially when referring to plot clichés. An example would be when the heroine in a story is helpless and is always in need of being saved by the male lead. I will

not be getting into those types, but rather focusing on the types of clichés that are short phrases such as "plain as day," "like a kid in a candy store," and "it's not brain surgery (or rocket science)." Thus when I use the word "cliché," that is what I am referring to. These are also a common topic in fiction.

When I picked up the craft of writing fiction, I was disgusted with my basic two-dimensional descriptions and wanted to make them sound better. I found myself slipping in descriptions that can be found in seemingly every other novel (something "fading into nothingness," "time passing in a blur," "wreak havoc," "balmy air,"—any of these sound familiar?). I wanted to describe things in ways that no one had before, and I wasn't quite sure how.

Many articles and books warn aspiring writers to avoid using clichés because of how overused they have become. When I was a novice writer in my early teens, I would eat these texts up like they were writing gospel. However, I tend to question sweeping advice that includes words like "never" or "always." These books would say to *never* use clichés, but I constantly wondered if it ever was okay to use clichés, and, if so, when they could be used.

Early Drafts of This Article

When I got the assignment to write a *Grassroots* article for my English 101 class, I decided that my topic would be clichés and that I would look at them more in-depth through reception. According to CHAT, **reception** is people's reactions to the text and what they might do when or after they read it. I chose to look at reception partly because I thought people's reaction could be the easiest to test, and because people's reactions to clichés is a part of what makes them cliché. To test this component, I composed a survey that had sets of passages from various genres. Each passage set contained the passage utilizing a cliché, and one with an alternative phrasing.

My survey-takers were asked to indicate which passage better fulfilled their purpose for reading the genre it was written in. The reason I asked this was because there is almost always some sort of purpose as to why someone reads a text, whether it's for entertainment or for school, so asking what someone's purpose for reading something is ties into reception and how they take that text up. I thought that asking if the cliché affected their purpose for reading the text would be more insightful than asking if the cliché made the text sound "better" or "worse" because depending on their purpose for reading, they may not even be paying that much attention to wording.

Admittedly, there were some flaws with this survey. My passages were on the shorter side, and my panel of survey-takers was also on the small and

narrow side. I had asked ten undergraduate students my age, eight of which attended Illinois State, to take it. All in all, I ended up with four responses. My panel could have been larger and had more variety of backgrounds represented. I also could have come up with better alternative phrasing for the passages. For example, in a passage that used the cliché "going forward," my substitute phrase was "in the future." I realized that my alternative didn't have the same sense of immediacy that "going forward" conveyed and a better equivalent could have been "from now on." Also, while I never eluded to the survey being about clichés, it was probably easy for my survey-takers to figure out the general idea of what my survey was about, which may have created a bias in their responses as well. However, the editors of *Grassroots* found an even larger flaw with my survey: *they didn't consider the clichés that I was using to be clichés*. This is kind of a major problem when your entire article is about clichés.

How I Got to My Definition of Clichés

When I started my research, I believed that any written phrase could be considered a cliché if it had been written countless times to the point where the audience recognizes it. This definition encompasses a lot of things, such as idioms, figures of speech, proverbs, or just about any familiar string of words. I came across all of these types of phrases within the online lists and books of clichés I looked through for my research. There was some overlapping of phrases between lists, but most of them varied greatly from each other. This made me wonder which sources were right in what they call clichés and which were wrong.

What I found, even in this early stage, was that what one person may consider a cliché may be completely unfamiliar to another person and thus not be seen as a cliché in his/her eyes. For example, in those first few drafts, I referred to the phrase "well-manicured lawn" as a cliché. It was one that I was familiar with because I'd seen it used in a lot of fiction books. A friend that I had look over the draft, though, said that she'd never heard of the phrase and did not consider it cliché. I believed that in this sense, anything that someone calls a cliché could be considered a cliché. Thus, when I was writing my article, I kept my definition of the word open and decided to label any familiar stringing of words as cliché, even if it could possibly overlap into another category of phrases, such as idioms and figures of speech.

However, there was one source that really stood out to me. It was a book. This book was not like the other sources I had gone through, which mostly just had a list of what the author thought to be clichés and what they meant. The book I chose went into more detail than that. In 2014, Orin

Hargraves wrote *It's Been Said Before* which lists out some of the most common phrases in the English language. Along with each phrase is a ranking of just how common they are on a scale from one to five. Hargraves has a very specific definition of cliché; to him, it is a phrase that is overused to the point of misuse. He makes a distinction between clichés and idioms in that even though idioms are also used all of the time, they are still effective because they paint a clear picture of the message that is being conveyed and cannot be substituted (8). Clichés, on the other hand, are typically not used in an appropriate context and are used way too many times so people grow tired of them quickly. Hargraves compares this process to using tools: "A tool used for the wrong purpose will be much more likely to show signs of wear than one used properly" (7). If you have a specific phrase in your "writing toolbox," but use it in the wrong contexts, the result will be poor writing and a phrase becomes worn out too quickly.

I had done all this research and had a definition that was more nuanced than mine (clichés aren't just something that's used all the time; they're used inappropriately), and yet the *Grassroots* editors *still* didn't think the phrases I was using were clichés.

Drafts 7 and 8

Since it was the editors of the *Grassroots* journal that really didn't agree with my definition of clichés or the clichés that I used, I decided to interview four of them to get a better idea of what they thought about clichés. Editor 2 agreed that some of the phrases that Hargraves included in his book were clichés but noted that most were not, and said that was because of how he collected them. I thought that being a linguist made his research and his explanations more credible in his definition of clichés; however, the phrases that he included in his book were collected solely based on their quantities in the human language with no other deciding factor. Editor 1 explained that as literary scholars, she and some of the other editors looked at and defined clichés differently than linguists. However, not all of the editors at the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* are literary scholars, so some may have even different perspectives about clichés. And, according to some schools of thought, Hargraves' book may have actually been wrongly titled. When I spoke with Editor 4, who majored in English linguistics, she called Hargraves a lexicographer. Lexicography, by the way, is a part of linguistics, but it has a focus on writing dictionaries and making lists in general (Lew 5). This editor explained that lexicographers look at a text and then make their lists, while literary scholars analyze the text and assess its relationship with other factors. And, rhetoric and composition scholars look at a text in a completely different

way by considering the ways the words create effects. CHAT is an example of one of the ways they analyze a text because it involves breaking down the text and looking closely at seven components of it as a way to learn more about it. A simpler approach to explaining these differences in analyses is that lexicographers consider text with a top down thinking, while literary scholars look at it from bottom up thinking. With top down thinking, lexicographers draw conclusions about a text first, such as "'going forward' is used a lot in the English language" and then find a reason to explain it, such as "'going forward' must be a cliché."

Editors 1 and 2 agreed that the phrases I chose were not clichés. Hargraves made an interesting point about analogizing phrases to tools and so perhaps there are ways to misuse the phrases in his book, but not to the point where they could be clichés. Some of the examples that Editor 2 came up with were "only time will tell," "all's well that ends well," and "a dime a dozen," none of which were mentioned by Hargraves. To her, Hargraves' examples of clichés were necessary transitions for writing. They could maybe be overused within one piece of writing if the writer uses the same three transitions, but across an entire genre, they are more *conventions* than clichés. Editor 2, who described herself as more of a reader than a writer, explained that her examples of phrases were ones that she had seen too many times in reading for them to mean anything to her.

Editors 1 and 2 also did not consider idioms to be cliché. However, the two are both structured as phrases and sometimes clichés too require some explanation in order to be understood. Since they look the same, analyzing the context of how and at what frequency different phrases are found to be used could lead overused expressions to be considered cliché. This sense of overuse would be determined by socialization. **Socialization**, another CHAT component, refers to how interactions with a genre occur and how that reflects upon societal and cultural norms. Clichés and idioms all have their own personal histories that resulted in them entering common use. Over time though, clichés grow to be considered overused and may even evoke an emotion of disgust when noticed. This idea of disgust was something new to my definition. Disgust or annoyance is something that the reader develops on his or her own and can be a cause of the discretion that can occur when determining whether a phrase is a cliché. Basically people can develop different opinions of what phrases irritate them depending on their own backgrounds. It can also explain why the authors of some cliché dictionaries incorporate idioms into them—they personally find the idiom irritating and overused.

While the phrases the editors came up with could be found as cliché in most genres, there are also some clichés out there that are genre-specific.

Editor 2 was quick to pick out "in conclusion" to be cliché when used in a student's essay. However, if "in conclusion" were to be used at the end of a story, it may not be cliché because a story's general convention is not to end with "in conclusion." If the story was written in a specific tone where "in conclusion" would fit to perhaps describe the story's resolution, it may not extract that same feeling of being overused because it's being found in a genre that is different from where "in conclusion" would normally be placed.

I realized that Hargraves had such a different definition than what these editors were saying because of his background. What's more, I was beginning to see that clichés depend on the context around them. They're not a fixed thing. Whether or not a phrase is a cliché is relative to the person and to the context in which one finds them in.

Socializing the Cliché – Conventions vs. Cliché

The people who have the power to determine whether or not a genre-specific phrase is cliché are the people who interact with that genre the most—mainly its audience and its producers. A genre's audience are the ones who firsthand recognize the clichés, but unless they communicate with producers of the genre or become producers themselves, clichés may never be eliminated from the genre. The producers of a text are the ones with the power to decide whether or not to use a cliché, so they have the responsibility to be aware of what is cliché for the genre that they are writing in. In most cases, the producer of a text will have read enough of that genre in order to make genre-appropriate choices. For example, authors don't tend to write novels without ever having read a novel before. But, in the case of a school essay, teachers have read far more essays than the students writing them have, so the teachers have a better idea of what overly-formulaic transitional phrases besides "in conclusion" are cliché. When an audience member becomes a producer of a text belonging to that genre, they may have more familiarity with the genre and have a better idea of how to write it in a way that's not clichéd. However, as anyone trying to write in a genre that is new to them can relate, it's hard for writers new to a genre to avoid clichés even if they know they're cliché because it's hard to come up with something different that fits into this new genre. This was the problem that I was running into when I began writing fiction. I was trying to fit into the genres I was reading (following the conventions), but instead I was being redundant (and falling into clichés). Now, I'd like to say that I'm better at selecting word choice, but it still sometimes becomes a problem for me. With how easy it has become to publish and critique work online, though, it has also become easier for audience members to communicate to producers of a text about what they found to be cliché—and, by using the right resources,

new genre writers can fall out of the habit of using clichés in a way that is a detriment to their writing.

Editor 3 and I discussed the implications of genres that may not have clichés. These genres have very specific standards regarding how the content should be formatted and have little room for personal expression. All genres have certain conventions that need to be followed to be recognizable as that genre. These conventions require that a product of a certain genre follow a certain format and, in word-based genres, have certain phrasing to be considered a product of the genre. For example, at the bare minimum, the cover of a novel will have its title and then the author's name. There can also be other things too, such as some flavor text hinting at what the book is about, a quote from a review, and often the words "a novel" floating around there, too. Even though the words "a novel" are no stranger to a novel cover, it is never questioned as cliché but merely a convention of the genre. When the book is opened, the reader may encounter a variety of components. There is the point of view, the organization of the story, the style of the writing. All of these change from book to book but the fact that they are present in all novels show that they are also conventions of the genre. Within each convention, though, are ways that a novel can become cliché. For example, the presence of artwork on the cover of a novel would not be cliché, but rather a convention, since most novels have artwork on their covers. If the novel was a horror novel, though, and the cover presented some dark shadow on the cover, then this might be considered cliché since a lot of horror novels feature dark shadows on their covers. My thought is that what pieces make up a genre could be considered convention, but how those pieces are presented is how it might become cliché.

However, there are some genres where the content should rigidly follow the same organization and style, and there is only one suggested way for how to produce the genre. For example, Editor 3 explained about her job as an auditor and the formal language that she is supposed to use when documenting what she does. These documents are strictly meant for technical informational purposes, so the language must be tight. Some phrases used in them may be considered cliché in similar genres where more originality is a part of the convention, such as, "in conclusion," but they are not considered to be cliché in this genre, rather simply a part of the conventions.

Another genre we talked about was the genre of a woman's figure skating performance. Though this is a genre with more expression, judges have expectations for how they want the figure skaters to perform, thus the style of their routine must conform to expectations if they want a desirable score from the judges. At one point, figure skaters were expected to have cutesy performances with light music, little hand flourishes and an overall

more playful routine. Figure skater Surya Bonaly defied this norm in the 1998 Olympics with an athletic routine set to harsher-sounding music and including tricks that were performed that displayed her strength. She also incorporated a backflip, which was illegal in figure skating. Because of this, her score was docked points. With figure skating, there were certain expectations from the judges, and the performances of a more clichéd tone with the cutesy routines were what they wanted, rather than something more creative that moved away from that. Thus, these characteristics, though cliché in comparison to other routines, became a part of the genre's conventions. Eventually, though, the conventions were adjusted when cutesy figure skating faded out, and there are now more options for how figure skaters may incorporate their moves. It has evolved into a type of performance where the dramatic is acceptable, and oftentimes, more desirable. Now that this has become a pattern, perhaps the tone of dramatic figure skating routines may eventually grow to be cliché as well, and a new type of figure skating will fill that void.

The Changing Cliché

All genres have an intended audience and exist in a specific time period, and a part of what determines whether a cliché is appropriate for a genre is how it would affect the audience's expectations. As mentioned before, the audience's reactions to phrases play a part in labeling them as clichés. With the genre of figure skating, there is the audience of the spectators, and there is the audience of the judges. These two audiences have very different reasons for watching routines—spectators watch to be entertained; judges watch to look for very specific criteria so that they can give it a proper rating. When performing with the judges in mind, a routine with a clichéd tone might be preferable as it is likely to guarantee a higher score. However, the spectators could be considered easier to please if any sort of trick excites them, which might change the type of routine used. Up until Surya Bonaly changed the tone of figure skating, spectators may not have even realized how repetitive the genre of the figure skating was. When Bonaly incorporated a backflip, it may have been to show spectators that there's more that can be done with figure skating than what they'd seen so far. What may have been happening in the figure skating genre that caused a shift in the tone of their routines is that the desire to be different and to stand out to the spectators was stronger than getting a desirable score. Thus, routines have been adjusted to be more entertaining for the spectators.

However, perhaps to someone who's new to watching figure skating, any repetitive hand flourishes or tones in the skater's body language may not pop out as cliché because identifying clichés comes with the familiarity of experiencing the genre. The same applies to clichéd phrases in writing.

If someone does not consider a phrase to be overused, they're not going to consider it a cliché. However, since clichés are so closely related with genre, unfamiliarity with a cliché may indicate unfamiliarity with the genre it is most closely linked to. One of the so-called clichés that I came across in my research was "a silver bullet," which I had never heard of. When I did a search on the phrase, I discovered that it was because it is mainly used in the genre of scientific journalism, a genre that I do not read. What this means is that people who are new to producing texts in a certain genre should probably get some practice reading it first so that they have a better idea of how to produce it and what clichés not to use. For example, when I started this article, I felt completely comfortable with how to go about discussing my topic and establishing my tone because I had read so many *Grassroots* articles in my ENG 101 class.

The first time I had written this article, I had taken a very narrow look at clichés and was mostly analyzing how the composition of each individual phrase could make it acceptable or not acceptable in writing. I was looking a little into genre, but not enough for my findings to make a difference. As the editors began to work with me on my article, I began to expand my focus to look more into how clichés are affected by genre, but I was still under the assumption that the same phrase could be considered cliché in every genre. It was not until recently that I realized how clichés can be genre specific and how their presence is dependent on how the text is received and produced. My research has suggested that the best way to avoid clichés in writing is for writers to be well-versed in the conventions of the genre that they're writing in and aware of what possible clichéd phrases may be associated with those before they start writing.

With regards to writing research, I learned that it's best to approach a topic broadly before delving into details. This can sound like an obvious thing to do, but when I started my research, I was too eager to figure out the details and didn't stop to look at the big picture first and discover where the details exactly fit. This can be compared to painting someone's portrait and starting on the person's eyebrows before drawing the face shape and figuring out the exact location of all the other facial features. What happens is that the eyebrows may not end up looking right in the context of the rest of the picture. The details that I found on clichés when I first started writing didn't sound right because they weren't placed in the context of the entire relationship that clichés have with genre. The same phrases can't be considered cliché within every single type of word-based genre, but rather it is dependent on what the genre is *and* how they fit into that genre's overall conventions. Figuring out these broader ideas first when doing writing research saves a lot of time and can even make researching the smaller details easier.

Editor Key

Editor 1: Tharini Viswanath

Editor 2: Erika Romero

Editor 3: Laura Skokan

Editor 4: Christina Sánchez-Martín

Note: Editors are numbered by the order I interviewed them. Tharini Viswanath and Erika Romero were interviewed jointly.

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Atychiphobia, Failure, Genre, and Vulnerability Inside and Outside the Writing Classroom

Shane A. Wood

In this article, Shane A. Wood attempts to enlighten failure as a positive means for production and progress. Wood argues that failure can offer us—the teacher and the student—a lot. This article challenges us to consider how failure aligns with other theories (e.g., genre theory), and to re-consider how failure, through vulnerability, can be relational inside and outside the writing classroom.

Introduction: Understanding Failure

The following pages are filled with failure: failure to say things in the clearest way, failure to theorize well enough, failure to understand fully. Failure is a part of how we learn, as the old adage goes. But how often, as teachers and students, do we attempt to understand failure as a practice or phenomenon? I know none of us want to be associated with failure. We never want to produce failure, we never want to be viewed as a failure—and, we never want people to see our failures. I'd like to deconstruct these assumptions that lead, ultimately, to a lack of conversation about failure. I'd like to challenge our communities and institutions that help construct our fears of failure. For the most part, we have become numb to our failures and we have devalued them because we see them as weaknesses. I'm weary of my own failures and even more so about talking about them. Nerves and anxiety help establish my fear of failure. In the back of my mind, even as I write this introduction, I'm thinking to myself: *I hope this introduction doesn't fail. I hope whoever reads this acknowledges my work. I hope this introduction doesn't disappoint anyone, or make anyone question my intelligence or ability as a writer.*

Atychiphobia is the fear of failure. More than any other tangible or intangible, realistic or unrealistic fear, I fear *failure* itself. So, I decided to write on failure because failure is relatable. I believe we all struggle with some degree of failure, past or present or future. For some reason, failure seems to be the most relational aspect of humanity. Failure is something we have all experienced, we still experience, and will always experience. No matter how far away we try to run from it and no matter how many barriers and walls we put up, failure still exists. The premise of this article is pointing towards one claim: we *all* fail and we *all* can learn from failure. I'm writing this as an attempt to theorize failure within composition studies and writing classrooms. I believe that we've all experienced failure and we've all avoided failure or neglected to share our failure(s). Therefore, by understanding failure, I think we're expanding our opportunities to learn and grow. In this article, I'm asking us to consider and reconsider the nature of failure in our own lives as well as what it means to resituate failure in the composition classroom.

During my junior year of college, I had a detrimental experience where I felt like a failure after an English professor of mine commented on my ability as a student-writer and suggested that I wouldn't succeed if I wanted to continue to pursue higher education. This teacher's feedback stole nearly every bit of hope I had in my abilities as a learner. I had recently switched my major from Business to English Literature because of my inability to take standardized tests, and after this feedback, I felt like I didn't have a place in academia. I was devastated, and I felt doomed for failure. I remember reading those comments via email and shutting down—mentally, physically, and emotionally. I sat there in an on-campus computer lab and the walls began to collapse. My skin began to peel and fall like wallpaper, and I had nowhere to hide. The only thing I could see or think about were those comments. I was ashamed and embarrassed. Questions about my intellectual and academic abilities began to race through my head: *Is my writing that bad? Do I really have no potential? Where do I go from here?*

My fascination with failure started because of this experience as an undergraduate student. The beginning was feedback, or how a teacher responded to my writing, and how it made me feel. I believe the writing classroom is a perfect place to start engaging in discussions about failure because it's a space that embraces experience, creativity, analysis, critical thinking, and exploration. To me, *the writing classroom is vulnerable* and provides opportunity for vulnerability. And vulnerability is an opening for conversations on and about failure. The art of being a *good* teacher is the art of adaptation, and the art of being a *good* student is the art of non-cognitive skills, such as motivation and perseverance. Pedagogical theories are (and *will always* be) formed and constructed in an attempt to better the classroom by making it more effective

and more accessible. Theories and research inform teaching, and teaching informs theories and research. I'd like to introduce vulnerability as a lens in which the writing classroom can be transformed—teacher and student alike. But first, I want to consider how Mary Soliday's work in genre can be a possible frame for how we—the teacher and the student—perceive failure in the writing classroom and critique the nature of our writing assignments.

Everyday Failures in the Writing Classroom Through the Genre of Writing Assignments

Mary Soliday's *Everyday Genres: Writing Assignments across the Disciplines* explores the nature of writing assignments teachers construct and distribute to students across different disciplines, and she concludes that "genre is not a recipe for writing we can effectively list on the assignment sheet: instead, because it is a social practice, readers and writers make everyday genres interactively" (3). She offers a better understanding of how teachers create writing assignments to assess a "writer's intellectual grasp of material" and focuses on how writing assignments can be viewed as a genre that "shapes how writers talk *about* something *to* someone *for some reason*" (1–2). If teachers and students consider how writing assignments *are acting and being acted* upon, then I believe we have to acknowledge the possibility that failure may exist in those writing assignments—whether that be in the construction of the assignment, the reception of the assignment, the grading criteria for the assignment, or how the assignment is meeting or not meeting the goals of the course or program. Genre studies can help us uncover the innerworkings of writing assignments, and the potential constructions and responses to failure.

Genres are complex, multi-faceted, and robust. Genre scholar Amy Devitt writes, "[Genres] shape our experiences, and our experiences shape them" (219), and Deborah Dean adds, "Genres are social. They are used to act in specific situations, and they arise from social situations" (11). The writing classroom is a specific social situation where the teacher and the student interact with each other and genres, like writing assignments, on a consistent basis. The simple categorization of writing assignments is even too broad to fully comprehend the nature of those assignments. There are low-stakes writing assignments and high-stakes writing assignments, ungraded writing assignments and graded writing assignments. Both low-stakes and high-stakes writing assignments are acting and being acted upon differently by the teacher and student, and each assignment must be analyzed individually in order to understand its dynamic nature. Soliday connects to other genre theory scholars by explaining how writing assignments are placed within situations and motives. Can we look at genre theory and writing assignments to help us

understand failure? And can we share failure through the ways in which we construct and take up those assignments as teachers and students? Nothing is more social or anti-social than failure. In some cases, sharing failure generates more conversations, it encourages more people to willingly talk about their own failures. In other instances, sharing failure further isolates the individual, causing for future conversations to shut down. Regardless of how we respond or react to failure, it still exists.

In my writing classroom, we often analyze writing assignments by thinking about what works, what doesn't work, how does it work, and why it works in that specific genre of writing. Ultimately, this type of critical thinking and genre awareness searches for deeper understanding and looks for different meanings. We engage in critical thinking about specific genres and how we go about composing within those genres, and we often consider the flexibility of the genre and what it affords. For example, if the writing assignment is to produce an ethnography, then we consider the flexibility within that genre; ethnographies allow us to create a narrative, base our understanding and writing on field observations and interviews. An ethnography functions a lot differently than an academic research paper. Understanding the nature of the writing assignment and the genre of writing we're composing in allows us to consider failure.

The premise of the writing classroom is largely influenced by failing. If writing is a process, then failing is a large part of succeeding in that process; messing up and revising is a normal part of any writing assignment and process. As both teachers and students engage in the writing process, aren't we also engaging in failure? The impetus of the writing classroom is writing and writing and writing and revising and revising and revising and so on. The process of failing is ultimately the heartbeat of practicing and teaching writing. I believe that failure doesn't have to be associated or assigned a negative connotation. In fact, I'd urge teachers and students to start thinking about failure productively.

Productive and Positive Failure in the Writing Classroom

As a student, five years ago, a professor of mine wrote a letter to my class expressing his own failures. The letter was a heartfelt confession of how terribly the class session before went. The previous class session was focused on peer-to-peer feedback and it turned into an absolute debacle of suppressed voices. Nothing positive came from that experience in class. But, that failure became a learning process. The initial problem, the failure, was necessary in order for the letter to be written and for the second half of the semester to occur. The

letter possessed honesty because it was a reaction to failure. After he read the letter, the class thrived and the confession of failure became a turning point. The class took advantage of failure and turned failure into something positive, *a learning moment*. The beauty of failure and our experiences with failure is that it allows us to connect with each other. Theorizing failure can help both teacher and student through the enviable crises that failure in writing classrooms bring with it.

As a teacher, I try to talk about failure as much as possible in my writing classrooms. I don't talk about it in terms of failing the class, or other academic institutional associations with failure that often portray it as negative. In fact, the first two class sessions of every semester, I try to embrace failure as much as possible by talking about how failure is positioned and asserted in academia, and how I disagree with failure being perceived as a mark of incompetence. I try to reposition failure by giving it more value or by simply acknowledging its value by talking about failure as being a fundamental part of human nature and learning. What I'm doing in the first couple of class sessions carries great weight for the rest of the semester: it opens up a conversation about failure—something we all experience, something we all feel. I'm being vulnerable. I'm tapping into my personal experiences with failure as both a teacher and student, and I'm sharing it all. I believe vulnerability is a key step in sharing failure in the writing classroom.

Five Steps for Vulnerability and Transforming the Writing Classroom as Teacher and Student

Vulnerability is one lens we can use to embrace failure in the writing classroom. I feel like being vulnerable allows me to be more real, more honest. I'm no longer fearful of failure. That lack of fear is the impetus of vulnerability. The fear of failure doesn't control me or what I do in the classroom. Instead, failure is projected as a positive. And it's natural. What better way to talk about failure than to criticize writing assignments? The teacher and the student can practice vulnerability by openly analyzing what the writing assignment affords and constrains. For example, the writing assignment might be privileging certain identities over others. Teachers and students should be aware of the ideological positions that exist in writing assignments and in academia. We can begin critiquing those systems and structures inside and outside the writing classroom. If we're producing different genres—different texts—and if we're constantly talking about genre, then failure makes sense. What better way to talk about writing than to also talk about failure? Writing is failing; writing is revising; writing is understanding what works and doesn't work within a genre; and writing is vulnerable.

Admittedly, being vulnerable is something of a different nature for different identities. I know and understand that some teachers can embrace vulnerability more in the writing classroom than others due to other aspects of their identity: *being able to be vulnerable* in the classroom is a privilege. For example, as a student, I don't want to assume that my teacher will be open to hearing what I have to say through my vulnerability. Likewise, as a teacher, I don't want to assume that students will embrace my vulnerability inside the classroom. Confessing and sharing failure isn't easy because we can't control how someone is going to receive our failures, or how someone will respond to us sharing failures. There's no potion. Talking about failure is a personal endeavor, talking about failure is selfless. Talking about failure, I believe, is one representation of humility. The idea of cultivating vulnerability is one idea of how to center failure in the writing classroom.

The following list is what I've personally gathered from embracing vulnerability and what it means to focus on failure in the writing classroom. This list isn't a self-help manual or any sort of guidelines to follow as a teacher or student. Instead, this is only what I've learned from my own classroom experiences about vulnerability and failure (and how the two collide). For now, the most significant elements of my own experience with, in, and through being vulnerable as a teacher and student are honesty, listening/communication, consistency, and accountability.

Honesty

Honesty is the grass roots; it's the cornerstone of vulnerability. If you want to talk about failure, I believe you have to be honest with yourself—it's okay to fail. Believing that it's okay to fail is a big step moving forward. After you believe that, then confessing your failure is usually next. This is going to be hard. I'm not naturally inclined to admit where I've failed—past or present—but I'm becoming quicker in verbalizing how I've failed. There's another leap: you must move beyond a mere confession of failure. There has to be a turning point where you see failure as positive. If you truly want to embrace failure, then you can't look at it as solely negative. I ask myself, my friends, my colleagues, and my classroom these types of questions all the time: what did I learn from this specific failure? How is this failure going to help me moving forward? How am I encouraged by this failure? How can I share this failure with others? What's the best thing about this failure? If the failure came from not meeting one expectation within the assignment—if the genre calls for a specific convention and it gets overlooked—then it's a matter of seeing how that specific convention shapes and changes what the genre does and how it functions. As a teacher and student, I've discovered that productive classes spend a lot of time talking about assignments even after the final draft feedback is given. As a teacher, I make it a point to never

move on to the next assignment without a thorough discussion about the previous assignment. This may take one to two more class sessions, but it's worthwhile in creating vulnerability. As a student, I have to be okay with talking about my successes and failures of a given assignment after receiving final feedback. There's more to learn, there's more to understand. It doesn't stop with marginal comments and an end comment. It's extremely important to want to talk about failure. As a teacher, I even confess how I feel like a previous class session failed, how the assignment failed in some way, how the discussion failed, or how the criteria for assessment failed. There's always an open, honest dialogue where the classroom is focusing on failure productively.

Listening / Communication

If that dialogue is going to exist, then communication is necessary. I believe conversations on and about failure are guided by listening. I placed *honesty* before *listening/communication* purposefully and intentionally. Ultimately there needs to be some attitude-based framework that builds everything else. Honesty is inward and foundational. Without honesty, listening/communication doesn't exist, especially vulnerable communication. When it comes to failure inside and outside the writing classroom, listening is one of the most important concepts to grasp. Often, in my writing classroom, we break into pairs to further generate conversations on failure. We might do this during the middle of class, or after a group activity, or after receiving feedback, but regardless of the circumstance, we get time to talk about failure. Each student is given five minutes to share and confess how they're learning from failure and how failure is becoming a positive experience. One person talks, the other one listens. The listener can't say anything at all. Then, they switch positions. After those ten minutes, I have five minutes to share in failure. I'm given the opportunity to communicate and share where I failed, whether that be in the creation of the assignment or the production of my feedback. If I feel like I created my response in a "rubber stamp" manner, where my feedback could be transferred from one student paper to the next, then I speak candidly about where I failed them. I talk about how I wasn't intentional enough, or how I wasn't careful enough in my response. After I share, we have a larger discussion about failure. Students, then, have the opportunity to talk about the assignment as a whole and how the assignment or assessment potentially led to specific aspects of failure in their writing. I embrace students critiquing the assignment and assessment. If we're going to learn from failure, then I believe we have to analyze those texts that may help produce failure. If the assessment criteria, which is always created collaboratively as a class, fails in some way, then we need to address that. We need to have open communication about how we can improve assessment for our next assignment. I believe this is untraditional in academic culture, a culture that tends to push aside failure.

Consistency & Accountability

I'm a believer in consistency. If I'm not consistent, I want to be held accountable. Now that failure is a large part of what we do in my classes, I expect consistency in talking about failure. Consistency and accountability help produce a more vulnerable classroom—holding each other, both teacher and student, to a degree of accountability is important in creating a writing classroom that thrives on vulnerability. My nature and personality already relies heavily on consistency—my schedule and routines—and academia, for me personally, has cultivated that need for consistency even more. Consistency and accountability often branch from honesty and come from active listening and communication. Are we being honest with ourselves and each other? Sometimes, I think it's necessary to evaluate and assess conversations we have with each other. Are we being vulnerable? In class, we reflect on what we're thinking, how we're thinking, what we're saying, why we're saying it, and how we're feeling. We're accountable for our own intentions and purposes, and we're accountable for the person beside us.

Conclusion: Incorporating Failure and Failing in the Writing Classroom

Failure is multifaceted. I think that writing about and discussing failure will allow us to see the broad, multifaceted nature of failure. Theorizing failure within composition studies and writing classrooms might be a long process, but I believe that a conversation on failure which attempts to identify the nature of failure by breaking down social conventions in order to define, or establish the identity of, the writing classroom will lead to an open dialogue that embraces, not evades failure. Failure and the feeling of failure seem to be a significant portion in the life of all of us. Failure is a part of the nature of what it means to be human. I argue for more failure. I want failure to be illuminated inside and outside the writing classroom. I encourage all of us to engage in an open discussion of failure, and I desire for writing classrooms to be at the forefront of that conversation. The more we focus and study failure, the more we will be able to understand why and how it happens. Our world isn't perfect; our communities aren't perfect; our institutions aren't perfect; our classrooms aren't perfect; our writing assignments aren't perfect; we aren't perfect. I challenge us to better understand failure so that we can learn from our imperfections. This article has merely scratched the surface on failure theory. I urge others to take up the task and do more work in failure theory.

I believe that failure is an endless learning opportunity; a constant force with countless possibilities. Theorizing failure has changed the way I look at myself, my life, my pedagogy, my writing assignments, my assessment, my

feedback, my classroom, my students, and so on. Instead of avoiding and running from failure, I accept and share it. Instead of dwelling in all my failures, I focus on where I've grown from those failures and where those failures have taken me. I acknowledge that I will continue to fail, and I acknowledge that failure is unavoidable by its nature. Instead of feeling shame and guilt from the negative aspects of failure, I will be enlightened by failure, and I will be encouraged that something great will come from it. Failure is a part of me, and I will choose to carefully examine all those failure(s) that exist. Maybe the best unanswered question so far is this one: how will you embrace failure?

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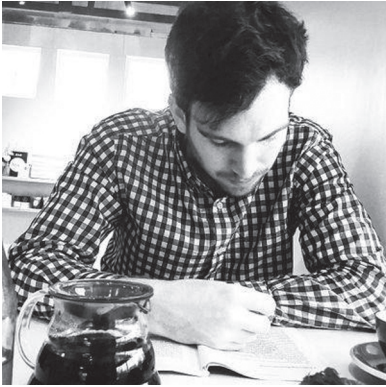
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Spreading Roots Presents:

CHATting About Greatness: Applying CHAT to "the 46" Defense

Braeden Weiss

Using his antecedent knowledge about the game he loves (football), Braeden Weiss explores how cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) helped him to understand the creation of one of the most innovative defenses of all time. By researching and applying CHAT to "the 46" defensive scheme he figures out the secrets of the creation of "the 46" defense.

"Some say the 46 defense is just an eight-man front. That's like saying Marilyn Monroe's just a girl." – Buddy Ryan, Chicago Bears former defensive coordinator and creator of "the 46" defensive scheme (quoted in Evans).

The Genius of "the 46" and the Genre That It Was

Every NFL fan should know about the 1985 Chicago Bears, their Super Bowl run, and what is considered to many as the greatest defense in the history of football, and arguably the greatest football team of all time. The statistics of the '85 Bears defense show their greatness, especially in the playoffs when they beat teams with ease, beating the New York Giants 21-0, the Los Angeles Rams 24-0, and finally beating the New England Patriots 46-10 in the Super Bowl (1985 Bears Season). The secret behind the Bears' defense that year was the revolutionary defensive scheme called "the 46." It was named after the very physical and hard-hitting safety Doug Plank (#46), who was the starting strong safety (the player who is the farthest away from the ball at the beginning of the play) for the Bears in the 1970s when Buddy Ryan was hired as defensive

coordinator (Hardy Evans). This strategy was created under the philosophy that the only way to stop the passing game was to put the quarterback under pressure. Putting the quarterback under pressure means to get close to tackling or sacking the quarterback while he is throwing the ball. It started out as just a blitz package (several defensive play calls that are made out of the same formation), but it evolved and was perfected into its own scheme over the years (see Figure 1). Buddy Ryan is considered one of the best defensive coaches of all time because of his work ethic and genius at stopping the other team from scoring.

The writing genres (football plays) that Buddy Ryan used while creating the scheme wouldn't be as obvious to most people who have not learned about CHAT (a theory that helps a writer understand the complexity of specific writing situations). But those who have learned this know that writing genres are everywhere, like a scoreboard, a newspaper, or even a business card. The genre of "the 46" was very complicated and extensive. After learning about CHAT, I can see how all of the aspects of CHAT can be understood when I apply them to Buddy Ryan's creation of "the 46." In fact, I think that considering the "the 46" through CHAT analysis helps to show how the complexity of writing that every coach that has ever created a playbook or written a play on a chalkboard has encountered.

Before I get into the analysis of "the 46" I would briefly like to define CHAT. **CHAT** (**cultural-historical activity theory**) is a theory that helps us think through the process and reasoning behind any specific situation in writing. It is a very important concept to understand so that you can think in the way that gets the most out of your writing. It can be confusing at times, but the more you study and think about it, the clearer it becomes.
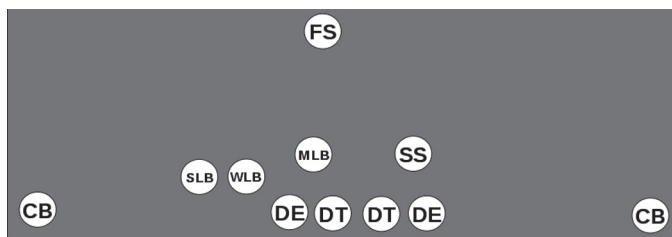

Figure 1: "The 46" formation.

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory and "the 46"

Writing was very prominent in the work of Buddy Ryan and his defensive schemes, especially in "the 46," and he was very skilled at it. With Buddy Ryan being a football player in college at Oklahoma State University, he wasn't considered a very smart writer, so he was an unlikely person to

be an expert at writing playbooks. If you look at one of Buddy Ryan's 46 defensive playbooks and know about CHAT, you can see that every factor of CHAT can be found extensively throughout, though some factors are more prominent than others. CHAT in Buddy Ryan's work is, in my opinion, not by accident. I feel that it's not an accident because I think that he thought through some of the aspects of CHAT (without knowing it) when he created the play. Though I don't think that he knew cultural-historical activity theory, we can still use CHAT to analyze "the 46." However, I think that from years of experience being a player and a coach, he understood how to create a playbook that would be effective in teaching and instructing his players how to run the scheme properly.

"The 46" was so innovative that even Bill Walsh, one of the greatest NFL coaches of all time, had this to say: "I had to use every bit of knowledge and experience and wisdom I had to come up with game plans to attack this defense. It's really the most singular innovation in defensive football in the last twenty years" (Bill Walsh). He is saying that no one in the history of football had ever written something like what Buddy Ryan did. This had to come with some challenges because something we all take advantage of is being able to research the genre we are writing, but Buddy Ryan didn't have anything similar to go off of except his previously written playbooks. Imagine how much easier it would've been for him if he had known about CHAT; he might have gotten the information across much easier, which could, in turn, make the learning process even simpler and make the players more in sync with the scheme, which would eventually lead to a better overall defense.

CHAT Analysis of "the 46"

Reception, or the way that writing is received by its audience, in my opinion is the most important CHAT concept used in the production of "the 46" (Walker). It is very complicated and anyone who has ever played football would know how much communication there is. In the *30 for 30* film on the 1985 Bears, Mike Singletary explains that Buddy Ryan would give a gesture from the sideline to Singletary that meant "automatic call," which gave Singletary the freedom to call what he thought was appropriate for the situation. So, the players' reception during the explanations of the way "the 46" was designed was crucial so that Singletary's call would be effective. In order for Ryan's intended audience (the players) to understand the scheme, he had to create the playbook in a format that the players could easily understand, while still showing them the complex responsibilities of the position they were playing. For example, a defensive end in "the 46" defense had basically three techniques to rush the quarterback. The first technique was an outside

technique in which he is to take an outside route to the quarterback then use something called a swim move where the defensive end hits the offensive lineman then brings his arm over the shoulder of the lineman and pushes with his elbow on the lineman's back towards the quarterback. The next technique is a crashing technique where the defensive end pushes the offensive lineman inside for another defender to attack the quarterback. Then, lastly, the defensive end goes about three yards up field and doesn't let anyone get outside of him. That is just one position out of eleven positions on the field, and every position has its own responsibilities and jobs, each one just as, if not more, complex. As you can see, Buddy Ryan understood the importance of reception and showed it in his writing of "the 46."

Representation, the way all authors think about and plan their writing, was another crucial concept that was used in the creation of "the 46" and is crucial in almost all genres (Walker). When Buddy Ryan made the final rendition of "the 46" for the '85 Bears, he knew that he had one of the best middle linebackers of all time at his disposal. According to Brian Holloway, Mike Singletary was the key to the success of "the 46," and Buddy Ryan made it that way. He had to plan out what position would do what by understanding the type of player that was at each position. If Mike Singletary wasn't middle linebacker, Buddy Ryan wouldn't have put such a big responsibility on that position. A lot of people criticize "the 46" by saying that the players and the three future Hall of Famers (Pro Football Hall of Fame) made the defense what it was, not the scheme. But Buddy Ryan knew the type of players that he had and the best way to utilize their skills, and that's what was so innovative about "the 46." Never before had any defense been created to utilize the players' skills, and there hasn't been one as effective since. A modern-day equivalent of this is the 2013 Seahawks when they used a 4-3 setup with a press cover 3, which is complicated, but all you need to know is that to run this type of defense you have to have the right personnel or it is not effective at all.

Production, everything that goes into the creation of a genre, is another crucial part of this genre (Walker). Without production in the genre of the playbook there would be no way for any of the players to learn the plays and schemes of "the 46." So, depending on the team, 20-26 defensive players would have to learn the scheme on the original document. The way production was used in making "the 46" was that Buddy Ryan typed up every aspect of "the 46" on the writing program that he preferred. He then printed every piece of paper and put them in an organized playbook. Then he made a playbook for each player that was on the defensive roster.

Distribution refers to when the author considers where his/her text might end up and the audience that might read it and also considers the way the genre would be given to the audience (Walker). Buddy Ryan had to

consider distribution while creating this genre. He considered and assumed that all of the players that would read the scheme would understand the football language and symbols. He and his fellow coaches were very careful about the way he distributed the playbooks to make sure that no other team would get their hands on the defensive strategy. The players also had to be careful about the distribution in the same way as the coaches. Because the defensive strategy could be the difference between winning and losing.

Socialization, or the interactions of people caused by the creation, distribution, reading, and post-reading of a genre, was also very important while "the 46" was used (Walker). During the creation part of "the 46," the coaches had to socialize with Buddy Ryan to learn how to teach the position they coached and learn the correct techniques to use that would be effective in "the 46" scheme. The other coaches had to learn the scheme themselves because one of the downsides of having such an innovative strategy is that none of the other coaches that he was working with knew how to coach a scheme like that. During the distribution part of it, the players talked to and with the coach that gave them the playbook. Then, after the reading of the playbook, the players would go to film study before practice and talk about the keys to success for the defense and ask about things they didn't understand. Then they would ask for tips on how to better utilize their skill when playing in the scheme.

Ecology relates to the environment that is affecting the author and what he/she is writing (Walker). Ecology was relevant in the work of Buddy Ryan because when he first started coming up with "the 46" it was a blitz package for a defense that was part of a non-playoff team, so he didn't have the experimental freedom that he would have had if the team was a contender. The environment also affected how quickly and clearly he wrote "the 46." For example, if he wrote in his quiet, peaceful office, then he probably wrote it more efficiently than if he wrote while he was at practice.

Activity takes into account all of the things that the author does while creating the text and is, in my opinion, one of the hardest things to grasp in cultural-historical activity theory (Walker). The activity system of "the 46" is very complex, and it starts with the philosophy that Buddy Ryan had: to stop the passing game you had to put pressure on the quarterback. That philosophy then branched off into many different ideas and actions that went into what eventually became "the 46" defense that made the '85 Bears defense so great. Some of the activities that Buddy Ryan did while making "the 46" included the idea he had, the writing of it, the creation of the playbook, the distribution of the playbook, the analyzation of the playbook, and every little thing that happened in between.

There are several different modern variations of "the 46" in the NFL today, but none are as effective as the one masterminded by one of the greatest defensive coordinators of all time. There is no doubt in my mind that the NFL wouldn't be the same without the revolution that was "the 46." And Buddy Ryan continues to be one of the premier role models for the defensive coordinators in the modern NFL. The '85 Bears defense is one of those teams that will never be forgotten and will always be the standard that all defenses compare themselves to. Applying CHAT to "the 46" has helped me understand all that went into creating this defensive scheme because none of it would have been possible without writing.

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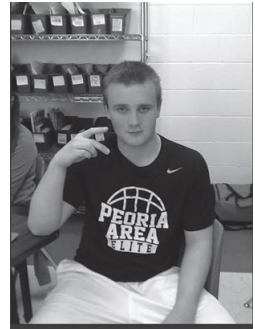
Beginning the Trip into Adulthood: Step One, Get Organized

Mackenzie Flowers

In this article, Mackenzie explores the genre of Bullet Journaling. She examines the genre through the seven elements of cultural-historical activity theory. Mackenzie also looks at how a system like the Bullet Journal can help to organize the life of anyone who chooses to use it by sharing her own adventures using the system.

If you know me, then you probably know that I am not constantly on top of things. I am a procrastinator and, for a long time, this method worked for me. I got good at doing things last minute and doing them well. It was only when I was getting ready to begin my senior year that I figured out that I needed to change something. I would have a lot more on my plate with a full class load, an internship, a job, and responsibilities that I have for my sorority. An ordinary planner like most college students use was not working for me because I would not look at it every day. I would write assignments, events, and responsibilities in the planner ahead of time and then forget about it. There were times that my planner was not opened for a week at a time. On top of not being able to use a planner, I knew that I couldn't afford to watch Netflix all day and put off any homework until the last second. My final year of school would not be a fun one if I kept up my tendency toward procrastination. To try and fix my dishonorable ways, I researched organization techniques that work well for students. The one thing that I kept seeing come up in almost all of my research was the Bullet Journal.

The Bullet Journal, as described by the creator Ryder Carroll on his website, is "a customizable and forgiving organization system. It can be your

to-do list, sketchbook, notebook, and diary, but most likely it will be all of the above. It will teach you to do more with less" (Carroll, "The System"). This journaling system truly is everything rolled into one. Since I have started using it, it has been my calendar, my to-do list, a journal, an assignment organizer, and more. The system is simple and forgiving if you find yourself messing up or trying something new. There are also many resources for ideas on how it can be used to continue to improve aspects of your life and your organization skills. To start off, I will take you through some of the basics of starting a Bullet Journal before getting into the genre itself and how it can help you keep your life organized and relatively stress free.

• Learn what a Bullet Journal is

A Bullet Journal is fairly simple to set up. There is a video that can be found on the official Bullet Journal website, bulletjournal.com, that takes you through each and every step and explains their meaning and use. There are other guides on blogs revolving around the Bullet Journal as well as on places like Pinterest, YouTube, and even Instagram. The first step is to get a journal or notebook. There are journals specifically made for this type of journaling that are available for purchase on the Bullet Journal website but it is not necessary to use this type of book. A normal notebook or journal bought at any store will work. The journal does not come with a ready-made template; the pages are empty until the owner adds something to it. One suggestion that I have seen on several start-up guides is to get a book that is on the smaller side so it will be easy to take with you on the go should you need to.

Figure 1: Basic symbols and bullet points used to denote tasks, events, etc., in a Bullet Journal.

The first thing to add to your Bullet Journal is an index page. You will most likely only need two pages for this right at the beginning of your book. The index is something that you will add to as you add to your journal. It will turn into more of a table of contents that you can reference if you are ever looking for something specific in your journal. Something else to add in the beginning of your book is a key of symbols and markings that you will use throughout your journal. For each thing that you write down in your journal there are special symbols and types of bullet
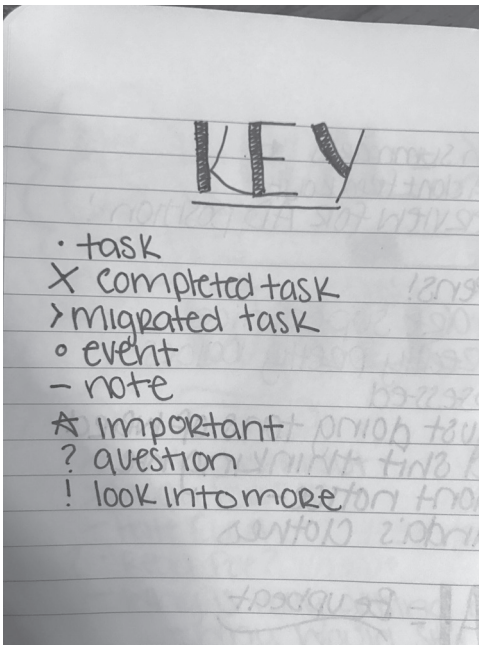
points used which can be seen in Figure 1. This is commonly in the front of your journal so it can be referenced or added to as you continue to use your Bullet Journal.

Next, you want to section a few pages into halves or thirds. This will be your Future Log. Each section will be labeled a different month and you can record as many months ahead as you want. It all depends on how long you will be using that journal. If you think that you will use it for six months, then only put six months in your Future Log and if you think that you will be using it for longer than feel free to include more. This section allows you to record events, deadlines, etc., in advance so you can reference them later when creating your Monthly Log at the beginning of each month.
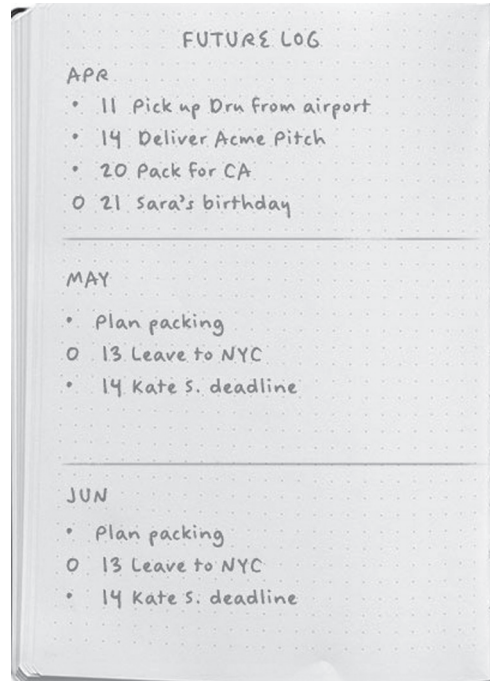
Figure 2: Example of a Future Log from Bulletjournal.com.

The Monthly Log will take up a page or two at the start of each month. On one page, I write down the date and first initial of the day for the entire month down the side of the page, leaving room for me to write down events and/or deadlines that I will need to remember. This is when I will reference my Future Log and then transfer the information to my Monthly Log. I will usually do this on the last day of a month so I am ready the next day to start out the new month. Something great to include on the opposite page from the Monthly Log is a monthly task list. These are tasks that you will not be completing in one day. Instead, they might take you a few days or weeks. You can also include some overall goals that you might have for that month like staying positive or being productive with your time. For example, if I have a large assignment due I will write down my goal grade for the assignment.
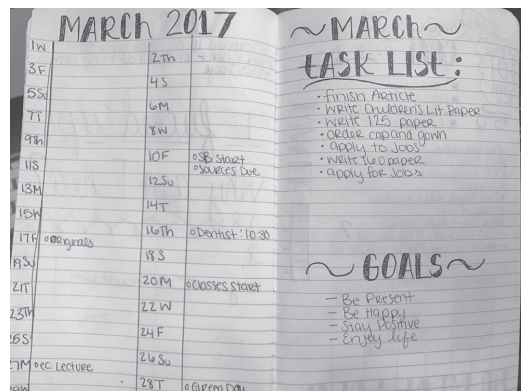
Figure 3: My Monthly Log that I create at the start of every month.

Next comes the Daily Logs. These are on the pages following the Monthly Log. To create your Daily Log, you write the date however you wish and then write down any tasks or events that you have that day. These tasks are things that you want to or can get done in one day. You can also write down any

thoughts and ideas that you have throughout the day that you might want to revisit later. Don't feel any pressure to make these super pretty and neat; if you write quickly and a little messily and it works for you, then that is perfectly fine. Another thing that you might find yourself using are Collections. These are tasks, events, ideas, or thoughts that are all related by a common theme or purpose. You can devote a page or multiple pages to a collection to avoid having these thoughts and ideas scattered throughout your Bullet Journal. Putting the page number and title of the collection in your index will help you find it whenever you need. Collections can be about anything at all. Some examples that I use are reading lists, movie lists, and packing lists. One last tip on starting a Bullet Journal before we move on is to start simple. Start with the guide on bulletjournal.com and then expand and add things later once you have a greater understanding of the system and how it works for you.

–What is so great about the Bullet Journal?

So, what is the big deal? Why is the Bullet Journal so great? The short answer, in my opinion, is that it helps to organize your life while also allowing you to be as creative and free as you would like. The long answer has many more components and illuminates more reasons why the Bullet Journal is useful and beneficial to whoever chooses to use it. To make it easier to analyze, I am going to look at the Bullet Journal through the elements of the cultural-historical activity theory or CHAT. Not all of the elements of CHAT are completely relevant to the Bullet Journal (or the person using it) but I will mention all of them, spending more time on some rather than others.

The **production** (or the ways and means that a text is produced) of each individual Bullet Journal is different and completely under the control of the user and writer. The basic format, as I mentioned before, can be found in multiple places online: bulletjournal.com, tinyrayofsunshine.com, and Boho Berry's YouTube channel being a few of them. Most people will say to start with this simple layout and then keep your journal fairly simple while you are familiarizing yourself with the ins and outs of the system. From there, once you feel that you are comfortable with what the Bullet Journal is, the journal can be *anything* you want and you can change, alter, add to, or improve upon the format based on what works best for you. You can change anything that you want in your Bullet Journal so that it fits your schedule, personality, or whatever other uses that you have for the journal, better. Maybe your journal is being used for a hobby that requires some planning or preparation, or maybe you are only using the journal for work purposes and it has no use in your everyday life. No matter what you are using the journal for, it can be adjusted to your own personal needs. The basic format given by Ryder Carroll is the more simplified way to Bullet Journal, and it is purposely shown

in this straightforward way to give the new user time to get used to the Bullet Journal and its uses and methods before the user can make it their own.

When I first started my Bullet Journal I used this simple format for about a month and a half before I felt comfortable enough to start making changes. I started out making slight changes to ease myself into it, and more often than not, my changes were made on a trial and error basis. I would try something because I thought that it would fit my needs better, and then I would see if my idea actually worked the way that I wanted it to and if it had merit to help me. Some things that I was adding had to be altered and adjusted several times before it functioned as I wanted it to. The Bullet Journal

Figure 4: The way that I currently format all of my days. I still add adjustments periodically.

is a very forgiving genre. At no point did I feel like I was messing anything up by trying different things. Now, my Bullet Journal is completely my own, and although there are still traces of the original layout there, I have added my own spin on it (see Figure 4). So far it has been working great for me. The Bullet Journal allows me to do whatever I want with it and use it in whatever ways that I wish. I have absolute control over everything.

To take you through an example of some of the things that I tried using trial and error, one of the things that I added to my journal is a Weekly Log. This is something that I craft every week, usually on Sunday nights or Monday mornings. It started out with me adding a small weekly calendar that allowed me to see what was coming up in the next week. I used this to write down events and deadlines mostly. I also made sure to leave some space for me to write down anything that I needed to remember or do just before an event or deadline. This overview helped me to stay organized and it is something that I implemented over time. It took me a few weeks to get my Weekly Log looking and

Figure 5: Example of what my Weekly Log is currently like and what I now include.

functioning how I wanted it to. At first, I simply wrote each day down and then listed what was happening that day followed by little things that I needed

to remember that were related to something happening that day. I ended up not liking this format at all. It got to be very messy and it did not look the least bit structured or organized. Over the next few weeks I changed how I formatted the Weekly Log until I got the result that I wanted.

Now, I have a page sectioned off into the seven days of the week with a little bit of room left over for various notes about the week (see Figure 5). Everything is listed in order of occurrence. Since I have arrived at this format for my Weekly Log, it has worked really well for me. I like being able to go over my entire week, knowing what my responsibilities are and what my schedule looks like. I also enjoy creating my Weekly Log every week because it gives me a sense of peace to organize my week and place things in their own little box. It is nice knowing that I do not have to follow someone else's format for their journal exactly; I can do what I want without fear of anything because it is my journal, and all that really matters is that I like the way that it looks and that it works well for me and my needs.

It is entirely up to the holder of the journal what things to use when writing in the journal. You can include memories in the form of objects taped to or pressed between the pages, or even pictures kept on the page that corresponds to the date a memory happened. It is also your decision what utensils to use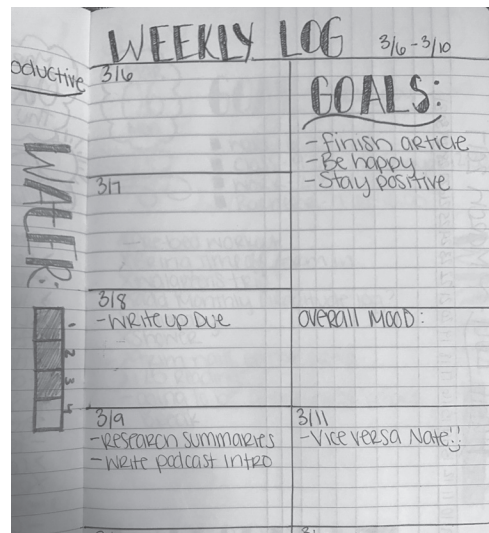. If there is a pen or collection of writing instruments that you really like, it is completely up to you if you use them for your journal or if you use number 2 pencils. Everything that goes into the production of the Bullet Journal is under the control of the user and it makes the journal more personable.

Representation is about how the creator of something thinks about and plans it. It also factors in things that might affect how people think about it. In relation to the Bullet Journal, representation is mostly in the mind of the person who is creating and using their personal Bullet Journal. How are you thinking of changing or adding something? Why are you changing or adding something? What is going to be the most efficient way to use your journal? Your personal schedule comes into play here as well. Most likely, you will be changing or adding something to your journal so that it will work better with your schedule and what you are doing in your life. In this way, your schedule will probably be a large influence on how you will think about your Bullet Journal, especially when you are still making it fit your needs and changing it semi-regularly.

My schedule ended up being so busy that I found myself forgetting about things or getting dates wrong. This was a big factor in my decision to add a Weekly Log to my journal. I needed to be able to keep everything straight in my head. My next step was to think about the best way to achieve this using my Bullet Journal. Did I want to write events and important things down every single day? I ruled that option out fairly quickly because I thought that it would

clutter up my every day space and I wanted to keep my journal looking neat and clean. What I needed was a way to look at everything all at once without taking up extra space on each individual day. This is how I came up with the idea of putting everything important for the week on its own page at the start of every week. From there, as I mentioned before, there was some experimenting with how everything would be organized and how I would make it look clean and productive. This is when trial and error came in rather than spending a lot of time thinking about my options. I found that it would be better to just try something out even if it does not work right away and then move on, if needed, to other options or continue to tweak one option until it did work.

Another aspect of Bullet Journaling that many will think about and add to their journal, myself included, is colors. Minimalists who use Bullet Journals will commonly only use black ink to keep things simple. However, others might color coordinate things in their journal. I use different colors for my daily schedule that I put at the top of all of my Daily Logs. I didn't have anything specific in mind when I chose what colors to use for what events although others might choose colors for reasons that make sense for them. I chose to use pink for work, purple for classes, green for my internship, and blue for anything I had to do outside of class that involves schoolwork like group project meetings or study sessions at the library. Having these colors to represent activities that I have throughout the day helps me keep everything straight. Now, I only have to glance at it to know what is going on that day or what is coming next.

Distribution and **socialization** work hand in hand with the Bullet Journal. Most would not want to distribute their personal journal because it is very personal and no one wants their thoughts and feelings left out for the world. However, there are a few people out there who post images of their journals online for others to learn from. There is an extensive community that has emerged around the Bullet Journal. Most of the time, any information on the shared pages that is personal will be blurred out using photo editing software. They are posting pictures of their journal to share formats, structure, and ideas. They are not sharing these images to share their personal information. In this way, these people are distributing parts of their journals without sharing personal information about them. Another aspect of distribution relates to people having the ability to purchase the official Bullet Journal notebook on bulletjournal.com. The journal is made by Leuchtturm1917. Ryder Carroll and Leuchtturm teamed up to create a journal specifically for the Bullet Journal. It is the same size and kind as their A5 journal with a few adjustments. The official Bullet Journal has an extra bookmark, pages marked at the beginning for the index, key, and future logs. It also features a guide at the back of the book, should you need it. There are many that choose to use this journal and it is available to purchase online.

Returning to the vast community of Bullet Journalists, three blogs that I have found and enjoy are tinyrayofsunshine.com, prettyprintsandpaper.com, and bohoberry.com. All three of the women that run these blogs use the Bullet Journal. Each pose ways to use the Bullet Journal that other users might not immediately think of. They also do things that are more interactive like monthly challenges that help to improve your handwriting, your Bullet Journal, or to help you become more productive. These challenges are interactive because, if you choose to, you can post a picture of your status with the challenges with a certain hashtag and your picture might be reposted by one of them.

Figure 6: Home page of Bohoberry.com.

All three of these bloggers offer forums and comment options on their sites. In these places, people are free to talk about their own experiences, ask questions, and even meet other people who are also interested in Bullet Journaling. These three blogs and more like them have created a community of Bullet Journalists that continues to grow. Communities like this allow people to socialize about ideas, tips, things that work well, things that might not work well, etc., which ensures that the community will always be growing and that innovative ideas will always emerge. The genre of Bullet Journaling will continue to grow and evolve. Without this community that I have talked about, there is a chance that the Bullet Journal would float to the background and eventually cease to exist. However, by allowing people to communicate and continue to generate new ideas, the journal will live on. This community truly is amazing. Everyone is very helpful and supportive. They are always available to help and discover something new.

Reception comes into play after socialization because it is all about how something is taken up and used by others and how they might change it. Most start in the same place with the Bullet Journal, but as I mentioned before, where it goes from there is up to the user. One person might choose to use their collections to record their sleep patterns and include a food log, while another might record movies that they want to see and then give them a rating so they will always know if they liked a movie or not.

Recently, in the first days of the new year, I was looking through some of the Bullet Journal blogs that I follow and came across an article on bulletjournal. com written by the creator and author of tinyrayofsunshine.com about the top five ideas that emerged for the Bullet Journal in 2016. For each item on the list there were multiple examples of how different people implemented the idea into their journal. There were images of several different journals submitted by the owners to demonstrate the way in which they did something new and creative. It is helpful to have articles like this because it lets people know that they can take this idea that they like and make it their own. These articles also show reception in progress. Each of these people featured in the article had the same general idea or heard about it somewhere and then went about implementing it in different ways. Everyone's reception and use of something is going to be a little bit different which is part of what makes the Bullet Journal so amazing. No two journals will be the same; they are entirely personalized.

The actual physical thing that you engage in while creating your Bullet Journal is **activity**. The main activity that you are doing is putting some kind of writing utensil to paper and writing. But what else do you do? Do you draw things in your journal? Do you talk to others while you are writing? Are you online when you write to find new ideas? There are many things that activity can encompass and it will be different for everyone. One of the reasons that Bullet Journaling has worked so well for me is because of activity. I got myself into a habit of sitting down and writing in my journal every morning while I eat breakfast. I repeat this same action every day and now I am conditioned to write every morning and, as a result, I almost never forget. As I mentioned earlier, I also have made a habit of creating my Weekly Log the night before a new week begins so I am prepared for the next day and the week ahead. If I did not have these routines then I would probably find myself forgetting to use my Bullet Journal and it would not have been as effective in helping me. Activity has been something that continues to draw me toward the Bullet Journal and my continued use of it. It has probably had a considerable influence on others who use the journal too, especially if they like routine.

The best part about **ecology** (in relation to the Bullet Journal) is that it doesn't really matter that much. You do not have to purchase certain expensive materials if you do not wish to. You can use a spiral-bound notebook and cheap pens if you want. I definitely use the cheap pens because I still am a broke college student and I am not about to spend my money on nice pens until I have an actual income. The Bullet Journal is also a physical thing that can be used mostly anywhere and everywhere. You never have to worry about not being able to access your journal because if you have your journal and a pen or pencil with you then you will never have a problem. You do not need to be able to access the internet or any kind of technology in order to access your Bullet Journal.

−Can the Bullet Journal really help?

Looking at the Bullet Journal using CHAT, it is easy to see that it is a diverse and flexible genre. There are many things that you can do with it, and it can be adapted to fit and work for anyone, no matter what they are using it for. Jessica
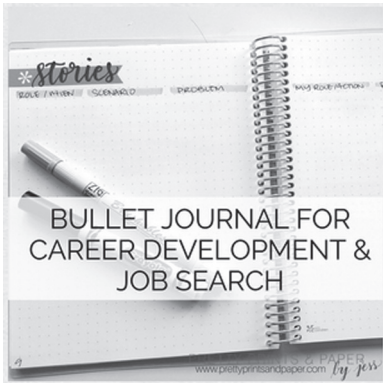
Figure 7: Cover art for a blog post on Prettyprintsandpaper.com.

Chung, who runs the blog prettyprintsandpaper.com, created a host of blog posts about using the Bullet Journal for different things. In the Bullet Journal section of her blog there are titles such as, "Bullet Journal for Career Development and Job Search," and "Bullet Journal for Adulting." There is even one titled "Bullet Journal for Job Interviews." There are an endless number of ways to use the Bullet Journal, and these ways can be changed and adapted to fit your personal needs. The variations available continue to amaze me. Kim, who runs tinyrayofsunshine.com, has many resources for the Bullet Journal on her blog as well. She has posts focused on starting a

Bullet Journal, tips and tricks of the trade, and pen and notebook options and reviews. Kara's website bohoberry.com has similar things as Kim's. She also has blog posts that go through her setup for each month out of the year. She takes pictures of the pages in her journal and talks about some of the layouts that she uses. These three blogs have become my favorites and the ones that I find myself repeatedly visiting. However, there are other blogs out there as well. There are also resources outside of the blogging platform. On bulletjournal.com there are links to various Facebook pages. These pages are targeted toward everyone from students and mothers to those struggling with mental health problems such as depression or anxiety. Another large part of the community is YouTube. Kara (Boho Berry) is a large part of this community on YouTube. She posts videos about her journal and the different things that she is doing with it. She also has a series on YouTube about starting a Bullet Journal called "Bullet Journal 101," in which she goes through everything it takes to start a Bullet Journal. She gives tips for starting one and goes into depth about what a Bullet Journal is and what it does. Once again, there is no limit to what you can do or where you can go for ideas or advice. The community is extremely open and does not hesitate to give advice or tips that might help someone to improve what they are trying to do.

⁰ Start a Bullet Journal

In my opinion, the Bullet Journal is the ultimate resources for organizing a busy life. It has been a wonderful thing for me and, at this point, I don't know what I would do without it. It has become something that I bring with me

everywhere I go. I use it to keep my schoolwork organized, my work schedule, any other events happening, as well as keeping my own mind straight by using it as a plain old journal. I create packing lists in my Bullet Journal when I am going on a trip and I have even used it for my shopping list every once in a while. The Bullet Journal can be used for whatever you need. Analyzing the Bullet Journal using CHAT has only reinforced my opinion that it is an amazing tool and has the ability to adapt to anyone and anything. Now it is your turn. If you feel that the Bullet Journal would be beneficial for you, which I hope you do after learning more about it, then I suggest you visit some of the websites that I have mentioned and get started on creating your own Bullet Journal.

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To Judge a Book by Its Cover:
A Genre Analysis About the Cover of a Book

Sarah Lyons

In this article, Lyons begins to investigate the simple genre of book covers. But, are they really that simple? Book covers are the information on the front and back of the book that includes topics about the author, the title, and the overall mood of the book that makes you want to read it. But this genre can get a bad rap because it can be easily underestimated. Book covers are strangely complicated genres that have a strong power over people. Lyons explores the power and different conventions of book covers and why we judge books because of them.

"There are some books where the backs and covers are by far the best parts."

—Charles Dickens

Book Covers . . . So What?

Is there anything harder than picking out a book? I don't know about you, but nothing else makes me feel so unsure of myself. To you, it may be the design of the letters, the pictures, or even the color that draws you in. To me, it might be something different. It doesn't matter . . . whatever the reason, we *all* tend to judge a book by its cover. I'm a reader. I go to the library at least once a week. So how do I choose the perfect, most amazing book? Well, for me, the book cover plays a role. And, every week, when I walk out of the library with a book, I can't help but realize just how complex the genre of the book cover really is.

Before We Begin: An Important Distinction

Book covers are not the same thing as dust jackets. Before I continue sharing any of my further research, I want to make this clear. You have probably heard of a dust jacket. A dust jacket and a book cover sound like they would be the

same thing, but they're not. I actually thought this too, until I started to think about the design. Even though dust jackets are not as common in books now as they once were, I am almost certain that you have seen one. Dust jackets are thick paper removable coverings that come with some books. According to Wikipedia, "Most of these dust jackets have a small flap on the front and the back of the book." (I personally find these really annoying when I read). These flaps are used to protect the book itself against damage from dirt or mud. This is now completely opposite from the regular book cover, which is the actual covering of the book and often does not have this at all. According to *Front Cover*, "The first book covers had appeared in England. This was also the time when England was still discovering the rules of consumerism." For anyone that does not know and does not want to look it up on the internet, I will give you a brief description. According to Investopedia, "consumerism is a theory that all services and goods would be more successful economically. It is an example for the people, of larger amounts of goods and trades that are sold." Basically, all you need to know then is that book covers were created to help *sell* books.

Even though many of us would deny the fact that we judge the cover of the book, it's true. No, it does not mean that you are a bad person, or are "judgy," if you do. It just means that the marketing tricks played by cover designers are working. Believe me, there is nothing worse than coming home with a book that looks absolutely perfect, but, then, as you open the book and start reading, you realize it's terrible. Even though this doesn't happen to everyone, the ones who do experience this feel, *well*, dumb. Why did you pick *that* book, the worst one on the shelves? It looked good, you thought. Sometimes, in a time like this one, we may feel like we do not have the best sense of judgment. But, once I started to think about the genre of the book cover, I began to notice things that some people may have not seen. And, then, I kept asking myself questions as I researched. While pondering over this, it led me to my first main research question: *How does the cover of a book influence a certain audience to pick a book to read?*

Why Book Covers?

I chose to research the genre of book covers because it sounded very interesting to me. Since I would have to research this for a few months or so, I definitely could not lose interest in it, or the experience would be absolutely dreadful. As I have said, I am a big reader. I also wanted to pick something that I was familiar with and have a lot of experience with. Even though this topic is nearly impossible to research (I had a bit of a tough time finding the information that I needed), it is fun, and I knew it would hold my interest for quite a long time.

A History Lesson

First off, please don't skip this section because of the title. I know it sounds boring, but please stick with me. Back to the topic at hand, the first step of my research was to define the book cover. *What is a book cover?* According to my research, "A book cover is any protective covering used to bind together the pages of a book. These covers could be made out of paper, cardboard, or plastic" (Wikipedia, Book Cover). Okay, that's good. But I think I need to get a little more in depth than that. I think that I need to step away from Google for a bit and think about this myself. At first I thought that book covers included advertisements about the book, with vibrant colors and bolded words. Sounds simple, right? That's what I thought, too.

I began to look back to where book covers actually came from. As I did more research, I found out that the first "book covers" originated during the medieval times. The only flaw that I noticed was that these normally had no words or text on the front. This was because the purpose of this early "book cover" (really a dust jacket; remember my distinction earlier?) was to protect the book from being damaged. That's it. Even though there might have been a few gems or something on the spine of the book itself, they were most likely a little bit more boring than most. During this time, there were special ways of producing these book covers to fit in with the society and how goods were produced. Through my research I learned that there were a few new techniques for mechanical bookbinding introduced during book cover production in the 1820s. For example, I read that, "At first, the go-to material for bookbinding was cloth, and then it became paper. This was because it was extremely cheap, and became a staple for the economy. These easy, mechanically produced book covers originally became possible because of the mechanically produced paper, and the steam-powered presses, and other machines" (Wikipedia, Bookbinding). After reading this, I realized that this must be correct, considering that the first printing presses were invented in 1816 by George Clymer (Harry Ransom Center). I also identified that these printing presses were invented around the same time, when the latest in the 1800s was the monotype machine, which was much smoother and faster than other machines invented in past years. And since most of these machines were used to create paper, this fits in perfectly to the bookbinding process and how much easier it was for the economy to create this product in mass amounts.

Okay, I think that's enough of a history lesson for now. I think it's time I begin the next step in my research. I have a bit of background information about book covers. Now, it is time to consider the marketing techniques I have been thinking about.

The Secret Weapon

Don't worry, it's not really a weapon. It relates more to a marketing tool, as I have previously said. You may not realize it, but the designers of the covers of the books you are reading are taking advantage of you. Hang on, pause for a minute here. Please don't put down this article and go sue somebody because they are using mind control or something. (It's not like that; really, I swear.) Alright, now that I have solved this predicament, let's start again. "Whether you choose to believe it or not, the opinion you have of the last book purchase you made was a result of observing these attributes—to a certain extent" (Thacker). These attributes in the quote further read to include the price of the book, the design, and the genre of the book you are reading. The genre that you read depends on the style, the font, the pictures, and even the author of your book. Let's face it, book covers are spread across a vast variety of different genres (after all, they are for books and reading material). The potential buyers of the book may want a preview of the genre so that they know what to expect. This means that the information on the cover of the book plays a large role in the effectiveness of marketing to buyers. Most book covers have small bits of information that leaves the audience wanting more.

Figure 1:
The book cover of
Amityville Horror
by Jay Anson.

How About an Example?

Okay. The answer to my simple marketing question laid in looking at an example. So, I decided the best thing to do would be to analyze a certain book cover. Even though I am only providing you with one example of this genre, I think that you will get the point. I realized that the design of the cover is dependent on the genre of the book itself. Let's take horror books, for example (because I read them the least). When I went to Google and saw this book (see Figure 1), I kind of wanted to read it, which was kind of weird. I noticed that

the background design of the cover, the letters, and the overall mood affects and influences the decision of the audience whether or not to buy the book. In the example I was analyzing I noticed things like the hues of red, the font, and even the background image. Sometimes, we can find mood inside of different colors and patterns on the book cover itself. According to Infoplease, colors show a lot. "Some hues of red can relate to emotionally intense color, red stimulates a faster heartbeat and breathing. Black can also relate to authority and power. It can also seem evil and aloof. Yellow colors are also attention getters and very bright." I saw evidence of this in the book cover I was looking at (*Amityville Horror*), but I have also noticed that colors are used frequently to convey emotions in other books, television shows, and even movies.

So, there you have it. When considering the main colors found on the book cover, they all relate to the main story's plot. The designer of the cover I was analyzing obviously wanted the readers to understand that this book was meant to be horror and wanted to attract the right kind of audience. While also looking on the cover of the book, you can sometimes identify a background image on the back of the book. While some books may be left a little plain, this book shows a background image that may change your opinion of the book. (Since I hate the genre of horror, I could obviously tell that this was not for me, just by looking at the image). This may also happen for you, but not with this specific genre. It all basically depends on the reader's personal preferences.

You also notice that the font on the book is very large and ominous. Beyond color, some books tend to include a small sentence about the book on the front of the cover. This small sentence included in some genres determines the different moods of the audience and who will be interested in reading the genre. Sometimes, these small phrases can be quotes from reviewers or the author, or they can be a quote found inside of the book, or they may even include the author's personal preference about the book itself. This sentence or phrase also might play a role in whether or not the audience likes the book because it can set the mood of what they are going to be reading. Thinking about this, it pointed me to my next step in my research: *How would I write an effective book cover myself and make it persuasive to my audience?*

The Convention Detection

Now that I have a little bit of background information on book covers, it is time to consider a few of the rules or conventions of this genre. In order for my research to progress further, I needed to see how to make a book cover myself. In order to make the (almost) perfect book cover, you need to consider

the audience's point of view. What would I want to read? What am I looking for in the perfect book? By considering the "secret weapon," you are able to make a book cover ready to sell. My next step of the process was to research the different aspects of book covers and what it takes to write one.

Before I had begun my research and this article, I had made a short list of what I *thought* book covers needed to include to be considered "correct." This includes all of the conventions and rules that I had *thought* that you needed:

- Correct grammar and punctuation

- A title, the author's name, and a picture

- Bright images to catch the audience's attention

- Possibly a short description of the book on the front

I know, this small list is a little sad, but that is why I have decided to research this topic. As you can see by my conventions list, I wasn't quite correct. The images or colors on the cover are not limited to bright or bold. There are dozens of different marketing strategies that book designers may use. "The cover of your book is the first thing people will see—so you want to make sure that it looks professional" (Completely Novel). As I have said, the "secret weapon" they use is a variety of different ideas and designs. Some designs may be big and bold to catch the reader's eye. Yet, some designs are simple and blank and have a mysterious feel to them. These may make the audience curious and make them want to read it. Whether you like what is on the inside of the book or not, you are ultimately individually going to want to read the book because of the cover.

The Small Stuff

According to Fred Showker, the author of *Book Cover Design Tips & Tricks*, "There are many things that you want to consider. You want to know the material. What is the mood of the book? Could the characters be matched in the setting? Another information topic includes the readers. Who is the target reader? What production tools could be useful to catch my readers' eyes?" After I had researched the conventions of book covers, many of the generic conventions include word weight, good eye flow, color breaks, readability, and correct grammar conventions and spelling (Book Cover design concepts, Fred Showker). I noticed that I didn't think most people pay attention to these details, and yet they are quick to judge with one glance of the book. This shows that the cover of a book plays a large role in its marketing effectiveness. Most of the audience that you want to buy your book

would want a preview of the book they are about to read. This is because they want to know what type of book they are investing their time in, and they want to know the overall emotion of the book. With this thought in mind, it leads me to my next section of research.

Book Covers in the Wild

On the board in Mrs. Kieffer's classroom it said, "Primary research." Since, sadly, I had no idea what that meant, I turned to the almighty Google once again. According to The Daily Egg, "Primary research is new research, carried out to answer specific issues or questions. It can involve questionnaires, surveys or interviews with individuals or small groups."

To help to further my research, I sent out a (sort of) informal survey and a series of questions that would be helpful to my research. My audience in this survey was my other classmates. I asked them what genre of books they read and if they judge books by their covers. These were the results I got for one of the last questions on the survey.

What to you, is the most important part of a book cover? (18 responses)

- Title of book
- Authors name
- Pictures
- Short description of book (not all book covers have this)
- Other

33.3%   16.7%   16.7%   33.3%
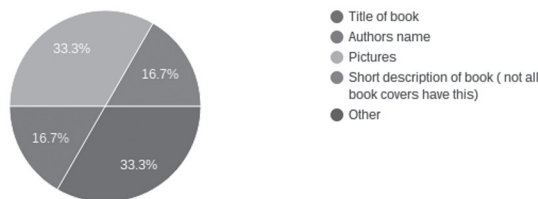
Figure 2: Participant responses to what is the most important
part of a book cover.

As you can see in Figure 2, 33.3% of my classmates said that both the pictures and the title of the book are the most important parts of a book cover. I expected this since the conventions and rules of book covers are somewhat vague. On the lower half of the results, 16.7% of my classmates said that the short description of the book and the author's name are most important. If all of this information is clumped together, it shows that most of my generic research is correct. It shows that the different marketing tools in book cover designs work on this audience. Even though, to me, there is not one that is more important than the other, some members of the survey may choose books based on covers that use one certain trick more than the other. And, as I have stated earlier, the genre of the text and the overall mood plays a role in what marketing strategies to use.

This was another one of the survey questions that I asked my classmates. Once again, I was happy with the results of these responses.

Do you think that the cover is important in choosing a good book? Choose one.
(18 responses)

- ● Yes, all the time!
- ● Yeah, a little bit.
- ● Sort of.
- ● Not really.
- ● NO WAY! Book covers are dumb.

55.6%

27.8%
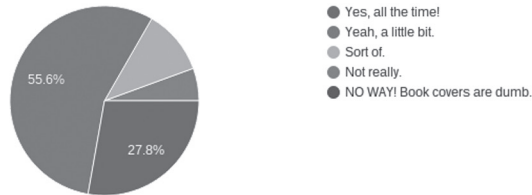
Figure 3: Participant responses to whether a book cover is important in choosing a book.

55.6 % of people said "yeah, a little bit." In second place, 27.8 % said "yes, all the time!" Behind them, 11.1 and 5.6 % said "sort of" and "not really." This to me shows that my audience has a pretty decent understanding of book covers and what a large role they play in a person reading a book. As for the people at the bottom who think otherwise, I think that the way they pick out books is different. They may also read slightly less than the people at the top of the list (though, this might not be true). I also wonder if this is because these people may not have as much experience picking out books, or if they just get very lucky with their choices.

In order to not just target 8th grade audiences for their opinions, I decided I wanted to raise my age range slightly. I also sent out the survey to my college pen pal so that she could answer the same questions that the 8th grade survey takers did. Interestingly, I noticed that she answered almost the same as most of my classmates did. I personally sent her questions through a letter (which was required for the class). It included the same questions that I had asked my classmates to answer. Here are her answers:

> *"I think that the front cover aspect would be definitely be the photo or picture that depicts or represents the book as a whole."*

> *"While the cover is an important part of the portrayal of a book and the first thing you see, I do not like to judge the book by the cover. Though, the cover, however does draw me in but from there I typically read the summary and make my decision based off of that."*

If you compare the two responses from my college pen pal and my other classmates, you see that the majority of the 8th grade responses are, for the most part, similar to her response. Based on all of these responses, people within these two ranges of age are both influenced by marketing tools by

designers and are familiar with the undefined power of book covers. Even though one person of a different age doesn't represent all others, I do think that this information does somewhat help in my overall primary research.

What's the Big Deal Anyways?

Okay, one more survey example, and then I promise I am done.

What are some ways you become interested in a book? (You can more than one)
(18 responses)
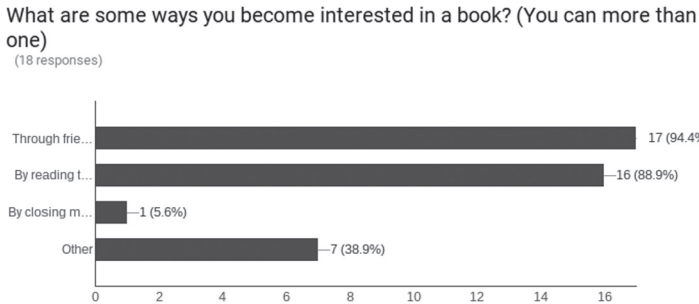
Figure 4: Participant responses to ways they become interested in a book.

According to Figure 4, those surveyed became interested in a book in very specific ways. Since the information is a little cut off in my image, here are the four options that those surveyed chose from:

- Through friends or other people telling me about them

- By reading the cover and the blurb on the back of the book

- By closing my eyes and choosing a random book off the shelves

- Other

I know, these options may seem a little simple, but they represent what I think most people relate to when they pick out a book. I also bet that you are still wondering about the title of this section. What's the big deal anyways? I guess a few of you are thinking this in your head as you read: "What's the point? Can't our misjudgment of a book easily be avoided?" Well, that's what I thought, too, until I looked at the survey responses. 94.4% said the first option, 88.9% said the second option, 5.6% said the third option, and 38.9% said the fourth option. (Just in case you don't know, they all add up to more than 100 because you can choose more than one).

Hang on a minute, pause, slow down. After I read the options over and over again, I realized that I had hit the jackpot. Eureka! I noticed that the majority of people said that they rely on friends and others to pick out their books for them. Bingo. *But what exactly does that mean?* I think that it means that,

most of the time, you don't choose your own book. Others do. It's almost like a chain of people passing excellent reviews about a book. Even though it's not your fault, and you sometimes can't help it, you almost have to pile on and read the book. This happens even if it is not a genre for you, or if it looks terrible. This is because, most of the time, you become completely blindsided by peer pressure and/or recommendations from other people. So yes, *THAT* is the big deal, in case you were wondering.

Okay, okay. I'm sure there are a few people who are reading this who are thinking to themselves, "What? No way, I don't do that! I totally pick out books all by myself!" Alright, you got me there. But let me ask you one thing before you jump to conclusions. Think of an extremely popular book that you have read before. Let's take *The Hunger Games* series, for example. (No, this does not count the movies. If you have not read the books before, then think of another one.) Where did you learn about that book before you started reading it? Friends? Family? Online? Chances are, you or someone you know has chosen a very popular book just based on someone else talking about it to you/them. Even if you heard about the book online, who wrote that article or social media comment or something? People wrote that (at least, someone did).

I definitely can relate to these findings based on personal experience because I have read many books that I have learned about online. In fact, one of my favorite book series, the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling, I learned about by reading reviews and recommendations online. But, I know that I have also gotten book recommendations from friends at school or at home. Even if you don't know these people, the reviews from friends, family and/or strangers play a large role in crafting your emotions towards a specific book. But, no, that doesn't mean they are doing that on purpose, and, no, they can't read your mind. Hang on, hang on, am I rambling again? Alright, a promise is a promise, I'll be done here very soon. Let me just slow down for a second to see where my research has taken me.

The Research Road Map

At the beginning of my research into the genre of the book cover and how it influences people to buy books, things seemed simple, but there were ultimately many turns and twists that led to many different destinations about my initial topic ideas. While I ran into many dead ends and problems, I noticed these ends led to new roads and ideas for research. Basically, I have decided that the research might never end. You can always find a new path to research. But sadly, based on how long this article is getting and my need for sanity, I will have to cut you off here at the end of this conclusion.

My research began with a simple idea. But, because (not in spite) of this, my knowledge of this topic continues to progress and grow as my research ideas and my imagination expand. I think maybe I began to create my own sort of genre and to develop my own new ideas that nobody has thought about before. As I concluded this chapter in my research, I took a step back and thought, "Wow!" I was surprised by how my ideas on this genre have changed throughout this process. No, I still cannot write the perfect book, genre, or even article, but I can at least try. In a few years, I will be excited to see how the genre evolves and how it grows as I age. I noticed as I concluded that these small conventions of the book cover do not fit together in one piece of the giant metaphorical genre puzzle. But then I thought maybe they're not meant to come together. I think that perhaps they are possibly best left a little out of place. I think it's time that I let you judge.

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Sarah Lyons is a student of Washington Middle School. She is in 8th grade and is passionate about spending time with her family, playing in the band, and running track and cross country with her friends. When she is not at the middle school, she is at home, reading the *Harry Potter* series and playing with her dogs in the backyard.

Let's Sit Down for a Talk

Becky Holdsworth

Captive audiences are some of the trickiest kinds of audiences to write for. They do not always receive information positively. But Holdsworth finds that the Illinois State University (ISU) Health Promotion and Wellness office is calculated in their representation of important information to encourage positive audience uptake. In this article, Holdsworth discovers how they use "Toilet Talks" to communicate important messages about general health, safety, and well-being to the ISU campus.

I am scratching my head as I start this article, mostly because I am not sure how to approach the taboo topic of reading in the bathroom. I'm going against my private nature (and sense of decency) to talk openly about a subject that would make my grandmother blush. For the past several months, my classmates at Illinois State University (ISU) who knew about my writing research project over ISU's Health Promotion and Wellness "Toilet Talks" have been saying things like, "Every time I go to the bathroom here, I think about you." That was never my intention, and I will be relieved when people wipe away thoughts of me every time they step into a stall. *So why am I talking about reading in the bathroom?* Honestly, I am fascinated by the genius idea behind them: a beneficial message is distributed to a *captive*, but targeted, audience. Everyone uses the bathroom, and a bathroom goer will read what is on the wall. Message delivered.

Go Away. I'm Busy.

When I usually think of the activity of bathroom reading, I think about novels or other interesting reads, or reads one would only feel comfortable perusing

inside the private, sacred space of the home bathroom. There is even a series of books dedicated to bathroom reading. I used to browse through the *Uncle John's Bathroom Reader* series, a popular book series which contains information geared towards trivia (see Figure 1) because I greatly enjoyed the random facts about word origins, presidents, town names, etc. People take novels, magazines, even phones (gross) into the bathroom to accomplish some solid reading for enjoyment. No matter the form, bathroom reading is usually based on personal choice.
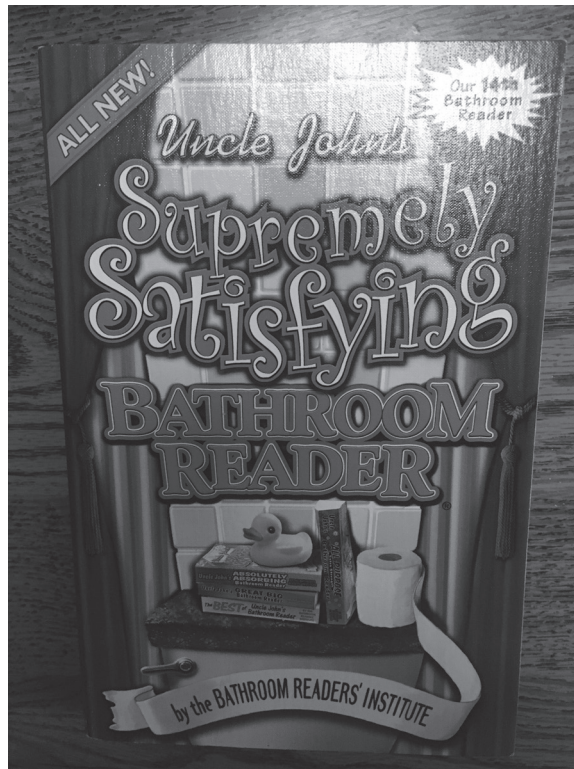
Figure 1: A book in the *Uncle John's Bathroom Reader* series.

I Have to Share a Bathroom with Forty Other Women?!

My first memorable encounter with "Toilet Talks" was over ten years ago when I was an undergraduate student. These fliers are distributed inside a plexi-glass case on the door of each stall of the bathrooms of the dormitories, student center, library, and classroom buildings (see Figure 2 below). It was the distribution of the "Toilet Talks" fliers that got me interested initially. (**Distribution**, a term in cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), is the forum in which a writer chooses to place his or her work. For example, some writers distribute writing online on blogs, while others use print books, or writers may distribute writing in pamphlets or fliers, like the "Toilet Talks".)

To me, the "Toilet Talk" placement was great because I felt weird taking a novel inside of the bathroom, but I did not want to give up my bathroom reading. At that point in my life, I was very interested in self-improvement, and I found the "Toilet Talks" to be informative and beneficial to the transition of being a college student. The graphics were friendly, and the content was interesting even if it did not always directly apply to me.

The goal of the "Toilet Talks" was evident: the authors wanted the ISU community, mainly students, to benefit from concise and pertinent information about living a healthy lifestyle. In other words, the writers were hoping the audiences' **reception** (a CHAT term referring to how a reader, not always the intended audience, will apply and possibly repurpose a text) of the "Toilet Talks" would result in positive change for the reader. In my case, I had a positive uptake of the "Toilet Talks." I used the information they provided to change my habits and better my health.
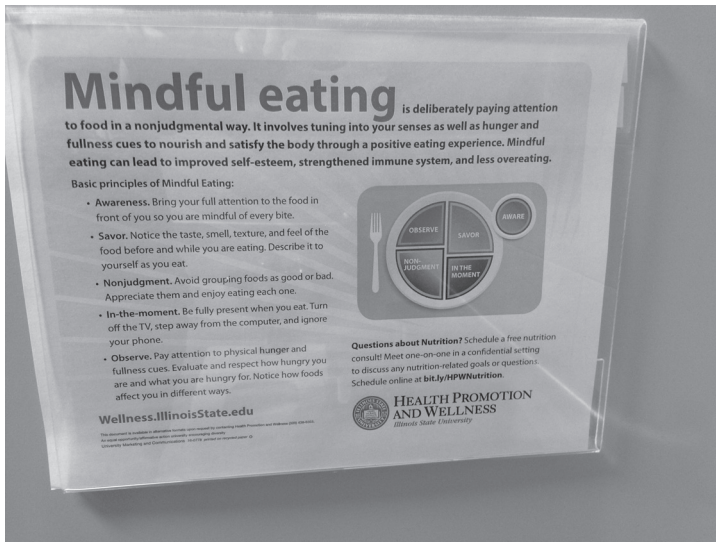
Figure 2: A real-life "Toilet Talk" picture taken in the bathroom stall at Stevenson Hall!

The Approach of "The Throne of Discovery"

Fast forward ten-plus years to my tenure as a high school English teacher. I recently took the position of National Honor Society (NHS) advisor, and I was helping students brainstorm projects to better the academic environment of our high school. Then inspiration hit me: Like the ISU "Toilet Talks," our NHS students could involve themselves in the **production** (a CHAT term that refers to the people and tools used to create texts—in our case it would be NHS students and Google Docs) and distribution of fliers in our school bathrooms. My rationale was that if kids were going to miss class to use the bathroom, they

ought to be learning something. I thought we could have a team produce a new topic each month, with student members splitting the writing tasks up to create something fun and useful for the student body to read. At the time, I did not necessarily think it needed to pertain solely to health and wellness as ISU's had.

The genius struck. We would call it "The Throne of Discovery[1]." What I envisioned was a collision of two similar genres: the ISU "Toilet Talks" and trivia bathroom reading. The formatting and distribution of the "Thrones of Discovery" would be like the "Toilet Talks," but the content would resemble *Uncle John's Bathroom Reader*. One of the goals of the NHS club is to transform the academic environment of the school positively, and "The Thrones of Discovery" could be one way our organization could change the social practices of the school. CHAT defines **socialization**, in part, as transforming social and cultural practices. NHS student writers could research what the student body needs, and they could work to influence the practices of students. My hope was that students would have a reception of the "Thrones" that created a stronger academic environment. Like the "Toilet Talks" aiming to change students' health behavior at ISU, the goal of the "Thrones of Discovery" would be to encourage good study habits and to gain other useful academic knowledge. Our fliers would be a means towards positive socialization.

I shared the "Thrones" idea with my NHS students, and I got a few half-hearted smiles and a few groans. The students were willing to give it a try, but they wanted to know how they would produce such a text. To answer their question, I decided to look more closely at how the ISU Health Promotion and Wellness department made choices to produce and distribute its "Toilet Talks." I wanted to know how the writing **activity** (a CHAT term referring to the people and practices involved in the pre-life to post-life of a text) used to produce "Toilet Talks" could help the NHS students produce "The Thrones of Discovery."

I began my writing research with these questions:

- How did the Illinois State Health Promotion and Wellness department choose content to create social change in students or socialization?

- Why would they opt to distribute important health information via "Toilet Talks" vs. using a website?

Plunging Towards the Goal

I hoped my research into the activities of the "Toilet Talk" fliers would lead to a solid answer for my students' production of "The Thrones." I wanted to be able to guide them in production and distribution. I hoped at the end of my research I could show students how to write a text that had the

precision of content like the "Toilet Talk" but contained academic trivia like an *Uncle John's Bathroom Reader*. Thinking through the goals of the written text would help with our **representation**, or the way we think about and make plans to create a text. While both styles seek to inform, I believed *Uncle John's* goal in representation of their content was to entertain individuals in a varied audience (the audience is uncertain), and "Toilet Talk's" goal in representation was to disseminate valuable health information to a university campus. The *Uncle John's Bathroom Reader's* audience would have a quiver of random facts, but "Toilet Talks" are designed to result in a change of behavior (socialization). *Which one would be best for the socialization goals of the National Honor Society?* My answer became clear as I began my research.

Tracking down information was not difficult. I busted into a bathroom stall in Stevenson Hall one evening after my graduate class, and I took a picture of a "Toilet Talk" before anyone could see that I was taking pictures in the bathroom. (*Taking selfies in front of the mirror is one thing . . .*) The "Toilet Talk" listed the Health Promotion and Wellness website, and from there I found the contact information of Erin Link, the Coordinator of Communication and Marketing for Health Promotion and Wellness. Because I had limited time to meet in person, I asked Ms. Link if she would be willing to answer some questions I had via email, and she agreed.

While I waited for her responses, I did some digging on my own. According to my very scientific Google search (keyword searching "Toilet Talks"), "Toilet Talks" are part of a university initiative to spread awareness of health and wellness. And, Illinois State University's program was one of the top hits of my search. There are currently sixty-four "Toilet Talk" flier archives available on the ISU Health Promotion and Wellness website[2]. They cover a variety of topics such as healthy eating habits, sexual wellness, alcohol consumption, and social health, etc.

Ms. Link responded to my questions, and I was surprised by the amount of work in representation, or planning, for the "Toilet Talks." The content of the fliers is all researched based on, and specific to, the needs of ISU's campus, and the goal of the "Toilet Talk" fliers is to "fulfill an important need for ongoing education on important health and wellness-related topics" (Link). She wrote that a collection of data from such sources as the National College Health Assessment Survey[3] determines topics. This survey asks ISU students if they have received information on issues of health and safety as well as if they would be interested in receiving information. Ms. Link also wrote that the team of writers is aware of "emerging issues or occurrences that need to be addressed." Ms. Link believes that the "Toilet Talk" fliers are impacting the intended audience, the entire campus community. In other words, Ms. Link believes that the reception has aligned with the intended goal determined during representation. One of

the questions I posed to her was, "What kind of impact do you believe the 'Toilet Talks' are making?" She replied, "We know that people are making behavior changes based on the information, or it is at least moving them along the Stages of Change, helping them move closer towards the action taking phase." I did a quick online search to find that the Stages of Change is a psychological theory that moves a person from a harmful behavior to a safe one[4]. Based on my personal experience as an undergraduate student years ago, I would agree. I thought the information on the "Toilet Talks" were helpful and easy to implement. While my habits were not necessarily harmful, I benefited from the tips such as those on studying well and reporting sexual assault. The "Toilet Talk" writers hope to develop a more direct and designed system to gain feedback from readers in the future but don't currently have a system in place to assess impact (Link). They want to know from us if the "Toilet Talks" help.

After reading Cody Parish's 'the shit house poet strikes again': Trials and Revelations of Bathroom Graffiti Writing," a *Grassroots* article on graffiti at ISU, I wondered if any person had written on an actual "Toilet Talk" in response to the content. In several of Parish's encounters with graffiti, people had responded to one another much like the commentary on Facebook posts (146). "Toilet Talks" are more protected than the "open commenting" of graffiti on a stall wall. The fliers are positioned behind plexi-glass, which would require more effort for students to remove and write on them. Ms. Line responded in our email exchange that, in fact, some people had written directly on the fliers as well as drawn on them. When Health Promotion and Wellness student workers change the "Talks," they bring the ones with messages to the writing team so that they can discuss any ways the fliers should change based on feedback. Link wrote:

> For instance, on a campus safety message some people thought that the graphic made it look like the police officer was drawing his gun. While the officer was not, we had enough people provide this feedback that we recreated the message with a different graphic since the graphic was deterring from the actual content of the message.

This serves as an excellent example of how a visual can affect the intended reception of writing; the audience focused more on what the flier didn't actually say in the text instead of benefitting from the message. The "Toilet Talks" are never designed to support violence, but perhaps because of the current upsweep of social unrest regarding police brutality, people were influenced to see what they wanted to see. As I prepared to venture out to the bathroom stalls myself, I wondered and hoped I would encounter written responses on the "Toilet Talks." Now that I had a solid understanding of the representation and reception of the "Toilet Talks," I was ready to do my fieldwork investigating the bathroom stalls.

I could not enter the men's restrooms on campus, so I knew I would need to ask a few friends to help me. I decided to ask some friends who I went to ISU with during my undergraduate years, and one of those friends had written a *Grassroots* article before, so I knew he would not think my research demands were too strange. He also worked on campus, so he could see the ever-evolving "Toilet Talks" and update me since I am only at ISU one night a week.

I assembled my research team of two via exuberant text messaging, asking if they would like to "relive our undergrad days" and "couldn't they spare an hour or two for a friend," and after they said yes, I asked if they could go in the men's restrooms at ISU while I went into the women's. (I still owe them coffee for agreeing to it.) We met at 9 a.m. at Stevenson Hall on a Saturday to avoid the student traffic (none of us wanted to explain why we were visiting each stall).

I will admit to you, I was hoping to unearth some shocking secret, some dirty fact, some kind of plot twist, but building after building, we found the exact same three "Toilet Talks" in all of the restrooms: A homecoming tailgating invite from ISU Health Promotion and Wellness, "How to be a Sexual Assault Ally," and "Mindful Eating." There were no gendered differences except for one instance where "How to be a Sexual Assault Ally" was missing entirely from a men's restroom (see Figure 3 for a picture of the "How to be a Sexual Assault Ally" flier).
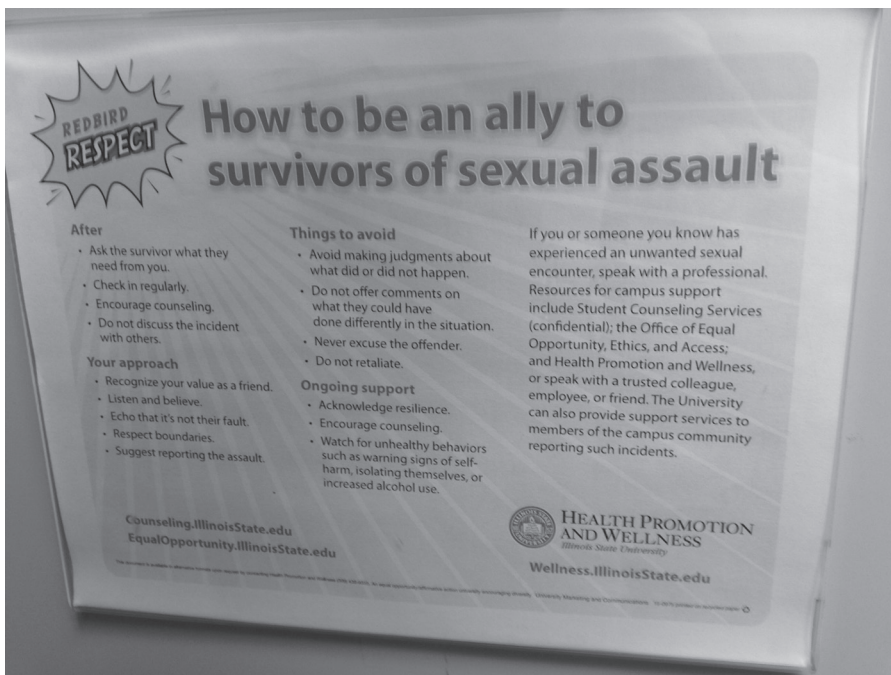

Figure 3: A "Toilet Talk" that was not present in one men's restroom in Stevenson Hall.

Regardless of which university building we were in, all the "Toilet Talks" were the same and fairly evenly distributed. After I parted ways with my research team, and one of them muttered something like "no worries, this is true friendship," I poked my head into a few more buildings on South Campus. I noticed that in the Center for Performing Arts (CPA), no fliers were posted. I emailed Ms. Link to find out why. She responded that the CPA has many off-campus guests—families, community members, and since it was not an academic building, they did not request to put "Toilet Talks" in there. This solidifies that the intended audience is the daily campus traffic rather than university visitors and that the "Toilet Talks" are geared towards meeting needs specific to what the Health Promotion and Wellness determined while researching for the test, an activity of representation.

Are You About Done in There?

So, what is the difference between trivial bathroom reading and a "Toilet Talk"? Plenty. Let's consider Joyce Walker's definition of distribution: "Distribution involves the consideration of who a text is given to, for what purposes, using what kinds of distribution tools" (75). Let's revisit the distinction made earlier. Bathroom reading is the choice of the individual. People choose the texts they want to bring in the space of the bathroom for their own personal enjoyment. So, if bathroom reading is a choice made by the reader, it might not be best for the writers of the "Thrones" to seek to entertain because tastes in entertainment are so different. Just try to play a rap song for a die-hard country fan (like my dad) and see what happens. Health Promotion and Wellness's representation, the goals in how they represent their content, is far more universal than mass entertainment. And, as my research into the "Toilet Talk" genre developed, I realized that the "Thrones" could have a much greater impact on students than just being used for a giggle or random facts like the content represented in *Uncle John's Bathroom Reader* series. Initially, I correlated an increased positive environment in our school with light-hearted trivia, but as I investigated "Toilet Talks," their precision of content to student needs made me rethink if humor is what students needed. Maybe, what students need is information that will help them overcome difficult academic tasks.

"Toilet Talks" are "talks," informative fliers of information intended to fulfill the "need for ongoing education" (Link). Let's consider the implications of the word "talk." One definition is "to talk to in a manner that indicates that a response is not expected or wanted.[5]" In my own experience, when someone says, "I need to talk to you" or "Let's talk," it does not foreshadow a dialogue as much as one person expounding on information he or she wants

the listener to hear. Sometimes it's an intervention to help someone make better choices, which is the function of the "Toilet Talks." This information is important for the speaker to say, so much so, that she prefaces it by preparing the listener that "she needs to talk." The "Toilet Talks" are given out of concern for what is best.

Let's also consider the space or ecology of the public bathroom stall at the university. **Ecology** refers to where the text is distributed and how the environmental factors can influence the reception. This is a private space. The individual is the only one in the space. In some ways, the "Toilet Talks" function as a life advice flier or a guidance counselor. Every counseling room I've encountered is small and intimate. The space allows us to feel secure. The "Toilet Talk" anticipates answers to questions that students may be too scared to ask or are unaware that they need to know. But, just as people choose to sometimes reject advice, some students choose to ignore messages. Some make fun of the content, which I speculate in some cases stems from annoyance to something the reader thinks students should already know. Regardless, some students take comfort that it is fulfilling a researched need.

To merely distribute this information on a website doesn't guarantee the student body will see it. I have never Googled "How to Have Positive Self Image," but I know some tips because I was "talked" to, and it made my day a little brighter when I implemented its advice. And, Health Promotion and Wellness firmly believes this information is relevant for students and employees to hear especially in light of their research through the National College Health Assessment Data. So, why don't they just put it on their website? Well, my guess is students would not see it. The only time I go to a health or wellness website is if I am in need of something specific, for example, diagnosing maladies on WebMD. My guess is the website does not see much traffic, but the bathroom stall makes a captive audience. The student will see the flier, whether they want to be informed of healthy sexual practices, study behaviors, and bicycle safety, or not.

My NHS students want to produce a text that makes an impact. The "Toilet Talks" are a fantastic example of a well-researched piece of writing. The Health Promotion and Wellness office of ISU is convinced that their "Toilet Talk" fliers are making an impact, and I don't see how they couldn't impact students. They have researched what ISU students need to know, and they distribute that information in a personal space in a low-key, but compelling manner. I will encourage my students to produce "The Thrones of Discovery" similarly. I look forward to my students taking the plunge to create a document that overflows with relevant information for our student body.

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Endnotes

[1] A play on words based on the "Throes of Discovery." How clever.

[2] wellness.illinoisstate.edu/living/toilet/

[3] wellness.illinoisstate.edu/data/ncha/index.shtml

[4] https://psychcentral.com/lib/stages-of-change/

[5] According to dictionary.com

Becky Holdsworth does not limit her reading to the bathroom. She lives an informed life because she is an avid reader of all print including food labels and shampoo bottles. When she is not teaching high school English, you will find her having a good meal with friends or belting out a song while playing the guitar.

Faceless Ecologies:
Determining Author Control in the Distribution of Facebook Posts

Andrew Del Mastro

In this article, Del Mastro explores how ecology can affect the way people express themselves when posting content on social media. He specifically looks at elements of Facebook that can and cannot be controlled by users in order to determine how ecology might limit or manipulate self-expression and author ownership online.

I thought I would start this article by asking you to imagine a time without the Internet, thinking that it would provide some profound insight into how useful it is and how dependent on it we've become. But I don't think you need me to tell you that we rely heavily on this mysterious force that enables us to consume and distribute information quickly and efficiently across the globe. What I would like to do, though, is ask you to think for a moment about the *environment* of the Internet. You see, it doesn't matter if we're creating a blog, sending an email, interacting with social media, or engaging with any other task because everything we create online is quickly dispersed throughout the "world" of the Internet. Just think of the memes that we see repeated from one random site to another; trying to imagine where they began is often as fruitless an endeavor as trying to predict where they'll end. After all, once something goes online, it's anyone's guess what will happen to it. This phenomenon can be as exciting and entertaining as it is dangerous, and in the spirit of understanding it better I'd like you to join me in thinking about the *ecology* of the Internet.

According to Joyce Walker, **ecology** can be understood as "the physical, biological forces that exist beyond the boundaries of any text we are producing . . . these environmental factors can become very active in some situations in shaping

or interacting with our textual productions" (76). Think, for example, how weather might impact the way an outdoor speech is delivered, or how a status update can affect or interrupt a paper you're writing. When we create something, there are forces surrounding us that impact the production, distribution, and reception of our work. Thinking about a different genre, we can't text someone without a device to create the message—we can try to write a similar note using pen and paper, but then it's no longer a text message—it's just a conventional note. If you use social media, try to remember when you didn't and first started. There's a good chance that, before creating your first profile on Facebook—or Myspace for those who remember the old days, or Xanga for those who remember Pangaea— you probably looked at a friend's profile to see what it should look like, and you, perhaps, tailored your own profile to fit the style and design of your friend's. In such an instance, you were introduced to what that particular social media platform could allow you to do, and this informed your own use of it.

So, when you're creating something, the materials you have access to and the people who will have access to the finished product are just some examples of what we mean when we say *ecology*, the forces that exist outside of our texts but nevertheless impact the way we create and perceive them. It doesn't matter if we're sending an email, Tweet, or—in the case of this article—a Facebook post; there are biological and environmental forces at work that impact our decisions and dictate what we can actually accomplish when we produce writing.

These forces, in turn, influence how we compose our unique stories when we are creating and sharing online. For those of us who use social media, we understand that part of the ecology of these various sites involves rules and regulations that dictate how we can create interesting texts and ideas while logged in. For example, Twitter has its character limit, Snapchat requires its users to utilize image-producing technology, and Facebook is structured so that images and texts must be uploaded into designated spaces. Ecology, then, is an important element when we share our ideas and experiences online, which got me thinking. Considering that we are dependent on the rules of a particular site when we're online, and we can only compose ideas within the limitations of those rules, who really controls the story we tell about ourselves when we post online? After all, social media is a way to catalogue our journeys through life but—if we are dependent on the ecology of online spaces—are we truly able to compose our life stories the way we want, or are our experiences filtered by the genre conventions of social media? In short, who really controls the content of our posts?

Understanding Ecology and Facebook

Social media is an enormous topic that expands well beyond the length requirement of a *Grassroots* article, so, for the purpose of my study, I want

to apply this question specifically to Facebook. When composing texts or distributing images and videos on Facebook we like to think that we have control over our posts and, consequently, the way we characterize ourselves online. I question the accuracy of this belief. Thinking back to ecology, there are rules and conditions that apply to our use of Facebook. We can't, for example, post a status update or an image unless it's in the proper box (Figure 1):
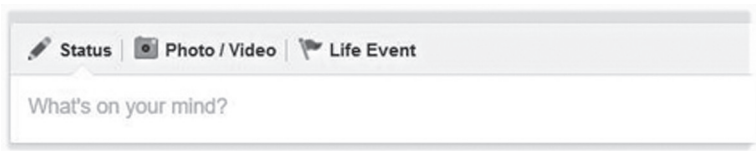

Figure 1: An example of one such proper box.

And, once we've written a post or submitted an image, we cannot necessarily control how our audience interacts with—and interprets—our texts. In short, whenever we post something on Facebook, we are doing so under the rules and restrictions of that site. As I considered these restrictions, I began to wonder whether these limitations alone were a hindrance to expressing ourselves online. After all, do we really have full freedom to characterize and represent ourselves when we play by the rules of someone else?

The first step in my research was to understand better what Facebook actually is. Since I'm working with a popular social media site, it's important to understand the environment from which posts and images will be distributed. Understanding this environment means comprehending the ecology of Facebook as a genre. To do this, let's explore what we mean when we describe ecology as the physical, biological forces that exist beyond the boundaries of whatever text we happen to be producing. With regards to Facebook, we can create and share all kinds of texts on our profile pages whenever we access the site, but those texts that we actually produce are limited to the posts we compose. Those posts cannot exist without Facebook. Facebook, then, is a necessary **activity system**[1] in place that allows us to distribute our messages, and its rules and conventions help to shape the discourses we create.

So, then, how can we define that great cyber-garden of cat memes, vacation albums, and regrettable political posts known as Facebook? Well, according to the source, Facebook's mission is to "give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. People use Facebook

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[1]Loosely defined, activity systems are cooperative interactions aimed at achieving a goal. For example, if your goal is to create private invitations for a party, you might use Facebook to create a group page that advertises the event. Like any activity system, Facebook has certain rules and conventions that need to be followed, and these rules are shaped and informed by the environmental forces and rules that exist within Facebook (for example, the fact that Facebook gives you the option to create a private group is part of its rules; how you design your private group and where you post it within Facebook are informed by the site's ecology).

to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them" (Facebook). In the words of the good people of Facebook, their goal and function is to allow members of their online community to connect and share with the world. This is the framework we'll use for this article when trying to define and understand authorial control of posts created on this social networking service. After all, if expressing what matters to an individual is a key concept in Facebook's mission statement, then it's absolutely necessary to comprehend as completely as possible who controls those texts of self-expression.

Ecology's Role in Author Control

My goal in this study is to demonstrate whether we, as authors of our Facebook posts, actually have control over those texts we create while online. In order to start this research, I needed to look at the terms of using Facebook—you know, that stuff we're supposed to look at before we make online accounts for anything but don't actually bother to do. For the greater good, I bothered to do that. Here's what I found from Facebook's own policies web page, which, as of this moment, was last updated on January 30, 2015: "You own all of the content and information you post on Facebook, and you can control how it is shared through your privacy and application settings" (Facebook). Whoops. There goes my research topic. It looks like we really *do* control the stuff we post online.

But wait (he wrote in the voice of Billy Mays), there's more. Yes, according to Facebook we all own and have the ability to manipulate the posts that we create, but this ownership comes with a few conditions:

> For content that is covered by intellectual property rights, like photos and videos (IP content), you specifically give us the following permission, subject to your privacy and application settings: you grant us a non-exclusive, transferable, sub-licensable, royalty-free, worldwide license to use any IP content that you post on or in connection with Facebook (IP License). This IP License ends when you delete your IP content or your account unless your content has been shared with others, and they have not deleted it . . . When you delete IP content, it is deleted in a manner similar to emptying the recycle bin on a computer. However, you understand that removed content may persist in backup copies for a reasonable period of time (but will not be available to others). (Facebook)

So stuff posted on the Internet lingers on the Internet, and Facebook makes mention of the fact that copies of this data will not be made available to others during the mysterious duration of a "reasonable time period." This information is an important aspect of Facebook's ecology; while we may not interact with these rules directly or immediately, they nevertheless inform what we can and cannot do on the site, specifically looking at the composition

of texts produced while logged into Facebook. We cannot, for example, delete a post completely the way we might erase other forms of our writing because texts produced on Facebook may linger online for a "reasonable amount of time" despite our efforts to remove them. Equally important, if your content has been shared with others—which, of course, it has—and *they* have not deleted it, then it's unlikely you'll ever be able to completely delete your posts.

Now, what interests me most about this cited material is the mention of our *privacy settings*, particularly because this is an element of Facebook's ecology that we have a degree of control over. Many of us are aware that sometimes we don't always post the most respectable or intelligent of things online and that these posts can one day return to haunt us while seeking employment, internships, etc. However, we believe that if we are mindful of our privacy settings we can avoid calamity.

Or *can* we? Suppose you were to post a picture of yourself on Facebook, or a witty paragraph filled with your life's musings, without minding the privacy setting. Naturally, you consider yourself the controller of this post because you created it and uploaded it to a wider audience. This was done by design, and now you have a published text created in the world of Facebook. You're an author, Harry. Congratulations. But here's the issue that provoked my inquiry into this topic: once you've created something and submitted it to the world at large, what degree of control do you have over your own creation, as opposed to the (potentially) countless people who might have access to that post immediately after its creation? I needed to understand what happens to public posts, so I consulted Facebook's terms again: "When you publish content or information using the Public setting, it means that you are allowing everyone, including people off of Facebook, to access and use that information, and to associate it with you (i.e., your name and profile picture)" (Facebook). One might find this mildly disconcerting. Anything posted publicly on Facebook becomes fair game for people to access and, more than that, *use*. So if you create something and submit it for public consumption, it will be used by that public. Perhaps it can even be manipulated and altered. In that case, your control over the text—indeed, your ownership of it—has passed on to the next intrepid explorer of the World Wide Web. What a strange thought, that the picture you posted of your dear Aunt Meredith could now belong to a man named Steve living in his mom's basement somewhere in rural Idaho.

But this exchange of textual control is contingent on keeping the privacy setting public on one's posts, so I needed to experiment with something a little more restricted. A little while ago, I posted a picture on my Facebook account that was set to be visible only to my friends. I then asked a friend to share that post on her wall. She then asked a third friend to share the post on her wall. Every time that post was shared, it continued to be visible to the friends of the post's new owner, and every time it was shared my name was still attached to it. In a matter of seconds, that post was visible to 886 people. It became clear

to me that anything online could be quickly distributed to a larger audience than was originally intended, and the initial author of the shared post has little control over where it goes once it has been picked up by a new person. The ability to share a post, which is part of Facebook's ecology, can impact what happens to that post despite an author's original intentions.

I want to try to illustrate my point further, though, because the purpose of Facebook is to share and network. The things we share are personal to our life experiences; in essence, we are publicizing our life stories to people who are a part of our lives, but also to people who are not emotionally invested in what we do. I want to tackle this concept of creating life narratives in order to illustrate the full implications of losing control of our posts. So if you'll humor me, I'm going to try and compose a narrative of my life to see how it can be potentially manipulated or misinterpreted. Here's the post I'll use (Figure 2):

Figure 2: A Portrait of the *Grassroots* Writer as a Young Man.

This picture exists on my Facebook wall and was originally shared with me by another individual. In other words, I did not create this post in the sense that I physically selected it and uploaded it. Instead, it was shared with me and has my named tagged on it, meaning it is visible to my friends and the friends of the actual owner. However, I believe that *I* am now the owner of this post, especially since I have power to edit and transfer it to other people whom I choose. If I wanted to, for example, I could post a clever title for the picture (I'm thinking something like, "He showed me a whole new world").

I can also manipulate how this picture is received by a wider audience; at the moment, it is simply a photo without caption or location. Suppose I edit the post to add the location of the photo—in this case, The Prater in Vienna, Austria. Now I can play with how people view the post; at first, it was just a silly picture of me, but now I've given it context and, since it's a foreign context, it might inspire a little more intrigue. Maybe more people will like it (Wow, he's in Austria!), maybe it will inspire jealousy (Why can't I be in Austria?), and maybe it will inspire raw,

unabridged hatred (I don't care where he is—I still can't stand his face). In any case, I've manipulated a post that I previously had no control over, and wasn't given control over until it was posted by another person. In short, I didn't just become the owner of someone else's post; I became *the* author of a new post completely. I created a new conversation, and all I had to do was fiddle with someone else's image. I've considered factors beyond my control—how the post will concretely be distributed on Facebook and interpreted by my audience, chosen or otherwise—and this awareness of ecology has impacted the effect of the text.

Ok, I hear you saying—sure you were able to take a picture that was already *shared with you* and create a new context for it, but that doesn't mean the original owner has lost control of her initial post. She could, after all, delete the post, and then no one has ownership of it.

But I still would.

Think about it—all I have to do is make that post my profile picture, and then it doesn't matter what happens to the first post that was shared with me because now I'm the only one with access to it. Except I'm not. Anyone who can see my profile through their own has access to that picture. In fact, I didn't even take a screen shot of the picture from my profile when I uploaded it to this article. I *downloaded* it straight from Facebook. You know, the same trick any of your friends can do with any of your photographs online.

Now to be clear, Facebook does occasionally provide us with privacy reminders whenever the personal narratives we construct online are distributed or engaged with in ways we may not have perceived. Consider the screenshot posted below, which I received after a friend of a friend interacted with one of my posts (Figure 3):

You're in control of who can see the things you post

Andrew, it looks like someone who isn't your friend recently liked one of your posts. We want to make sure you know who can see the things you post. To learn more, check out Privacy Basics.
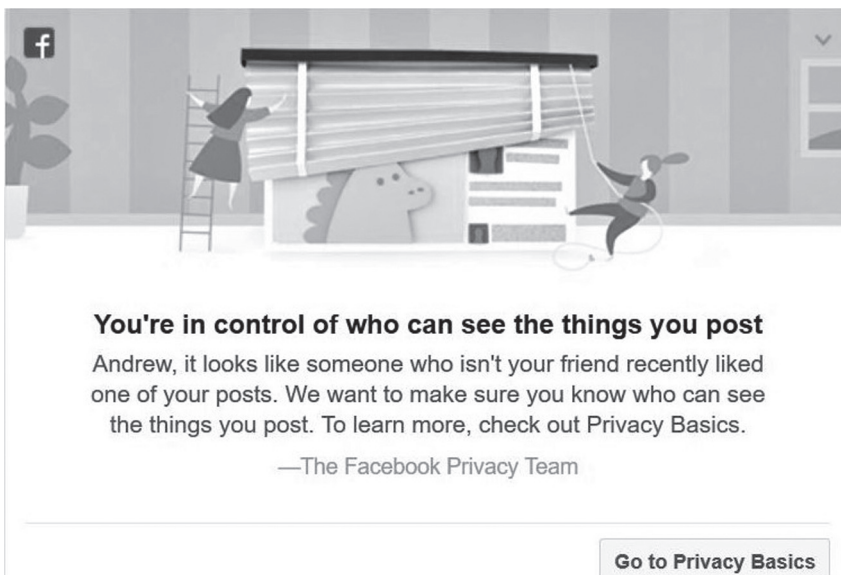
—The Facebook Privacy Team

Go to Privacy Basics

Figure 3: One of many privacy notifications Facebook sends its users.

This reminder from Facebook permits me to consider the distribution of my texts and potentially change the way my audience can interact with it, even after I have submitted it. In a sense, I am given a greater degree of control because Facebook has made me aware of a potential breech in my profile's security. The particular post mentioned in the image above was shared with my friends, which includes the friends of a person I tagged in the post. I do not know all her friends, so I can't possibly comprehend how they might interact with my text. Facebook saw this as an opportunity to remind me that I can control the distribution of my posts. By itself, this suggests that I have greater autonomy within my profile. The message itself even indicates that *I* have the control. But think for a moment about ecology. This message does not always appear, and the conditions set for determining the privacy of my posts are still dictated by the rules of Facebook. Whether they remind me of their Privacy Basics or not, I am still bound by the rules of those Privacy Basics. Also, even if I did change the privacy setting, who's to say how the newly defined audience for my text will interact with it? What if the Facebook warning was too late and someone already downloaded the image and is distributing it beyond the scope of my reach?

Can I really be in control of my online privacy if my options for privacy were determined by someone else? Is my only real choice whether or not to *have* the profile?

Interpreting the Results

Whenever we create original content—whether it's online or not—we are impacted by the ecology of our chosen medium. The environment of the Internet provides tremendous flexibility when distributing our writing, photos, etc., and virtually any text created on a social media site can be transferred to a different place and given a new context. Trying to understand these shifting contexts is part of what influenced my study for this article. I thought I could prove without a doubt that control and ownership are easily passed from person to person online, which would mean that an online author is at the mercy of the Internet, but I think there's still some gray area in the conversation. I do believe that ecology limits the content that we are able to create online, but I don't think our ability to express ourselves accurately is impaired by the rules and regulations of social media; rather, I believe ecology, if it can adversely impact anything, affects the *distribution* of our content. After all, I can think I'm sending an innocent inside joke to a friend on Facebook, but that can easily be picked up by a friend of my friend who can then take the post out of context and misrepresent my narrative. But, regardless of what happens to the text, the available options for how it is

initially created—and the means by which it is distributed—are determined by environmental factors existing beyond our control. These factors are part of the ecology of the sites we use and, while we may choose whether or not to interact with them, we cannot circumvent those options; they are controlled and defined by their respective sites.

In that sense, we need to be aware of the conventions of a genre when we begin to compose texts within it (so maybe we *should* read the user agreement forms? Gross.), but we also need to be mindful of the ecologies of online social networks. After all, information from one can easily transfer to another, and I believe this is how tenuous ownership of texts can potentially be manipulated and passed over to new owners. There are faceless rules and conventions dictated by the ecologies of the environments where those posts were made. All genres are produced within certain environments, and the final product of any literate activity will be informed by that environment. So, do we have complete control over our Facebook posts? Maybe. I can appreciate that that's a vague answer, but here's something I know with greater confidence: regardless of who controls what, we'll likely continue to engage with social media as a means to communicate, network, and share our stories. So, let's take a break and go back to our cat memes.

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Literate Practices in a Juvenile Detention Home

Mackenzie Flowers
and Maddi Kartcheske

This article is a two-part series. In part one, Writing Program Intern Maddi Kartcheske interviewed Patrick Sweeney, Director of the La Salle County Detention Home, via email correspondence. Here, Maddi gets an overview of Patrick's writing in the workplace, as well as some of his writing history. In part two, Writing Program Intern Mackenzie Flowers transcribed Patrick Sweeney's Q & A session during a classroom visit to Delores Robinson's English 101 class at Illinois Valley Community College (IVCC). Delores, a PhD student at Illinois State University (ISU), incorporates the ISU Writing Program writing research practices in her classroom. She invited Patrick to be a guest speaker in her classroom to discuss his literate practices at the La Salle County Detention Home and then graciously shared the video with the *GWRJ*.

Part One: Maddi and Patrick Correspond About Literate Activities

MADDI: Could you please introduce yourself and explain what your job is?

PATRICK: My name is Patrick Sweeney and I am the Director of the La Salle County Detention Home. My job consists of the overall administration of the Detention Home, its budget, staff, policies, physical plant, and resident care.

MADDI: We'd like to start by asking you about any and all kinds of writing that you might do as part of your work. This doesn't have to just be writing with words or in long chunks, but any of the written or visual ways you communicate.

PATRICK: My job requires writing on a daily basis, and this comes in all forms. Reports which are to be presented to the County Board or other community groups. Email is used to communicate with co-workers, outside vendors/contractors, court personnel, etc. Written documentation is a large part of working in a detention facility. Any and all interactions or occurrences must be documented whether in a resident's file, behavior point sheet, or with a special incident report.

MADDI: Could you tell us how you learned these ways of communicating?

PATRICK: I would like to say I learned this all in my years of school, but I would have to say that the majority of my learning was on-the-job training. Don't get me wrong, I attribute my foundations to my formal education, but I have definitely learned that every job has a specific procedure for how we are to use written communication.

MADDI: Were there any moments where you really had an epiphany about why you were writing in a certain way or where it really clicked for you?

PATRICK: Early on in my career I learned that the rules of writing within my field were much different than the rules of writing that I had learned from school. Some people might look at an incident report from a facility and think it to be very repetitive and drawn out, but that is necessary because we cannot leave room for facts to be inferred within our reports. They must be factual and contain every piece of detail from the event, no matter how small.

MADDI: What kind of tools do you use to communicate?

PATRICK: As my career moves on, there is more and more digital communication used, but here at the La Salle County Detention Home, our main tool for written communication is still pen to paper. We have hand-written logbooks, admission paperwork, documentations, and staff notes. Overall, I would say that I use almost every tool to communicate except social media. Cannot say that I will ever get on that train, but you never know.

MADDI: What sort of outside bodies (bosses, organizations, laws, etc.) control the way you write?

PATRICK: As I stated in my answer to an earlier question, the foundation of my writing was learned on the job. Therefore, I would say that the way in which I write is largely controlled by the system within which I work.

MADDI: Could you explain where you fit into the hierarchy of your job? Like, who do you report to and who reports to you? And, discuss what people are affected by your writing? And, whose writing you encounter at work?

PATRICK: I am the Director of Detention Services for the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit (La Salle, Bureau, and Grundy Counties). My direct supervisor is William Pfalzgraf, Director of Court Services, and the Honorable Christopher Ryan, Chief Judge, is in charge of the entire Thirteenth Judicial Circuit. I have an Assistant Director, Shift Supervisors (5), Juvenile Detention Officers (15), Teacher, Teacher's Aide, and part-time Secretary who all report to me. I would have to say that I encounter written communication from everyone I have listed above and many more people involved within our juvenile justice system.

MADDI: How do mechanics, style, grammar, spelling, and that sort of thing factor into your writing? Do you think about them much?

PATRICK: I try my best, personally, to keep my written communications as clean as possible. That being said, I do not feel that it is the most important factor in the written communications within my field. I am not perfect by any means, but I definitely see some poor examples on a daily basis. Sometimes it makes it very difficult to receive the proper information.

MADDI: Could you talk at all about your experience in college (where did you go?), and the sorts of writing you did, and then compare that to the sorts of writing you do now in your career?

PATRICK: I am a graduate of Illinois State University ('98). Obviously, I was required to complete your basic English composition class, and I cannot say that I was very successful, but I passed. I would say that I did much better written work within my Criminal Justice major courses. Though I am not a perfect writer by any means, I would go so far as to say that I am a much better writer now than during my time in formal education.

Part Two: Q&A with Delores Robinson's ENG 101 Class

The following section was transcribed from a video of Patrick Sweeney's visit to Delores Robinson's classroom at IVCC. The video can be found at www.isuwriting.com. Delores and her students asked Patrick questions about the types of writing he does for work, the types of writing that the residents of the detention center do, and other questions about writing at the facility.

QUESTION: What is your main form of communication while working?

PATRICK: My main form of communication is face-to-face talking. Communication is huge but in my line of work with being the administrator, since we are a small facility, I want to go out and talk to the staff, talk to the residents, talk to county board members and all of that. But I also have to put it in writing. Because in my field, in criminal justice, if it is not written then it didn't happen. That is the number one key thing that we tell all employees when they come in: if it is not in writing, if it is not documented, then it didn't happen. I can go and talk to someone but if I don't follow that up with something like a memo saying, "do this," then it is not going to get done. So, writing always goes along with the face-to-face talking and communication.

QUESTION: How formal is your writing?

PATRICK: In my work, I go through all levels of writing. I write notes on a piece of scratch paper and put them in people's mail boxes, all the way up to

formal letters. I have some examples I can pass around. This one is a formal letter that I send out to the health department every year requesting an extra inspection because we are a part of the national school lunch and breakfast program and there are requirements. My writing goes anywhere from very informal to very formal.

QUESTION: What kind of writing do your residents get involved in?

PATRICK: We have a full school program, so the residents around the detention facility have Monday through Friday school year-round, minus some holidays. Our teacher and teacher's aide do all sorts of writing. They write throughout the school day. We also provide journals for the residents because we feel that writing is important, especially for the kids that are coming into the detention home to have that avenue and be able to write down their thoughts. We do monitor what they write because we want to keep it positive, as much as possible, even though they are not in a positive situation. So, writing is all throughout for them.

QUESTION: So, with the prisoner journals, is that something that is kept when they leave as an official document?

PATRICK: That is theirs and they can take it with them. It is more of a therapeutic journal. So, we want them to write about goals that they might have and things that they might do differently when they leave the detention facility. We want them to take that with them when they leave.

QUESTION: How is the communication for the detained youth different from that of an adult prisoner?

PATRICK: It is strict and they are limited. They can communicate with their families via phone but that is just parents and legal guardians. They do write letters. And some kids come in and writing letters is new to them so they learn it in the school program. They show them how you should write a letter and how to address an envelope. Their main form of written communication out is letters. They can send letters to anyone though as long as it is not in violation of their probation.

QUESTION: So, without electronic communication and no access to the internet, can you describe some of the schooling that they get?

PATRICK: The school is basically a one-room schoolhouse because we have kids that come in from all different ages. We have kids from ages 13 to 18. They are all at different levels of schooling. Our teacher will communicate with their home schools to find out what they are working on and what their assignments are. Sometimes we just get a class schedule and then our teacher will try to match it up with our materials. We do have internet access in the

classroom where they can get online to testing sites and whatnot. So, if they are at a safe school and they work on such-and-such on an online schooling site, they can still access that while they are with us.

QUESTION: You mentioned standards for everything and that those are written in manuals. So, is there any kind of policy on how the manuals are handled? Like they must be updated every blank number of years?

PATRICK: I try to update our policy manual on an on-going basis. Every year we are looking at changing things and different policies. Right now, in criminal justice and juvenile criminal justice there is a huge topic of shackling juveniles in court, which in LaSalle county, we have never done that. The kids come into court without any cuffs at all. But there has been research done and people are leaning toward starting to have juveniles shackled in court. But that is something that is changing. Getting policy changes from the state is a little bit different. Most things are still sitting on the desks of people in the Department of Juvenile Justice standards and they have been for fifteen years, so we are mostly still using the older stuff.

QUESTION: I know you said that you have to write down every encounter. Does that also apply to the kids there? If you have a conversation with them would you have to go back and write about that conversation as well?

PATRICK: It depends on the conversation. If it is just a "how are you doing" conversation, then no. Every resident has a file at the detention facility and the staff are required to handwrite log sheets for every kid. It is a requirement that for every shift, there are three shifts a day, there needs to be a documentation sheet for each resident about how their day is going and if anything major is happening. There can be multiple things that happen that need to be documented so if it is deemed important, then it needs to be passed along for other staff to read at a later time so they know what is going on. Something like that will be documented on one of those sheets.

QUESTION: So, with this sheet that you are passing around (from a previous question), what if it were to get out? Can that happen?

PATRICK: Everything about a juvenile in the court is confidential. So that information does not get out. They are all court documents so once we put their name on it and their file number on their file, then it becomes a court document. That is how we train all staff. When we write in it we treat it as a court document. We are not writing opinions, we don't write, "this kid is being a jerk today." We are writing factual statements, so if you feel that a kid is being a jerk that day, then you have to describe exactly what they are doing that is jerk-ish.

QUESTION: So how do you store all of that information? Do you have file cabinets in locked rooms?

PATRICK: Lots of file cabinets. Once the kid turns eighteen then they have aged out of the juvenile system. So, we keep their file until their eighteenth birthday and then a year beyond. And after a year beyond, I can microfilm that file and then shred the original. So, we take a picture of them and they go on film. They also scan them now. At the county in the past few years they are able to microfilm them and put them on the computer at the same time. So, I have it both ways now.

QUESTION: Is there anything that has to be written on paper or is it all electronic?

PATRICK: We have log books that are on paper. The daily documentation sheets that we keep for all of the residents are on paper. The staff communication and resident communication logs are on paper. Our mental health professionals will come in and fill out a document for the residents' files with any information from their mental health evaluations.

QUESTION: What kind of writing activities do the residents get into? Is it writing? Is it gym? Is it everything that they would get in a school? Or is it very limited what they get to do activity-wise?

PATRICK: They get exercise. Monday through Friday they have what would be the equivalent to gym. They write throughout the day in our program. There is a part of our day that is a structured activity called news notes. So, they watch the news and current events and they write notes on them to learn note-taking skills. There is another activity where they are given a thought provoking question and they have to write a page on it. They all have a journal and every morning they have to write a morning reflection type thing with another thought-provoking question or writing prompt.

QUESTION: You brought some wonderful writing artifacts with you, I would love to learn more about them. Can you describe or expand on them?

PATRICK: I have some examples of court reports. All of our staff have to fill these out for the residents. It is a report of the juvenile's stay up to that point and then those forms go to the court. I also have examples of our incident reports. These are filled out if a special incident happens that requires that the resident be put on a special program, which takes them out of our normal general program, then we write a report about it. And there is foul language in the incident reports, not the court reports, but in the incident reports. For the incident reports that staff write down exactly what happens. So, if a resident says "f--- you" to someone then that is what gets written down. Some of this other stuff is more stuff that I do. I have the letter that all of the parents are given. It basically describes the detention facility and rules for the parents for things like phone calls, mail, and whatnot. I never thought that I would be going into criminal justice and writing a lot, but I do write a lot.

QUESTION: What is the communication like between residents? Is it all talk or do they pass notes?

PATRICK: All talk. There are no notes. Well, they do pass notes, but they get in trouble. There are limits to what they can talk about. So, they are not allowed to talk about criminal activity like alcohol, narcotics, tobacco, sex. Those are topics that are no-go. The reality is that we can't listen 24/7 but if we hear it then they get in trouble. They are not allowed to pass personal information to each other, like phone numbers. And, they are not allowed to be passing notes. But we do get them. It is no different from any other school. You know, we get the ones that say "you're cute" and stuff like that.

QUESTION: How often are you in contact with the courts?

PATRICK: I am in constant contact with the courts. I will be on the phone with them probably three to four times a week. And they will come down sometimes to check things out and they will read the resident documentation sheets. So, that is what those are for.

QUESTION: Can I ask about the court document, because in relation to what we have been talking about in class, this is one of the more interesting artifacts that you brought. I have a couple of questions about it. First, when this was created, who created it? Is it the courts that need to know this specific information working sort of top down? Or is it something that originated at the center?

PATRICK: We came up with it but it gets changed and tweaked based on the courts and what they need. So, if they want to see something different then we will modify the form. But even the information that is in that, going back to when I was in Joliet, that information is all pretty basic.

QUESTION: Okay, and then I just did a quick skim but it looks like the first paragraph is about the violation, the next paragraph about school, the third is behavior, the fourth family and outside contact, and then recommendations. So, that's basic?

PATRICK: That is a basic format when we train staff. Those are the main things that we want to see in the court reports. But obviously, if there is something else that the courts want then we have to change it a little bit.

QUESTION: I love the small details that are more formal. I think that it is really interesting that these parts of formal writing make it into court documents too. Although, I suppose, the language of court is very formal.

PATRICK: This is an example of something for the union. This is a memo of understanding between the administration and the facility and the union

for the staff for something that we recently added. So that's an example of the formal writing that I might do. It is very formal.

QUESTION: Do you have to write any funding proposals or anything like that in your position as the director?

PATRICK: I have to do the budget proposal every year to the county board. That is more of a spreadsheet-type proposal. There are opportunities that come up sometimes and so recently the state had some extra money to spend on any new positions and so I wrote a proposal for an added program supervisor. The state approved it but the county board did not. I have an example of my proposal so I will pass that around. The format is a requirement that the administrative office of Illinois courts wanted. And the reason that it was not approved by the county was because that funds the salary but it would not fund benefits and the county did not want to fund more benefits at the time.

QUESTION: You said that there is schooling, including English, and I know that you are tracking that progression. Do you notice a difference in behavior or their way of verbally communication while practicing this written communication? Do you think that there is a correlation between the two?

PATRICK: We have kids, on average, for four weeks so to see a difference from when they come in and when they leave would be minimal. But the teacher does do initial testing when they come in, and if they are in the facility for more than thirty days, then she will do post-testing. So, we track that kind of stuff to see if they make any kind of advancements. Sometimes the advancement is when they came in they were not in a good mood and they didn't take the test seriously, so maybe their post-test is a little bit more accurate to their grade level and where they are at academically. There is an improvement in the communication sometimes where the kid will open up more. We have a lot of kids come through and a lot of different kinds of kids; they are all different. We have some kids who have poor social skills and poor life skills and sometimes they will be with us for longer than four weeks. So, if they are with us for sixty days then we will notice changes in them. And, unfortunately, we do have kids that come back. I have seen some residents come back five or six times, so I do see them growing up a little bit and I see changes in that.

QUESTION: How is medical treatment and documentation handled?

PATRICK: We fill out a medical questionnaire for every resident when they come in that asks very basic questions. And then our medical, which is provided through the jail, will do a physical and a tuberculosis test on all of the kids. If they are a returning kid, then they might not have to do the TB test. That is all documented. We have medical files that are all handled

by our nursing personnel. And then if there are medications, which a lot of these kids are on, we get them verified by the kids' doctor's office, our medical verifies it, and then we set up med boxes and our staff is responsible for administering the medications and making sure that it is documented that they got the meds.

QUESTION: You said that when you went into criminal justice that you didn't expect it to be so writing intensive.

PATRICK: I didn't. Writing was not my favorite thing in school. My wife is the writer in our family. We do have to write a lot. It is everywhere and I think that in schools, not just universities, they are better at letting you know that you will have to be doing a lot of writing. A lot of the writing that I do isn't what you learn in the classroom; you have to get out there in the job and you learn that way.

Mackenzie Flowers is an English–Publishing Studies major who graduated in May 2017. She enjoys reading and watching endless TV on Netflix.

Maddi Kartcheske is a junior at Illinois State University. She is currently working on a major in English with a concentration in Creative Writing and a minor in Civic Engagement and Responsibility. She is also starting her second year as an intern with the ISU Writing Program. Though she's often reading or writing, Maddi also loves listening to podcasts, playing board games, and hanging out with her family. Her dream job is to work as a professor in creative writing or rhetoric and composition.

CHAT, Would You Accept This Rose?

Addie McMullen

Reality TV shows are a guilty pleasure for many of us since they are often very dramatic—making them addicting to tune in to week after week. In this article, Addie McMullen analyzes the popular reality TV show *The Bachelor* through CHAT and the use of a survey in order to understand the complex genre of reality TV.

I hear my friend shout, "Oh my gosh!" from across the room while her boyfriend chuckles. I'm curious. I look over at the computer screen they've both been intently staring at to see what the commotion is about. I'm not exactly sure what I'm looking at so, naturally, I ask, "What are you two watching?" "The Bachelor," she responds. I'm not sure whether I should be ashamed or proud of what I'm about to tell you, but . . . I was hooked from the start.

The Bachelor is a reality TV show where one single guy sets out on a journey to find true love. During the first episode, he's introduced to 25 beautiful, single women who all want the same thing: to spend the rest of their life with him as his wife. As I watched the season unfold, the concept of the show became more and more fascinating to me. I wanted to know more.

Genres, Genres, Everywhere

The 20th season of *The Bachelor* aired while I was enrolled in my English 101 class at Illinois State. This helped me to identify it as a genre of its own;

although, after further examination, I realized it isn't quite its own genre but it does fit into the genre of reality TV. Before that class, I thought a genre was just a way to classify things like movies, books, and music. What I didn't know was that genres are practically everywhere. This article that you're reading right now fits into a genre. In preparation for this article, I created a survey for my friends to take—that's also a genre. A **genre** is a category that has certain similarities in not only subject matter, but also in form and style. For example, let's look at surveys. Generally, surveys are set up a certain way. There should be at least one question followed by either several responses to choose from or a blank space where one is supposed to write a personal response. If I were to create a survey that was formatted like a *Grassroots* article, it would no longer be a survey because it wouldn't conform to the typical characteristics found within the genre of surveys. Now that I have defined what a genre is, let's look at how to analyze one.

CHAT, Would You Accept This Rose?

In order to understand the complex genre of reality TV, I would like to take this time to look at *The Bachelor* through the lens of CHAT, or **cultural-historical activity theory**. Using several different aspects, CHAT helps us analyze writing as a whole and consider what happens to a genre once it's out in the world (Sharp-Hoskins and Frost 1). While there are a total of seven aspects of CHAT, I decided to focus on only four in this article. I looked to the ISU Writing website when defining each of these aspects.

The first aspect of CHAT I want to focus on is **production**, which is how a text is produced (Sharp-Hoskins and Frost, p. 1). This aspect is somewhat simple. The show itself is produced through the camera men that film everything. Then they have editors that sort through all of the footage and choose the best takes to include in the final product. The show also has producers who oversee every aspect of video production—they usually have the most say in what stays and what goes. The producers of *The Bachelor* also consistently structure the show the same way each season it's aired, which follows along with the definition of a genre (where it is described as a category that has certain similarities in form and style). I have noticed that not only is *The Bachelor* always structured the same way, but so are most reality TV shows.

This brings me to the next aspect, **activity**, or the actual actions that people engage in while creating a text (Sharp-Hoskins and Frost 1).

Throughout the season of *The Bachelor*, the contestants, along with the bachelor, travel to amazing destinations and go on various dates. There are the "group dates," when a large group of the girls go on a date with the bachelor. As you can imagine, these dates can get pretty heated since there is more than one girl fighting for the same guy's attention. Then there are the "two-on-one" dates, which are pretty straight-forward— two of the girls go on a date with the bachelor. These dates can also be intense because one of the contestants is typically sent home at the conclusion. And, finally, there are the "one-on-one" dates. The bachelor usually chooses a girl that really stood out to him to go on these. All of the contestants long for these dates because they're typically quite extravagant—they're not your normal dinner and a movie kind of date. They also give the lucky girl the bachelor's undivided attention, which is rare. Did I mention roses?

Every episode of *The Bachelor* ends in a "rose ceremony." During the rose ceremony, the bachelor is given a certain number of roses to hand out to the contestants. Each time he hands someone a rose he asks, "[Name], would you accept this rose?" Contestants who receive a rose are safe and will return the following week, while contestants who don't receive a rose are sent home. In addition, there is one rose given out on the very first night, coined the "first impression rose." There is also a rose given out after each type of date. Whoever receives a rose in these situations is safe for the week and safe from the anxiety caused by the rose ceremony. Then the finale, called the "Final Rose" episode, is where the bachelor is supposed to decide which woman he can't live without and get down on one knee. As you can see, activity is a very important aspect to look at when analyzing a genre.

Representation, or the way that the people who produce a text think about and plan it, is a little more complicated in terms of *The Bachelor* (Sharp-Hoskins and Frost 1). Technically, the show is reality TV, so nothing should be planned out ahead of time. Unfortunately, that isn't exactly the case. I don't think the producers go so far as to script things exactly, but they definitely do have quite a bit of control over what happens on the show. When the bachelor meets all of the women during the first episode, they each have a short amount of time to make their first impression after exiting the limo they arrived in. According to *Bustle* journalist Martha Sorren, former "bachelor" Sean Lowe revealed that the producers actually plan the order in which the contestants exit the limos. They pick the two women that they think have the best chance of ending up with the bachelor to be the first and the last contestants out of the limos. The order in which the contestants are called during the rose ceremonies is also planned out by producers because they want the most obvious choices to be called first so that the ending is more

suspenseful (Sorren 1). I've only included in this article a couple of examples of how the producers control what happens on the show, but there are certainly many more. After all, their goal is to make the show as dramatic and as entertaining as possible.

One thing I find fascinating about the show is the fact that the contestants and the bachelor himself aren't allowed to talk about the show until it's aired on TV. Talking about it would give things away, and nobody wants that. That's why socialization is an important aspect to consider when analyzing *The Bachelor*. **Socialization** is defined as how people interact as they produce, distribute, and use texts (Sharp-Hoskins and Frost 1). After the final rose ceremony aired this past season, the newly engaged bachelor, along with his fiancé, could finally be seen together in public. He talked about how nice it would be to finally not have to be "in hiding." If they had been seen together before the last episode of the season had aired on TV, people would obviously know how the whole thing ends. In addition, while the show is being filmed, contestants aren't allowed to talk to the bachelor unless it's on camera because the producers don't want anything to be left out. They want every step of the bachelor's journey documented (Sorren 1). Contestants have also mentioned several times that they aren't allowed to have cell phones, books, music, or anything else that could possibly distract them while the show is being filmed. I don't know about you, but that would make me go crazy!

Finally, how viewers feel about the show relates to its **reception** (Sharp-Hoskins and Frost 1). *The Bachelor* is intended to entertain its audience members. In order to understand how viewers feel about the show, I decided to conduct a survey.

True Love or Scripted Entertainment?

My survey consisted of several open-ended questions because I didn't want to limit my respondents to only a few options to choose from. I wanted to learn their independent views. I created the survey on Survey Monkey and posted the link to it on my Facebook profile, hoping to appeal to my friends who have either seen the show or, at the very least, heard about it. By the time my survey expired I had fourteen respondents, but, after reviewing the responses, I chose to only focus on five of these in this article due to repetitiveness. The five I chose showed the greatest variation in responses and stood out the most by bringing up interesting ideas that I thought would be beneficial to this article.

For the first question of my survey, I simply wanted to know what comes to mind when people see or hear about the popular reality TV show *The Bachelor* (Figure 1).

Respondent One: A hot guy looking for love.

Respondent Two: Drama, but I love seeing all the awesome places they get to visit during the show!

Respondent Three: I think it's a fake kind of show that doesn't produce love, but infatuation. It's easy to fall in love with beautiful people in beautiful places with no real problems. It never lasts.

Respondent Four: Women who are desperate to find a man who will commit to them.

Respondent Five: There is NO way people are there to find love. It's all about ratings, sex, and fame. It's a bunch of people seeking attention.

Figure 1: The five responses, from the respondents I chose to focus on, to my first question.

While analyzing the responses to my first question, I couldn't help but notice a trend: drama. Most of the respondents seemed to believe that the show creates lots of drama between the contestants. Since I have seen the show, I can definitely understand why they would say that. There's quite a lot of drama and tension during the first couple of episodes in particular since there are more girls trying to make time with the bachelor. This drama relates to the socialization aspect of CHAT because feelings are often hurt and rumors are spread. It can get pretty ugly.

The next question I asked on my survey was, "What do you like/dislike about the show?" (See responses in Figure 2).

Respondent One: I love everything about the show.

Respondent Two: I like when the bachelor is a faithful individual and doesn't only make their decision based on looks.

Respondent Three: I don't like that it is one person who basically dates 25 other people simultaneously. Also, they are always beautiful, thin women and handsome, thin men. The people seem fake, like actors.

Respondent Four: I don't like the show. It's a competition that is televised.

Respondent Five: That it isn't real. It's helping to bring our society down as a whole. I think it gives a demoralizing ideal of dating.

Figure 2: The five responses to my second question.

This question was focused on the CHAT aspect of reception. I wanted to understand what people thought of the show. Responses to this question

showed the most variation. The responses I received from Respondents Three and Five, in particular, stood out to me. They both saw the show as being "fake" in some way, even though it's claimed to be "reality TV." Respondent Three viewed the show as being fake because the people on it all look the same—they're all thin and beautiful. I would have to agree. It wouldn't hurt to add a little diversity to the show.

Next, I wanted to know if viewers believe participation in the show is an effective way to meet your future spouse (Figure 3).

Respondent One: I'd say it's up to the person. If you find it easy to fall in love and trust someone, it is probably very effective.

Respondent Two: No. You need more time to focus your feelings on one person at a time.

Respondent Three: Definitely not. You can't fall in love if you force 25 people to date one person over a few months. The odds that the marriage actually works out are very, very slim.

Respondent Four: No. I don't believe participation in a TV show is an effective way. It's a competition. People attempt to provide TV entertainment.

Respondent Five: Absolutely not. It's never worked out yet. There is nothing real about it. Things are staged for better ratings and they play upon the contestants' emotional states.

Figure 3: The five responses to the third question of my survey.

When asked if the show is an effective way to meet your future spouse, all but one of the respondents were not convinced. Personally, I agree with the respondents that said no. Only a few of the relationships have lasted after the show, so there must be better ways of meeting the love of your life. Respondent Five brought up an interesting point when they said, "Things are staged for better ratings and they play upon the contestants' emotional states." A widowed contestant on the 19th season of the show was made to look like a terrible person when producers "made it appear that she was callously using her tragedy to get ahead in the game" (Yahr 1). This kind of behavior from producers was soon confirmed when a former producer, Sarah Shapiro, confessed that she "had somehow become an expert at manipulating female contestants behind the scenes to get 'good television' for the reality dating show" (Syme 1). The manipulation the producers often use to make the show more entertaining relates to the CHAT aspect of representation. Learning about that kind of manipulation makes me sick. I guess I should have known. Reality TV is never REALLY "reality."

For my final question, I was curious to learn viewers' opinions on dating on the show, since that is, in fact, what the show is all about (Figure 4).

Respondent One: I wouldn't really call it dating. The contestants and the bachelor really only finish their first date throughout the show.

Respondent Two: I don't think it is realistic, and there isn't enough time for a person to get to know someone well enough for marriage.

Respondent Three: **Chose not to respond.

Respondent Four: Seems like dates need to be TV worthy. Dates don't seem like "reality" to me.

Respondent Five: It's a joke.

Figure 4: The five responses to my final question.

In response to my last question, all of the respondents said that dating on the show isn't "real dating." Some believed that they don't have enough time to really get to know each other, which I can agree with. The entire show is filmed over a few months, which is not much time to get to know someone enough to propose to them. Not only that, but the bachelor also isn't just getting to know one girl in this short amount of time; there are several in the mix. It's all very complicated and rushed.

All in all, in terms of the CHAT aspect of reception, Respondents Three, Four, and Five definitely hinted at the fact that they didn't like the show very much. They claimed that it's fake, which isn't completely false considering the fact that producers control certain things that happen on the show. Personally, I enjoyed watching season 20 of the show. While it may not be "reality," it did keep me entertained.

A Final Rose

Now I hope you have a better understanding of the complex genre of reality TV shows that *The Bachelor* belongs in. Looking at the show through the lens of CHAT and the survey I conducted really changed the way I think about the show. The show that drew me in from the start might not be as genuine as I had once thought, but now I know what makes it, along with other reality shows like it, so entertaining for myself and many others. Reality TV is truly a fascinating genre to look at. If you have never seen *The Bachelor*, I hope I've at least made you a little curious about it so that, when the next season airs, you'll try it out yourself.

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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 January 20, 2018. The deadline for consideration in our 10.1 (Fall 2019) issue is May 15, 2018. Please contact the Associate Editor at grassrootswriting@gmail.com with queries about possible submissions and to submit your work.

Queries and Drafts

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

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

Honoraria

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

Style and Tone

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Media, Mode, and Copyright Issues

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

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

Researching for *Grassroots*

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

But what does it really mean? In more practical language, it means finding some situation where humans are doing things that involve language (which can mean composing in 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. Issue 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, or Su Yin Khor's article "Multilingual Notes as a Tool to Understand Super Dense Readings" in Issue 7.2. 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.

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