

GRASSROOTS WRITING RESEARCH JOURNAL

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From the Editors

We are pleased to present the fourth, and perhaps the strongest yet, issue of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*. This issue examines several themes related to genre studies and writing research, including a number of “everyday” genres in order to support our mission of investigating and supporting grassroots writing.

Accordingly, several authors in this issue explore everyday genres that utilize non-traditional modes. **Evan Nave** takes to the streets to talk about how the act of writing creates writers just as graffiti writing creates the artist in “In Search of SOL: Graffiti and the Formation of a Writing Identity.” **Lisa L. Phillips’** “Writing with Tattoo Ink: Composing that Gets Under the Skin” posits tattoos as a collaborative writing process composed by the tattoo artist and client. **Dustin Grayson’s** “If Wallets Could Talk: Investigating the Genre of Receipts” shows how a lot can be learned about where something was bought from and the personality of who bought it by taking a closer look at these small slips of paper.

In our first ever multimodal publication, **Karly Marie Grice** tries out, researches, and talks to others in a quest to teach herself a new genre in “Journey to the Center of a Vlog: One Woman’s Exploration of the Genre of Video Blogs.” The companion piece that is printed in this hard copy contains the URL to the vlog and helpful advice for how to read it. In additional explorations of online genres, **Marc Vanderjack’s** “Sass in 140 Characters: Learning to Communicate on the Social Network” shows how to learn and fine tune writing with space limitations in Facebook and Twitter and **Erin Kilian** demonstrates how features of instant messaging have enhanced her relationship with her sister, even through difficult times in “I Think, Therefore IM: Instant Messaging and Sisterhood.”

The next articles explore the complex relationships between writing and audience. **Nicole Osolin’s** “Sports Journalists Have Love/Hate Relationship with Comment Boxes” details the “ever-blurring roles of ‘author’ and ‘reader’ in online spaces” as she sees in reader comments contesting a sports writer’s opinion. In “One Audience Too Many: An Interview on Prescriptive and Receptive Audiences in Screenwriting,” **Irina Nersessova** interviews a film student to discuss how audience interaction affects the production of a film. To examine how grammar rules often depend on audience, **Sarah Scharlau’s** “Commas Here, Commas There, Commas Everywhere!” shows how using commas changes across writing styles.

The next set of articles consider Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT): **Tyler Kostecki's** "Understanding Language and Culture with Cultural Historical Activity Theory" lays out the foundations for thinking about writing and genres in their creational contexts, ideas that are picked up by **Moria Torrington** as she talks about specific writing aspects and practices. "The Grape Dimetapp™ Effect: Revising the 'Revision as Medicine' Metaphor" uses CHAT to walk through her cousin's revision process draft by draft. In an analysis informed by dating culture, rather than CHAT, **Samantha Stout** compares her writing process to a romantic relationship in "My Relationship with Writing."

In order to compliment these everyday genres with genres found in business environments, **Brad Ure's** "From Cordially Yours to What's Up: Investigating Formal and Informal Letters" comparatively analyzes formal and informal letter writing to show differences between the two related but different genres. Reprinted from the journal's very first edition, **Erin Frost's** encounter with the once unfamiliar-to-her genre of quad charts demonstrates one possible approach to rhetorical genre studies research in "So What's a Quad Chart, Exactly?: Exercises in Genre."

The *GWRJ* will continue to publish an issue twice a year. To guide authors in crafting articles, the *GWRJ* editors are happy to once again provide "Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*" as the final article in this issue. This article offers information on the mission, style, and submission guidelines for the journal that we hope will guide writers in preparing articles on genre and writing research for *GWRJ*.

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

Evan Nave

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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Writing with Tattoo Ink: Composing that Gets Under the Skin

Lisa L. Phillips

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Endnotes

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



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

If Wallets Could Talk: Investigating the Genre of Receipts

Dustin Grayson

In this article, Grayson attempts to break down and categorize one of the most popular, yet rarely regarded, literary genres of our culture—the receipt. While receipts may appear to be simple documents recounting basic information, they in fact contain a wealth of data that is revealing of both the issuer's business practices and the recipient's personality and character.

Reach into your pockets and pull out any receipts you may have stuffed in them. Dig through your wallet, your purse, your winter jacket, your beach shorts, your recycle bin, your sofa cushions, your desk drawers, and kitchen table. Collect your concert tickets, movie stubs, and gas pump printouts. Collect them all and splay them out in front of you. Be sure to give yourself plenty of room. Once you have rested that last piece of paper down, you have made art. What you have just created is a mosaic, a self-portrait for our modern age. Each document reveals some detail about its owner, sometimes revealing too much. And if you gather enough of these little and seemingly innocuous slips, a story, a picture, a biography is formed.

We All Know What a Receipt Is, Right? Maybe Not

There are various types of receipts. There are the obvious sorts, like an ATM or credit card receipt, or the long slip the clerk gives you at a grocery store. Then there are more specialized kinds, like opera tickets and confirmation emails. Traditionally, receipts are given to the patron

<i>The Dascha</i>	
◇ <i>fine Russian cuisine</i> ◇	
<i>Transaction #70819 1/16/2012 8:10PM</i>	
<i>Your server - Elena</i>	
<i>2 Borsch - small</i>	<i>\$8.40</i>
<i>1 Salad</i>	<i>\$2.75</i>
<i>1 Shashlyk - Beef</i>	<i>\$13.80</i>
<i>1 Pelmeni</i>	<i>\$9.60</i>
<i>2 Kvas</i>	<i>\$4.50</i>
<i>2 Tort - chocolate</i>	<i>\$7.00</i>
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>\$46.05</i>
<i>Tax</i>	<i>\$3.68</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$49.73</i>
<i>Tip</i>	<i>-----</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>-----</i>
<i>"Bolshoi spasibo!"</i>	
<i>*Customer Copy*</i>	

Figure 1: Sample Restaurant Receipt

after they have received a service or product. These are to be used as proof of an exchange. There are also more specific types of receipts that are given out before a service is rendered, like those of concert or movie tickets. What I find interesting about receipts, which is why I am writing this article, is that they can serve a variety of functions and purposes for both the author and the recipient. Every receipt ever written was shaped to convey very specific information and goals. They must be concise, as most are limited in space. Let's take the receipt shown in Figure 1. On this little form, we have the name of the establishment, the number of the transaction, the date, an itemized list of the items purchased, the subtotal, amount charged in tax, the conveniently-added-for-you total, and the final personal touch of gratitude. Let's break down these elements to discover the wealth of information hidden in this small, concise text. What follows is a discussion of the generic features of receipts that I have found through a little investigating.

The Name of the Business

The name of the business is almost always printed on a receipt. This simple inclusion helps the customer remember or prove that they patronized that establishment. Proof of purchase may be necessary for returns or complaints. The name appearing on the receipt is also like a small billboard for the business. When you look at the receipt, their name appears. In my wallet, I have advertisements for US Bank, Chipotle, Noodles and Company, and Holiday Theaters. I see their names and I either think about going back or never going back. The receipt can also advertise to others. As many people litter their receipts or leave them lying about, other people can gaze upon them and mentally revisit their association with that company. Someone could find the ticket stub shown above and think, "Oh, the Holiday 8 is showing Batman. I want to go there and see that." This link between the business name and its product leads us to the next point.

The Item

Printing the item on the receipt is practical because it registers exactly what product or service was rendered. This information is essential because both the customer and the business can prove that the item was charged. Try taking a shirt back to Express with a receipt that does not list that a

particular shirt was purchased. They might refuse the return, or—even worse—think it was stolen! The receipt is your proof. And don't forget, naming the item advertises the product they are selling. Let's remember the person who randomly comes upon the ticket stub. "Oh," he says to himself, "They're showing Dark Knight."



Figure 2: Sample Movie Ticket

The Transaction Number

Do you ever wonder what those strange numbers on your receipts mean? I know that I've asked myself: Why are they there? What do they do? I never learned until I became a manager at a movie theater in my early twenties. Transaction numbers are printed on the receipt for the business to be able to track down the exact purchase in their records. Shorter numbers usually refer to batch processing, which means that the company clears and organizes their transactions in groups. Most companies limit their transaction pool to daily. Some receipts do not get processed at the end of the day, and that can lead to some pretty giant numbers.

The Date

This convention is rather straightforward. You were at that business at that exact time. Knowing the time the transaction took place can be helpful for a number of reasons. The date can work like the transaction number, as the business can bring up the transaction in their records by the date. In my personal experience as a theater manager, I would use the time stamp to find the customer on the surveillance footage. If there was a complaint about an employee, I could see on the footage who the employee was and find out exactly what happened. The date also serves as proof of purchase in case some stores limit returns to a certain number of days, like 60 or 90 days from the date of purchase. Finally, the date can be used to establish a time frame. If I get audited from the Internal Revenue Service, I could prove that certain purchases were made in that given year. The time stamp could also be helpful if you need an alibi!

The Prices

Have you ever been overcharged for something? Did the box office attendant charge you for an adult ticket when you explicitly said you were a student? Were you charged an evening rate for a matinee? It happens. Or, have you ever been flabbergasted when you get your receipt and the total is way bigger than you thought it would be? That situation happens to me almost every time I go to Schnucks. I scrutinize the prices, do the math quickly in my head, and then realize that yes, I do owe them that enormous amount

of money. The price is printed on the receipt to resolve many such situations. Plus, it tells the retailer how much money to refund you if you make a return. How convenient!

“That Personal Touch”

Businesses are streamlining their practices to reduce the amount of time it takes to complete an order. The thermal paper printout is an example of this reformation practice. Before thermal paper became an industry standard, receipts had to be printed line-by-line, sometimes on carbon copy sheets. Carbon copying is a time consuming task that requires the clerk to detach the receipt from its roll of paper, remove the perforated tabs that were used to feed the sheets through the printer, and separate the business’s copy from that of the customer. Businesses have found a clever way to use receipts to streamline efforts and boost the breadth of their advertising network. They have managed to effectively negotiate these goals through the appearance of quality customer service. Customer service is a tool that businesses employ to further increase their sales, whether it is upselling (“Would you like fries with that?”), negotiating (“While the car is valued at \$16,000, let me talk to my manager to see if I can get that number lowered for you.”), or alleviating any doubts a customer may have about buying a product (“That color goes great with your skin tone.”). Good customer service also includes recommendations of services and products, and an expression of gratitude to the customer for their patronage. Well, now that information can be printed on the receipt and make the transaction time shorter.

While some companies give the same recommendation on every receipt, other businesses have taken advantage of receipts for direct marketing. Using computerized systems, businesses can make recommendations based on the nature of the item(s) purchased. For instance, my Noodles & Company receipt recommends for me to “Try one of our 5 new sandwiches.” How did they know that I didn’t know they made sandwiches? What if I had ordered one? That would have been both poor service and awkward. But their software may have known that I did not order a sandwich, so the recommendation for their new product gets imprinted on my receipt. This process can be very effective. Just writing this article, I am reminded that I would like to try a California Melt at Wendy’s. Hey, Burger King, I’ll be back for that BBQ chicken sandwich. Keep it warm for me. Thank you too, US Bank. I will go mobile with you.

Of Course it’s Not a Perfect Genre

As straightforward as these conventions seem, receipts still fail. While I was working at the movie theater, I would routinely get asked by customers what auditorium they are supposed to go into. I’d ask for their ticket and

get annoyed because the usher had accidentally torn off that part of the ticket when they were redeeming the pass. It wasn't really the usher's fault, after all, because the thick paper was thinly perforated, leaving rough tears, missing information, and confused movie patrons. And what about those times when you try to take something back and the clerk can't find the item information because the text is jumbled, confusing, or vague? Take a look at the Monica's Closet receipt. How would the clerk be able to discern if the "women's shirt" of the receipt refers to the same item their customer is trying to return? The clerk may not accept the return. Also, a lot of businesses have a policy to collect the customer's receipt during a return transaction. This policy can cause a problem for their customer, as the customer may want to return another item on the receipt and now they don't have one!

Monica's Closet		
Prairie Hills Mall, Prairie Hills, MI (555) 529-9479 Or find us on the web! www.monicasclosetprahills.com		

12/1/11	2:23pm	Ashley G.
Women's Shirt		\$12
Moni Shoes		\$29
	Tax	\$3.28
	Total	\$44.28
<i>Bring back this receipt and get a \$5 discount on your next purchase!</i>		

Figure 3: Sample Retail Receipt

Receipts Have Other Purposes Too

Sometimes there might be more text on the receipt than was originally printed on it. Receipts can be a way to interact with the business or customer in a way that is not defined by the printed text. Often a clerk or a waitress or a Girl Scout will add little notes to the slip they hand you. They'll write, "Thanks for coming," "Pick up Monday," or "Cute dress!" For many restaurant credit card receipts, you are prompted to write in the tip and total. Occasionally, there will be a comment section, an area where you are free to write anything about your experience. Your only limit is the small amount of space provided. Sometimes someone will write a note for the waitress even if there isn't a designated space.

In the fall of 2011, Seattle bartender Victoria Liss received a different kind of tip from one of her customers. Instead of money, he left her a note on his receipt that said, "P.S. You could stand to loose [sic] a few pounds." Not only was his crude suggestion on the receipt, but as it was a credit card receipt, it also had his name printed on it. Outraged and hurt, Liss looked the man's name up on Facebook and found the profile of a man with his name and a picture that resembled her customer. She also uploaded a photo of the receipt onto her profile for all of her friends to see, comment on, and share with others. The news of this "tip" spread, and was even featured on ABC News.¹ Liss did not stop there. Photocopies of "Andrew Meyer's" profile picture were printed and taped on the windows of several Seattle area

restaurants and bars. A manhunt was underway. Unfortunately, the Andrew Meyer in her photo was not the same man as her customer, but someone who simply shares the name. Receipts can have power. They can help or hurt people. Because the receipt's text included this man's name, another man was affected and unfairly ridiculed. The original Meyer could not have known the trajectory of his text when it was written, nor could Liss have known that he would say something so cruel when she handed him the paper.²

Perhaps Even Better than a Photo Album

Take another look at that collage you made earlier. How many of these documents hold a memory for you? Do you remember receiving these papers? Do you remember where you were and what you were doing? If you remember, then the receipt has an agency, a power you can access by merely looking at it. You were somewhere, you did something, you connected with someone, and now you have proof. Now you can remember. Receipts have a value that supersedes their intention as mere bills of sale. Some people collect ticket stubs, concert tickets, or let their wallets puff with wads of thermal paper. Philately, otherwise known as stamp collecting, is a passionate hobby of many people. ISU PhD student Ryan Edel offered a comment on receipts when he observed, "Usually, they mean more to me than the exchange of cash. For me, they're more like markers of memory. I use them to remember where I've been, who I went there with, and essentially who I was at the time." Receipts are mementos. Why buy a key chain of a palm tree when your plane ticket says it all? As the associations we keep are personal, perhaps we buy those key chains not so we can remember, but so we can show others we have been somewhere exotic.

This distinction marks a division between the types of mementos we show others and those we keep for ourselves. We keep receipts on our body, in our pockets, in our wallets next to pictures of our loved ones. They crowd our night stand, fill in our scrapbooks. But of course not all receipts are worth keeping, and we may just be too lazy to throw those away. Despite these reasons, these small documents can still strike a stirring memory. A receipt is more than just a piece of paper, and whatever is written on the receipts has a degree of power.

I would like to finish this article by discussing the present state of these little wonders. Receipts are disappearing. As technology has progressed, physical receipts have become almost obsolete. Retailers have a financial incentive to implement software that allows the customer to choose whether or not they would like a printed receipt. As we are becoming more sensitive

to our environment, meaning we want to cut down fewer trees and fill in fewer landfills, many of us are starting to decline the printout offer on routine purchases. Technology is making transactions easier and less expensive for both the vendor and the consumer. Internet purchases have become incredibly popular. I buy most of my non-grocery items from Amazon.com. They don't charge tax, and with my student status, I get free two-day shipping on everything I buy through them. What does this internet explosion mean for our little friends, receipts? Internet vendors send digital receipts to the e-mail accounts of their customers. Since these receipts are not limited to the size of a small piece of paper, they can include a lot more information such as estimated shipping times, return policies, vendor information, and recommended products based on your purchase. Technology has become so advanced that advertising can become more and more specific to a customer's taste, especially with many purchases. As the recommendations become better tuned to the customer's tastes, the customer will be more likely to continue purchasing from that website. This cycle leads to less in-store purchasing and fewer receipts to fill your wallet.

While the digitization of receipts is certainly better for the environment, I still plan on requesting a receipt if I want to remember that moment later. And I'm glad that I do, because every time I open my wallet, I have a positive thought. That bank slip reminds me of the time a group of my friends and I swung by US Bank on the way to The Castle to see a Talking Heads tribute concert. I hold this slip and I instantly remember what songs I liked, how we danced, that weird tattoo that one guy had on his hip of David Byrne, and how my roommate showed up and owned the dance floor. I remember even much more than that, but I'll leave those memories for me and the next time I open my wallet.

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1. Kindelan, Katie. "Seattle Waitress Exposes Rude Tipper Online, Nabs Wrong Guy." ABC News. 13 Oct. 2011. <<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2011/10/seattle-waitress-exposes-rude-tipper-online-nabs-wrong-guy/>>.
2. Several employees across the United States have banded together to participate in <http://15percent.tumblr.com/>. Stilted employees can post photos of receipts to show how their customers have gyped them.



Dustin Grayson is a Creative Writing Master's student who is obsessed with pop culture, food, and nearly all forms of art. And the genre: bildungsroman. When he is not hanging around the English Department, or watching or talking about movies, he is busy whispering into his wallet, wishing his receipts would finally talk back.

Journey to the Center of a Vlog: One Woman's Exploration of the Genre of Video Blogs

Karly Marie Grice

In a webtext comprised of a collection of videos, Grice discusses her journey from uninformed, sporadic vlog watcher to novice vlog author through practice, theoretical research, and conversations with others both inside and outside of the vlogging community. She uses Cultural Historical Activity Theory and genre studies, especially an analysis of the antecedent genres of vlogs, in order to discover how our society's values and expectations help shape the conventions of the genre. The brief overview that appears here in print is only a supplement to the webtext, available at <http://www.youtube.com/user/kmgrice84>.

Why Vlogs?

I've always been a fan of things that make me laugh. Humor is definitely the key to my heart. So whenever one of my friends would post a link to a hilarious video on my Facebook wall, I wouldn't hesitate to click on the link and follow my computer to my own private comedy club in the privacy of my own home. Occasionally these videos would be a part of something much larger, a full collection of videos put out by an author on a central idea or theme. I would find myself losing hours of the day watching video after video and becoming a follower of the author's work, posting his or her videos on my own wall and peddling them to my friends as if I were getting paid on commission to spread the author's video empire.

The power this genre had over me (as well as thousands of other viewers), without even realizing what that genre was fascinated me. I decided to attempt to demystify this genre by discovering more about it. As I'm one of those hands-on learners who never really grasps a concept until I dive in and do it myself, I thought the best way to understand the "Wonderful Wizard of Vlogs" was to take a peek behind the curtain myself and make my own. After all, I thought, how hard could posting a few videos *be*? Point, shoot, share, right?

Project VLOG

I started my journey with research. I read about vlogs and watched hours of videos online. All of this gave me the confidence I needed to just jump right in. So, I picked up my video recorder, turned it on, and realized very quickly that I had no idea what I was doing. From that point on, I started to understand what it meant to really use my own vlog as a learning experience. Each time I tried to mimic what I was seeing in another author's vlog, I realized the extra training I needed. I needed to learn video editing techniques, scripting, staging, and online video sharing programs. Because of this hands-on learning process, it's easy to see a marked difference in the quality of my videos as they go.

With each video I started to learn more skills of vlog production, but what I feel was more important for my project was the identity my vlog began to develop. My mental picture of all vlogs was based on my shallow viewing habits: I thought they were all just funny video series and was having a hard time making my vlog fit into that identity. Was there room out there for a little informative/documentary vlog about one person's learning experience? After becoming a part of the vlogging community, I started having conversations with other authors of vlogs and talking about their experiences. Through them, I discovered a variety of vlogs, each unique in personality and topic. I found cosmetic tutorial vlogs, political affiliation vlogs, and personal diary style vlogs. Political vlogger Jonathan Barth made me see how the very nature of the online composing experience opens up the possibilities of the genre. An author can publish whatever kind of vlog she wants to, and somewhere out there in cyberspace there just might be an audience interested in that very same type of vlog.

The Nitty Gritty of Vlogs: Getting Acquainted with the Format of a Vlog

The vlog genre is a video evolution of the more textual blog. With a vlog, like its blog predecessor, an author records her ideas in video form, generally short in length, and posts them online in a central website location. While blogs generally use hosting sites like *Blogger*, vlogs can be created with any video hosting site like *YouTube*. An author creates a username and "channel" based on the type of vlog. The idea of posting continually on one's channel is to attract audiences who will subscribe to the channel like a magazine. As subscribers, these members will receive updates every time a change or post is made.

Since vlogs are structured around this regular, series style online publication, it often helps to watch vlog videos in order. If you're a newcomer to a vlog-in-progress (i.e., this vlog has been going for some time and has several videos you haven't seen), it helps to go to the beginning and get caught

up. Many vloggers will reference in their current videos comments or ideas they discussed in their previous videos, so a viewer could be missing out on some information by not watching them all. Fortunately for those viewers who don't have time to watch every video posted, most video posts are also structured to stand independently and discuss a separate idea.

Another convention of the vlogging genre is the interaction between author and audience through comment boxes and "like/dislike" buttons. Viewers can respond to ideas or questions posed by the author, share their opinion about the vlog with the author, request alterations to the vlog or specific topics for future videos, whatever they're compelled to do. These interactive qualities of the vlog make the text dynamic and adaptive, just like its technological medium. The vlog itself is shaped by the viewers' interactions with it, so in a way the audience plays a part in the authorship of the vlog.

For those viewers who aren't as familiar with the structure of a vlog, below you'll find a breakdown of the components of my own vlog to show you how to maneuver through my online webtext. When reaching a vlog's channel or home page, you might see something like Figure 1.¹

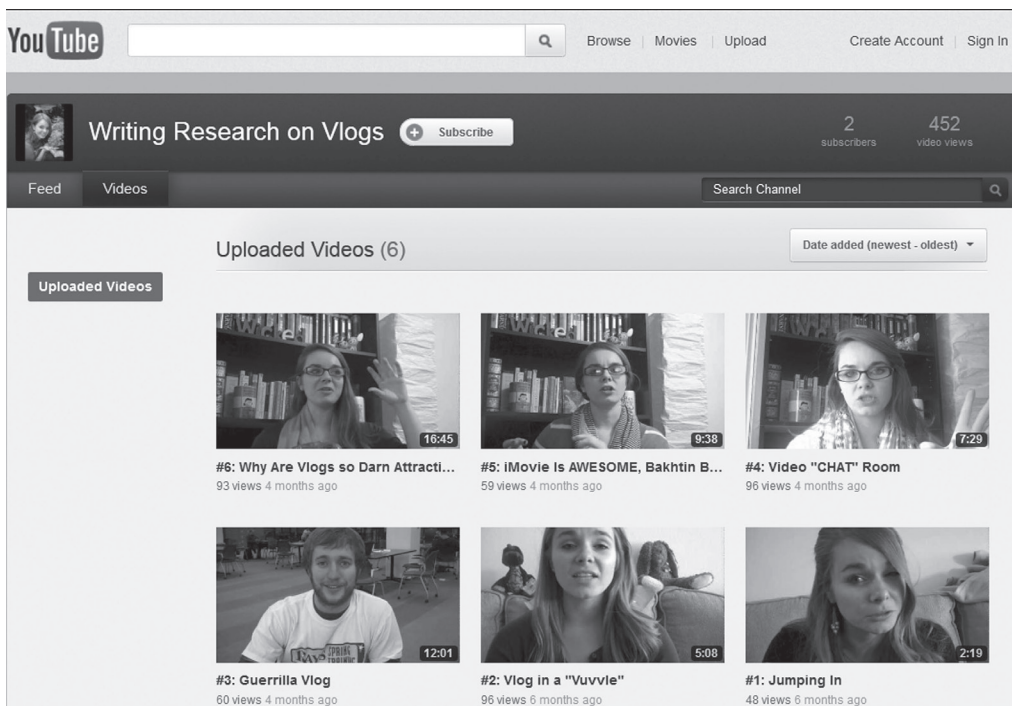


Figure 1: Welcoming Vlog Screen

This screen shows the title of the channel as well as all the author's uploaded videos in reverse chronological order. In order to watch a video, you'll need to move your cursor over the desired video thumbnail image and click.

After clicking on the chosen video, you'll be taken to a separate screen that will play the video and provide you with more information (see Figure 2). Above every video will be its specific title. Beneath it, you'll find the date it was posted, the number of times someone has viewed this specific video, and a short blurb explaining it. This lower information box, lovingly nicknamed a "doobly-doo" by vloggers Hank and John Green, is where the author can provide the audience with a summary of the video along with any other important information like sources or links. This information will be originally condensed due to screen space, so in order to see everything the author has written, you'll need to click the "Show more" tab.



Figure 2: Specific Video Screen

This screen is also where audience interaction occurs. If you would like to let the author know your thoughts on the video, you could "like" or "dislike" it by clicking on the thumbs up/thumbs down boxes. You can also provide very specific feedback and even ask the author questions by typing in the comment box below the doobly-doo (see Figure 3).

Drumroll, Please!

And now, I give you the fruits of my labor! Follow the link to my vlog, "Writing Research on Vlogs": <http://www.youtube.com/user/kmgrice84>.

The screenshot displays the top section of a YouTube video player. At the top, there are interaction buttons: 'Like' (thumbs up), 'Dislike' (thumbs down), 'Add to' (plus sign and dropdown arrow), 'Share', and a flag icon. To the right, it shows '70 views' and a small bar chart icon. Below these buttons, the video title is partially visible: 'Uploaded by kmgrice84 on Dec 12, 2011'. The video description reads: 'In this video, I reflect on some of the topics that were discussed in video #3 and respond to a message I received from an active vlogger who comments on his own participation in the vlogging community.' To the right of the description, it says '3 likes, 0 dislikes'. A 'Show more' button is centered below the description. Underneath, the 'All Comments (2)' section is shown, with a 'see all' link on the right. A comment box is present with the text 'Sign In or Sign Up now to post a comment!'. Below the comment box, a comment is visible: 'Yes why not do a books on vlog type series? something like audio books but on a vlog format with possibly with types of cut aways or interaction. then I could say I have knowldge of a book that others maybe reading' by user 'iceman2434' posted '2 months ago'.

Figure 3: Comment Feature

Watch, comment, like or dislike if you want (since you are free as an audience of this genre to share your opinion), and subscribe!

Endnote

1. Genres that use technology are always changing to keep up with new inventions and trends. The screenshots and all of the instructions explaining the look and use of YouTube is subject to change over time. All of the information provided in this printed article is based on the YouTube channel design as of April 2012.

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Karly Marie Grice is an MA student specializing in Children's Literature at Illinois State University. She hopes to be able to use her degree in this as an excuse to never grow up, although growing "up" was out of the question for her as soon as she maxed out at 4'11.

Sass in 140 Characters: Learning to Communicate on the Social Network

Marc Vanderjack

A clear fissure divides two genres of writing we do in a day: the lengthy and artistic essays we write for school and the stuff we toss up on Facebook. This article explores how we first learn to communicate on the social network and the way we can improve our Facebook and Twitter prose. While we may only be able to express our ideas on Twitter in a few words, it is possible and potentially beneficial to rethink the boundaries that separate the “short” genres of web writing and the “long” genres of academic writing.

On a recent trip in downtown Chicago, right after two girls passed me by in Union Station gawking at the size of my feet, I had one of those strange sinking-heart moments when I could not find my cell phone. I knew right where it was: back at home on my desk. “Oh man,” I thought. “Now I can’t post this story on Facebook.”

Normally, when something interesting happens, I am well prepared to inform the world of the event: “Two girls just laughed at my size 17 shoes. Soon we clown-folk will have our day!” This time, though, I was naked. My friends would have to wait to receive such pressing news. The beauty of technology is how it allows for the constant journaling of everything that happens in a day. If I have a quick message to relay to an individual or snarky thoughts to broadcast to all, I do so over Facebook and Twitter. Especially since I am in college, separated from old friends and close family, relying on the genres of different social networks to communicate my thoughts and daily encounters is more relevant than ever.

Imagine writing across every genre broken down into two overly simplified categories: short and long. Long writing is that which takes a significant amount of time to complete. Many students are familiar with these genres.

Research papers, general essay assignments, and the like provide a medium for a central idea, or thesis, to be explained and supported with fat paragraphs. Short writing, including genres that communicate an idea in as few words as possible, is a far less time consuming endeavor, and may offer a thesis with no support. In my academic life, short writing has been subordinated to long, which has left a gap in my learning. Teachers impose minimum word and page limits to assignments with the hope of encouraging students to beef up their arguments. Though lengthy compositions packed with depth and detail are important, online genres demand brevity. For example, Twitter limits each tweet to 140 characters. Other online genres that do not have imposed limits are also typically short so that busy people are more inclined to read them. But because academia does not directly teach this kind of short writing, it is a self-taught genre and has evolved into a genre of great speed and little accuracy.

For an old school lesson in grammar, refer to Chapter 3, Section 2, Subchapter 1, of your 2010 MLA Handbook. Fine. Don't. The gist of it is that punctuation, formally speaking, is for the sake of clarity (Modern Language Association 66). More so than other grammatical devices, punctuation plays a major role in what we express. One mere symbol can change the inflection of an entire clause. It's easy stuff. I'm not going to write a letter to my mother and sign it, "I love you?" And equally so, I am not going to approach a grieving widow and bark, "I'm so sorry for your loss!" More enjoyable yet is the old school comma lesson of, "Let's eat, Grandpa," versus the grotesque alternative, "Let's eat Grandpa."

Now refer to your choice of social networking website. This one I know you'll do. Flick through a few of your friends' posts and updates and read what they are writing. I am sure you will find that nearly everything written in the social network is, according to the 2010 MLA Handbook, unintelligible trash because it conflicts with grammar rules. Heck, imagine the letter grade even the most liberal of English professors would give to our quick, online prose. As marvelous as it would be to claim the Internet as a breeding ground for quality literature, most of what our friends pen is not terribly great. One of my close friends, Tim, is at present a biomedical engineering major at Purdue University. He's smart, and like many of us, guilty of neglecting grammar rules. Figure 1 below shows one of his status updates:

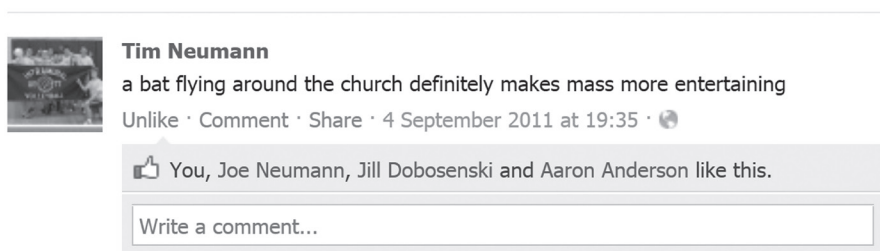


Figure 1: Neumann's Bat Status Update

Note the absence of consideration for proper punctuation by MLA standards. His sentence is well structured but lacks capitalization and punctuation, perhaps to save time. And yet we understand exactly what Tim is saying.

Since webspeak is not covered in school and most people do not look into it on their own, we learn this language by reading and writing online. When I joined Facebook and Twitter, nobody explained, “Capitalize nothing. Exclamation points and question marks are in, as well as the occasional ellipses, but periods are out.” There was never a lesson in school called, “Hw 2 rite good online.” So both Tim and I learned how to write within the genre conventions of social media by reading our friends’ posts and mimicking their writing.

As part of my own research into this genre, I turned to see what my good friend Sam was writing. Sam is currently an English major at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah; although when I first started utilizing her status updates and posts as examples, she was just a run-of-the-mill Facebook queen. With well over 1,000 online friends, she owns the web. Her power is in how many people “like,” or show approval of, what she writes. Figure 2 shows what she wrote on December 18, 2010, earning 64 “likes”:

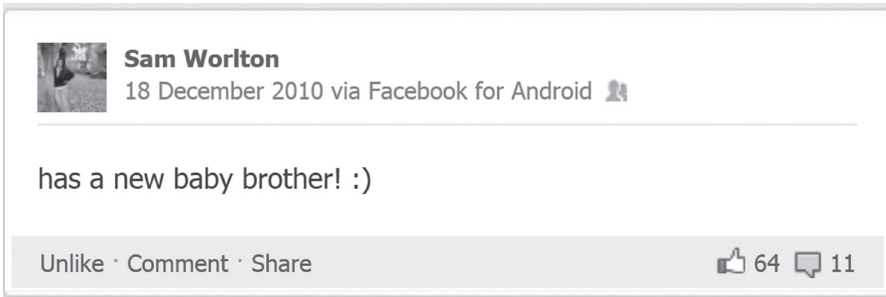


Figure 2: Worlton Baby Status Update

Then, on February 24, 2011, she wrote, as pictured in Figure 3:



Figure 3: Worlton College Status Update

This status update once more earned large positive feedback with 53 “likes.” Sam credits her success as a rhetor in the genre to a clear-cut method: “When writing a status, brevity, reliability and humor are very important for me. I think that’s why lots of people ‘like’ my statuses. And I only post them once in a while when I find something that is universally understood and experienced” (Worlton, Personal Interview). While Sam’s statuses may not actually be universally understood—a small child, for instance, would not be able to grasp the way she shows her enthusiasm at getting accepted to college—she takes her audience into close consideration when she writes. Her awareness of the fact that she is writing to other people who also use these genre conventions explains why so many of her friends enjoy reading her status updates. Sam has a following like the 9 o’clock news: people, including me, tune in each day to see what’s happening in her world. Thus, in the absence of structured training in short writing, turning to Sam helped me understand these genre conventions.

It would be great to say that copying Tim’s (lack of) punctuation or Sam’s Facebooking formula could catapult you into the stratosphere of web stardom, but I can attest that literary expression is never quite that simple. As it turns out, how we express ourselves on social networks, although quick and to-the-point, requires a great deal of thought. Since Twitter has a 140 characters maximum and Facebook status updates have an unstated convention of brevity, I found that my writing tightened up immensely when I began using these genres. For example, when I tell a story through a tweet on Twitter, my greatest concern as an author is establishing a clear narrative in as few words as possible. In a recent tweet, shown in Figure 4, I wrote:



Figure 4: Vanderjack’s Nacho Tweet

In this 124 character tweet, I intentionally excluded several details for the sake of conforming to the brevity conventions of the social network. If I had wished to tell my story in, say, a longer form, such as a Facebook note, I could have included a deeper description of the incident (like the struggles associated with driving when all you can see is tortilla chips and how gross nachos become when they freeze). In a Twitter tweet, a status update on Facebook, or any work of short writing, the author’s challenge is deciding what to include and what to leave out in order to best achieve a rhetorical purpose.

This argument is not an extremist cry for short form writing to be brought into the classroom, but instead begs a pressing question: without academic

support, how can we effectively learn to communicate better online with an artistic sensitivity for our language? Constrained by character limitations and other genre conventions, the printed word of the Internet might have little spark. While creativity, especially with acronyms and abbreviations, is possible, finding a status update that tinkers with mechanics and has fun with syntax and diction is now a rare event. Far too mindful of a looming cap on how much we can say, many, myself often included, avoid the challenge short writing poses and spew out what is minimally required for comprehension and coherence.

When considering short and long forms of writing as genres, learning both requires research. It would be a struggle to write a Facebook status without having read one first, just as it would be difficult to write a powerful eulogy without having heard one before. Short and long writing both require consideration of audience; it would be unwise to post a 3,000 word Facebook status to my friends who are expecting something shorter, which is equally as foolish as submitting an essay to your professor outlining your scandalous Friday night. And the similarities certainly do not end there.

But regardless of the parallels between long and short genres, most people take online short writing less seriously. However, we can certainly transfer what we learn from academia to Facebook and Twitter, and conversely, I can apply what I learn in school to what I write online. For example, my online short writing allows me to develop a unique voice that I can try to transfer into my longer compositions. In addition, short writing challenges me to be more concise and to take time considering my language choices, which can also improve my longer writing.

Of course, there are genre conventions that won't necessarily translate so easily. In Union Station, after the two girls rubbernecked at the sight of my flipper-feet, I had a great awakening moment: distress over not being able to access the sphere of social media evidenced not my deep love for writing, but my concern with broadcasting my thoughts instantly. And that, of course, makes online short writing very different from school writing.

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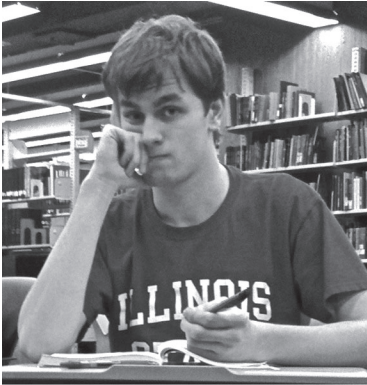
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Marc Vanderjack is a 19-year-old sophomore at Illinois State from Downers Grove, Illinois. While he is currently studying to be a high school English teacher, he fears that he must drop out of school in the near future to hunt for Horcruxes with his two closest friends.

I Think, Therefore IM: Instant Messaging and Sisterhood

Erin Kilian

In this article, Kilian explores the influence that the genre of instant messaging had in shaping her relationship with her sister. She discusses the advantages of communicating in this genre, including its potential for sharing humor and creating bonding. She also looks at how the automatic archiving of instant message conversations generates written histories of our personal relationships.

When I type my sister Meaghan’s name into my Gmail search box, a vast collection of everyday e-mails greets me. But the real gold is in the auto-saved “Chat” section. It contains archives of instant message conversations between us—853 of them to be exact. They date from the past four years, most of them conducted during a time when both of us were working desk jobs that bored us more than a little. The oldest one, from November of 2007, includes this important exchange:

10:13 AM **Meaghan:** i was just looking at youtube videos of wombat s doing tricks

10:14 AM **me:** what’s a wombat, actually

10:15 AM **Meaghan:** on the video it looked cute, but if you google image search it you’ll have nightmares

its like a big rodent, like an opossum or something, which i hate more than anything

me: you hate opossums more than anything?

10:16 AM **me:** seems like an overstatement

Meaghan: i hate any form of rodent

I wish I could say that as the conversations get more recent, they get more sophisticated. But as recently as last week, our conversations were full of talk of gossip about our friends and our analysis of old episodes of *Beverly Hills 90210*.

Because of school, work, and other unavoidable circumstances, I have not lived with my sister since she was twelve and I was fifteen. Consequently, instant messaging has shaped our relationship. It has been the best venue for us to vent about our problems, celebrate our successes, and just engage in idle chatter. There are distinct advantages to this mode of communication for us. Thus, this article is an investigation into the genre of instant messaging and how it informed and continues to inform my relationship with my sister. Let me walk you through it. . .

Advantage 1: Talking Becomes Multi-tasking

Five years after our wombat chat, my sister and I live a thousand miles apart, and instant messaging is still our primary mode of communication. The phone often seems too formal and time-consuming and texting cannot convey all of the minutiae we have to point out about *American Idol*. So instant messaging is, as Goldilocks once said, just right. We can talk as little or as much as we want. If one or the other of us is genuinely busy, there is no guilt in saying a quick “Gotta go. TTYL.” And we can use these chats to say things that are funnier or more outrageous than we could ever manage to be in person.

Equally important is the fact that this relationship building can happen while I’m doing other things. Research shows that “32% of IM users say they do something else on their computer such as browsing the web or playing games virtually every time they are instant messaging and another 29% are doing something else some of the time they are IM-ing.”¹ I have learned how to juggle conversations with my sister and three or four other friends at the same time, often relaying messages between them. I’ve worked on my computer, trying to craft a short story and popped on to chat with her when I needed quick vocabulary advice. She could say a sentence or two back and then return to her own work. We could be in each other’s lives and our own at the same time, with just a click of the mouse. This allowed for. . .

Advantage 2: Bonding through Humor

Reading the transcripts of my sister and my chat sessions, you get a sense of the shorthand of our relationship, full of pop culture references and inside jokes. Sometimes the jokes rely entirely on the typed convention of the genre

and wouldn't be as funny if they were spoken. Take, for example, this passage in which we write try to spell out our imitations of my mother's Boston accent:

9:26 PM	me: howyou?
9:26 PM	Meaghan: wonduhful, howayoooo?
9:26 PM	me: good, hows ya fathhaaa?
9:27 PM	Meaghan: whatevuh
9:27 PM	me: Oh, shooooo-uh

We both put a lot of effort into being funny in these conversations. There's definitely one-upsmanship at play—we see which of us can make the other one laugh harder while seated at their desk. In an article in the academic journal *Media, Culture & Society*, Ori Schwarz discusses this “performativity” and its relationship to instant messaging. He argues that because we know these instant message conversations can be saved, we attempt to be more entertaining versions of ourselves in them. He says that instant messaging is like “co-authoring of a text fixed in time, a collective production of an artifact which may later be consumed. . . for future reminiscing.”² And it is true that when I look back on these chats, I value the funny ones most. Thus our debates about which *World's Strongest Man* contender is our favorite (the dominant Mariusz Pudzianowski or hometown favorite Kevin Nee) take precedence over mundane negotiations about where to go out to dinner or what to get our parents for Christmas gifts. Which brings me to. . .

Advantage 3: Archivability

Being the electronic hoarder that I am, I started saving the funnier or more poignant conversations between us when I was in college. Reading the transcripts is like combing through my personal history: It features details of friendships I used to have that have fallen by the wayside, stories that I thought were hilarious at the time but I cringe about now, and events I don't remember attending. The exciting byproduct, since our switch from AOL instant messenger to Google Chat, is that these transcripts are now saved automatically. Everything we say is recorded and stored in the cloud somewhere, easily accessible for re-reading. It suits my penchant for nostalgia, for getting lost in memory. It is not unlike curling up with a book you've read before, thrilling at moments when characters seem uncertain of the future because you know how it all turns out.

Schwarz also says that “IM *objectifies* interaction[s], turns them into data-objects, fixed in time, subject to search-queries, copying, sharing, quoting and

re-use.”³ Though “objectify” seems critical, I think having these transcripts as objects, mementos, and physical manifestations of my relationships is what I like best about instant messaging. I can go into my archive and parrot back to my sister (via copy-paste) ideas and emotions we shared when we were still teenagers. Plus, the search function provides me with evidence for a silly argument over who came up with what shared catchphrase first. It’s documentation of how we became who we are.

While I have used the unique properties of instant messaging with other people and for other purposes, the transcripts with my sister are the most consistent and extensive. They chronicle the pains and frustrations of our young adulthood: fights with our parents or indecision about what job or opportunity to pursue next. Last year, they intersected with the most challenging episode in my family’s history—when my sister got very, very sick. The last IM exchange before she was hospitalized reads like all the others: equal parts Red Sox and *Real Housewives* criticism. She was just back from a trip to Las Vegas and had had a few weeks of recovery since her stellar run in the Boston marathon. But she had been feeling tired and bruising easily. Thanks to WebMD, she was self-diagnosing with all sorts of bizarre illnesses I didn’t think she could possibly have. Before her scheduled doctor’s appointment, our chat read:

10:57 AM Meaghan: i’m gonna go watch some tv and luxuriate on the couch. if i’m not back before my dr’s appt i’ll talk to you tonight aftawards or tmrw am
me: ok, see ya good luck with your diagnosis I hope you don’t have any scary diseases
Meaghan: athankee

This was our normal, joking tone. But as we found out after an emergency room trip, multiple blood transfusions, and a bone marrow biopsy, she did have a scary disease: Aplastic Anemia. AA is a blood disorder where your marrow does not produce enough platelets and red and white blood cells. It left her needing either an intensive program of chemotherapy or a bone marrow transplant. It was gut-wrenching news and we had no good way to manage it.

At first, I think writing about the horrible new reality helped us gain control of it. For instance, during the first chat we had after she got sick, we discussed looking for doctors who handled the disease (there are only a few in the country). We turned to each other for reassurance:

11:13 AM **Meaghan:** did you find the list of institutions that can treat it?

11:13 AM **me:** no, but there was a link to a website that had clinical studies. there were a few in boston, only one that was specifically for aplastic anemia (instead of like leukemia and aplastic anemia) and that was at children's hospital

11:14 AM **Meaghan:** hm
well, like i said, hopefully this is all moot but good information.

11:16 AM **me:** yeah
i still believe it will be moot

Meaghan: guh. maybe tomorrow i'll wake up and my bloods will be normal

me: that would be nice

Although these chats memorialize our experience after her diagnosis, the absence of communication that followed is just as telling as the transcripts themselves. There are nearly two months in the fall of 2010 with no chats. This was the period when she was the sickest. She was hospitalized to get chemotherapy and in and out of the clinic daily for blood transfusions with the rest of the time spent at home, no longer tethered to the desk job that compelled her to instant message me daily. Because we were both in Boston at the time, I was seeing her all the time and even going to most of her doctor's appointments. It could be that we didn't see the need to IM, but more likely it was too difficult to articulate our fears and frustrations in writing. Even still, it hurts to go back now and find no evidence of what our communication was like during that rough period. It makes me feel like that terrible period doesn't really exist because there's no written evidence. As such, there's. . .

Advantage 4: Writing Our History

Although looking back can be hard, these instant messages transcripts can often provide comfort when nothing else will suffice. In the article "Chat History" from the website Good.Is, writer Rebecca Armendariz recounts the heartbreaking story of her relationship with Clark—a rock musician who, over the course of their time together, was diagnosed with an aggressive form of skin cancer and passed away. She reflects on how difficult it was to be in their shared apartment or their local bar afterwards, as these places triggered sad memories of Clark's decline. But she found solace in reading their old electronic chats:

My Gmail is a priceless hoard of us making plans, telling inside jokes, calling each other "snoodle" and "bubbies." I type his name into the search field and enter a world of the unscripted dialogue

that filled our 9-to-5 existences. I become immersed in the coziness of our union. In hundreds of chats automatically saved to my account, we express our love for each other readily and naturally in our own private speech. This is a history of our relationship that we didn't intend to write, one that runs parallel to the one authored by his uncontainable illness.⁴

Though my story turned out differently, I can relate to Rebecca's sentimentality over the simple, digital transcripts that mark a place in time before everything changed and became darker and more complicated.

My sister is recovering now. She's planning to be off of her most serious medications by the end of the year. Here's one of our conversations from last spring:

12:11 PM	me: when's your next dr's appt?
	Meaghan: the 29th
12:11 PM	i think generally they will be the last friday of the month going forward
12:14 PM	me: nice (said like borat). it seems like you go so long between them, it's great
12:17 PM	Meaghan: ya. it's really weird to think that i used to be in there like 3 or 4 times a week
12:18 PM	me: yeah, you were a sorry little person
	Meaghan: i sure was

Meaghan is back to work, at a new job she loves, which severely cuts into our chatting time. I wonder if, as we move from our twenties into our thirties and continue to have more taxing careers and family lives, our chatting will continue as it has. I hope so. I want to be able to look back when I'm eighty at the first chat we had after her wedding or the birth of a first niece or nephew. I will also want to know what she thought of the terrible reality shows that will be popular in 2030. I hope the future history we write is a good one, full of laughs. More wombats than woe.

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Sports Journalists Have Love/Hate Relationship with Comment Boxes

Nicole Osolin

In this article, Osolin explores the ever-blurring roles of 'author' and 'reader' in online spaces thanks, in part, to genres such as comment boxes that allow readers the opportunity to give their opinions about works published on websites. Looking at one online sports editorial piece typed up after an emotional Chicago Bears football game, and interviewing the *Daily Vidette* journalist who took to the keyboard following that contest, as an example, she examines how those small comment boxes can have big impacts on the initial author.

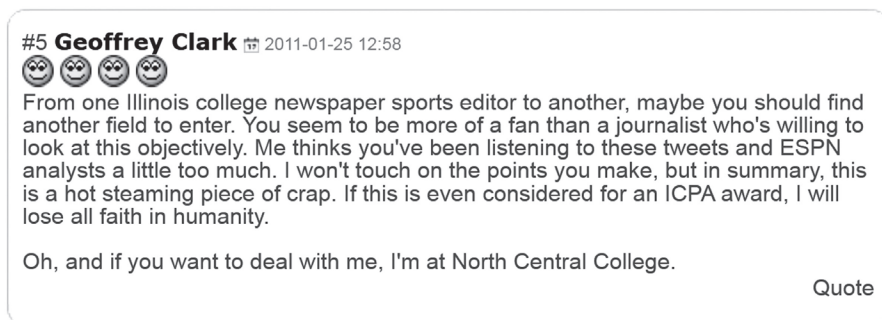


Figure 1: Comment to Schrader's Article

When twenty-two-year-old Ashley Schrader pulled up a sports column that she had written last winter for the Illinois State newspaper *The Daily Vidette*¹ a few days after the article had been posted online, comments by readers such as the one above were waiting for her. Other comments included "This is why we can't let personal opinion get in the way. It just makes you sound stupid" and "I usually never comment on the articles, but I just had to when I read this. This was as misinformed as the rest of the national reporting on the situation."

And the ones telling her that she should get a new career weren't even the bad ones. "I wrote this column thinking, people are totally going to hate it. They really did," Ashley said, rereading the comments as she spoke. "Ten months later, people are still commenting on it."²

Granted, Ashley's article was an opinion piece, so she was at liberty to give her *opinion*. But this particular article was about a fiery topic, particularly amongst Chicago Bears fans and particularly in the state of Illinois. In the piece entitled, "EDITOR'S CORNER: Bears QB Jay Cutler Reveals True, Ugly Colors," Ashley "typed out her anger" after the Bears lost to the Packers in the NFC title game in January 2011:

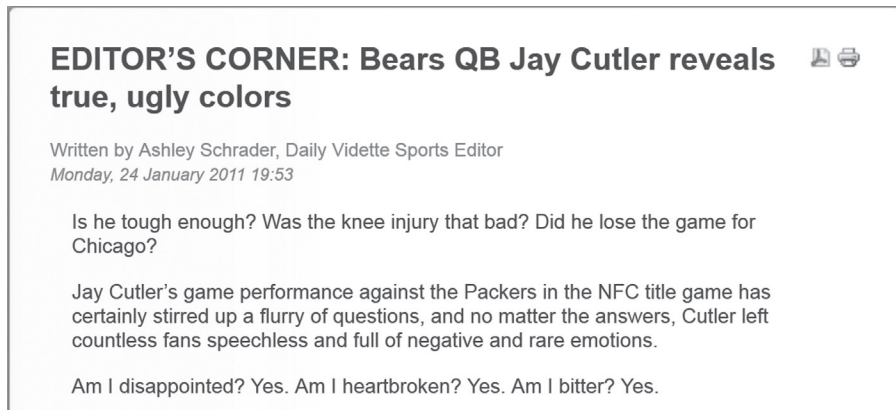


Figure 2: Schrader's Article

Additional comments that Ashley wrote in the article include: "Like many Bears fans in Chicago, I put up with Jay's antics, I shrugged off his mistakes and I even stuck up for him when people so easily bad-mouthed him. But not anymore. Plain and simple, Jay quit Chicago." But Ashley's anger and the words that it produced left many angry with *her*; some people get pretty passionate about sports, especially when a season was on the line and their team was on the losing end. In that game, Cutler went out with an MCL sprain; the Packers went on to win the Super Bowl. The Bears' season ended with the loss; Ashley's piece, however, lives on thanks to the potent mix of the internet, that comment section, and those lines that keep people talking. Whereas the print version of her editorial piece has long since found its final resting place in the recycling bin, the online version can still be located—months later—on The Daily Vidette website with just a quick "key word" search. And those comment boxes? Not only are they available as well, but they continue to allow for new comments to add to the existing dialogue.

The diehard Bears fan—and current ISU senior—decided to become a sports writer because that's what her dad does: "It was natural going into

sports I guess. Writing about sports is something that I grew up with.” Yet Ashley, or any other college writer considering journalism, is not going into her “daddy’s journalism,” so-to-speak. When her father started out as a sports writer, he knew that, when he wrote an article to be printed in the newspaper, it would get fan reaction. But he likely never knew most of the comments that people said about his writing. Today, readers can immediately react to what a news outlet has released thanks to the internet—and that box at the bottom of each article calling for fans to comment. With a few clicks of the keyboard, any person can do so, knowing that the original author can respond back to the readers if they so choose. “I wrote back once to a person’s comment that directly questioned my character—not what the article was about. People say things that they never would in person or over the telephone,” Ashley agreed. “Most never comment on good stories. They will never tell you that they liked the way you wrote this.” Still, some readers/commenters did agree with her:

#8 **Timberwolf** 📅 2011-01-25 16:52

It's nice to see Jay Cutler showed his true colors in a game that really matters. I have been waiting for this to happen. I was disappointed it did not come early, but he delivered when it mattered the most. It just shows a leopard never change his stripes I thought what he did was a cowardly acy.

Figure 3: Comment to Schrader’s Article

Darren Kinnard, sports anchor at WSIL-TV in Southern Illinois for nearly twenty years, agrees that journalism is becoming more interactive, and he often takes advantage of this to converse with readers. He says, “I really like when people post comments to our articles on Facebook because people’s names and faces are with their comments. So the explosion of interaction with viewers also comes with comments on the Facebook and Twitter forums, as well as the actual article comment sections. There’s opportunity for immediate reaction and interaction with these social media platforms. Sports provided ‘reality shows’ before that was even a term,” Darren continued. “Sports show us so much about people’s character...who can handle the pressure, who can’t, how do people handle winning and losing.”³

And, it turns out, sports can show how people handle reading a piece that they *really* don’t agree with. Should you say exactly what you think because that writer will never know your name? Or maybe think about that writer sitting at another computer who will soon read what you write and maybe even decide to comment back, then creating a sort of reversal of roles? The readers have these things to consider before they decide to hit the “post” button. But among the choices that those readers make in regards to writing a comment, one thing is certain: Those comments—even the good ones—will have some sort of impact on the author of that piece being commented on.

Ashley remembers opening up her computer to first read the comments that she knew would come after the Cutler article last January: “It’s really hard on a writer’s self-esteem, but it’s good that we know that people are reading it. And I do take what they say into consideration—even if those changes are just implicitly made in my next pieces.” These considerations are different for every sports writing genre found online and even for every particular piece. The writer of a sports article focusing on news, on those facts about one specific game, for example, will probably want to consider individual’s comments more carefully, especially if many such remarks are claiming that the article breaks a cardinal rule in journalism—getting the facts wrong. An opinion piece like Ashley’s, however, falls into a gray area regarding those comment boxes. Consider these two potential scenarios:

Scenario One	Scenario Two
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An online newspaper wants to attract viewers to its pages. 2. A sports journalist wants to attract comments about his opinion piece written about the big game yesterday, where he openly trashes the big name head coach and calls for multiple front office moves in the off-season. 3. Most readers hate it, not agreeing with the suggestions made by the writer at all, and they say this in their comments. 4. Repeat 1-3 a few more times. 5. Page views begin to <u>decrease</u>. 6. Advertisers are <u>not</u> pleased. 7. The online newspaper bosses are <u>not</u> pleased. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An online newspaper wants to attract viewers to its pages. 2. A sports journalist wants to attract comments about his opinion piece written about the big game yesterday, where he openly trashes the big name head coach and calls for multiple front office moves in the off-season. 3. Most readers hate it, not agreeing with the suggestions made by the writer at all, and they say this in their comments. 4. Repeat 1-3 a few more times. 5. Page views begin to <u>increase</u>. 6. Advertisers are pleased. 7. The online newspaper bosses are pleased.

While these two scenarios simplify what, in actuality, represents a very complicated interaction between authors of the online articles and the writers of the comments (as well as those readers who choose to not leave a remark), the most conspicuous difference between the two is represented by the decrease or increase in page views—a difference that can be attributed to, at least partly,

the individual readers who decided to comment, transforming themselves into authors in the process. Ashley’s opinion piece about Cutler’s “poor performance” in the “big game” could be placed on ten different websites and garner ten different overall reactions from readers; then again, it could also be placed on the same website at ten different times and garner ten different overall reactions.

So, breaking this point down a bit further: Essentially, some readers will love the authors with opinions diverging from their own, continuing to read and comment on their work because of that—even if they show this love in strings of negative feedback. Others will hate authors whose opinion never intersects with theirs—perhaps commenting a few times as they type in anger then ultimately deciding to take their viewing eyes to another web page, a web page where they can stare at words that echo what they would have written...had they written the article, of course. Thus, the actual content that the online sports article’s author chooses to write, then, equates to only one aspect when considering how that article will be received. Of equal, or perhaps more, importance in the genre of online sports articles, and opinion pieces more specifically: Who the commenters are, what they are looking for in sports articles, and what they finally choose to put down “in print” within those comment boxes is another major component—and a minor genre directly affected by the online sports article but also housing the potential to affect that “parent” genre—that should be taken into consideration.

Darren has seen this same idea constantly affect his work—knowing who his audience is and attempting to predict what type of comments a piece will garner: “Once I gather all the facts and interviews, it’s time to get to work [writing the story]. If I’m writing for serious sports fans, I know that I can go more in-depth. If I think my readers are more casual fans, then I try to construct a story that’s going to have a broader appeal.” A quick glance at the WSIL’s Facebook page elicits some pretty tame comments compared with those of Ashley’s opinion piece—some unrelated to the topic but still wishing to carry on a dialogue with the journalists and fans:⁴



Figure 4: Random Comment on WSIL’s Facebook Page

But even if it is just fans seeking a score of a local high school football game, Darren contends that writers have to at least try to give the readers what they want—or have a good reason not to, believing that there’s only so many times an author can leave a reader angry without that reader heading to a different sports

site. No matter how long Darren stays a sports reporter, he knows that his writing is only as good, at least partly, as how well he understands his readers' wants—even if those wants are to be able to openly disagree with him in the comments.

Just as this fluid relationship of journalist/author to comment reader/article reader to commenter/author continues for someone like Darren who has been at working in sports journalism for more than twenty years, it also remains present at “the top,” where the “best” sports writers—or at least those who achieved positions at the most prestigious newspapers—interact daily with readers via that comment section, and not all of the interactions are pleasant for the most decorated sports writers. A recent opinion piece called “10 Thoughts on Bears’ Loss to Chiefs” posted by Chicago Tribune writer Brad Biggs, about some key injuries to the Chicago Bears lineup during the latter half of the 2011 season, reveals that no writer is immune to the reader critics. Comments include “If you have 10 thoughts on this, you have too much time on your hands” and “The media blame game is back on. It is tiring as it is predictable. Biggs is no different than any of the other writers in Chicago. The Bears lose, throw them under the bus.”⁵

Taking these comments into account, someone just learning the art of creating an online sports article and that balancing act of moving readers enough to comment on the content of a particular piece while also getting them to continue to read future articles should never become discouraged when some reader, taking advantage of his or her ability to become a writer of comments, chooses to negatively invoke those opportunities presented in the comment boxes.

Ashley considers a particular comment as well as the online article that caused people to post such comments once again:

#6 **Pete** 📅 2011-01-25 13:27

Quoting Journalism Student:

"I'm guessing not, given that the average "journalism" student can't even pass Bio 101 without cheating."

Interesting, I'm wondering where you got this information. I would love to be enlightened with the database that reveals how many journalism students pass Bio 101 by cheating.

See, the intelligent kids who can read AND write AND understand the scientific method don't trifle with a degree meant for a dying industry.

Moreover, the imbecile that wrote this editorial could have merely looked up "MCL Sprain" in any search engine, and became more informed. But since this clown didn't, she reflects poorly on the major and on her work ethic.

Thanks for playing, journalism student. And once you graduate, no, I don't have any spare change for you.

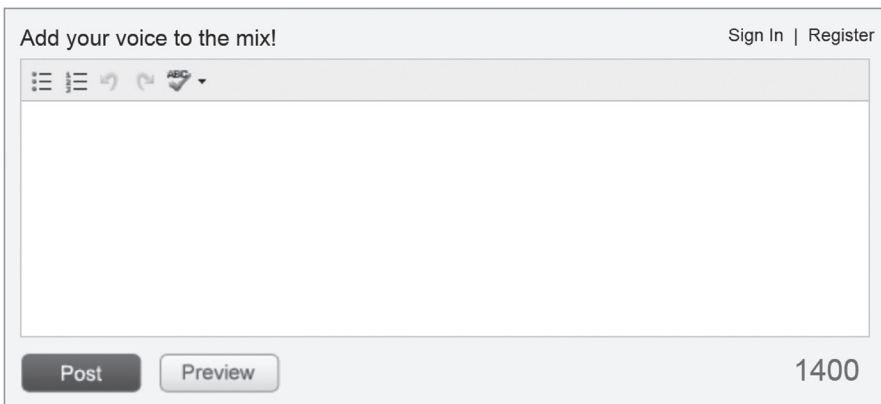
Quote

Figure 5: Comment to Schrader's Article

She's had ten months to think about its implications and the generally less-than-enthusiastic reactions to it, utilizing suggestions from those comments for later work. Yet, despite knowing now how the piece would come to be received by readers, she states, "I don't regret writing it. It was super, super opinionated, but I'd write it again."

Sometimes, writers have to take chances, knowing that not everyone will love them. And despite the commenters that may even say that they should give up that craft, they have to keep playing the game.

Just ask those guys at the Tribune.



Add your voice to the mix! Sign In | Register

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Endnotes

1. Ashley Shrader's opinion piece, "EDITOR'S CORNER: Bear's QB Jay Cutler Reveals True, Ugly Colors," can be found with a quick search of www.videtteonline.com.
2. Interview with Ashley Schrader, sports editor at The Daily Vidette.
3. Interview with Darren Kinnard, sports director, WSIL-TV.
4. WSIL Sports Facebook page can be found at <http://www.facebook.com/wsilsportsextra>.
5. Barry Biggs' sports piece, "10 Thoughts on Bears Loss to Chiefs," can be found by searching www.chicagotribune.com. The comment box at the end of this article is also compliments of the Tribune.



Nicole Osolin recently graduated from ISU with her master's degree in English, specializing in Teaching English as a Second Language and Applied Linguistics. She used to work as a journalist and has had a few people "yell" at her via comment boxes. Now she just comments on articles written by other journalists—but only nice things, of course. And yes, she's a Packers fan (but you probably already guessed that).

One Audience Too Many: An Interview on Prescriptive and Receptive Audiences in Screenwriting

Irina Nersessova

An audience is traditionally thought of as a group that only participates in a given medium by experiencing and interpreting it but not by having any hand in crafting or changing it. However, screenwriters encounter an interactive audience that is actively engaged in the act of producing a film. This creates an interesting dynamic between screenwriters and their work, which former film student Michael Melkon will elaborate on in this interview with Irina Nersessova.

Screenplay writing creates an entirely new awareness of audience. It's a highly unique genre specifically because a screenplay's audience generally consists of individuals with the power to ask for the text to be revised and then make further changes in the process of producing and directing. It is not until the screenplay becomes a film, which is an entirely different genre, that it gathers an audience in the traditional sense. That is, an audience that receives information, is entertained by it, and perhaps critiques it.

Michael Melkon: There's an old saying in Hollywood: "The best screenplays don't always make for the best films."

Irina Nersessova: You've heard that?

MM: Yeah.

IN: Who said that?

MM: Well, don't quote me on this [laughter], but I heard that [Francois] Truffaut said it in an interview somewhere. Probably in French. But the point is that *someone* said it and that it's *true*. The reason it's true is because, at the

end of the day, we're talking about two different products: a screenplay and a film.

IN: So you view writing the screenplay and producing the film as two separate projects?

MM: They're definitely linked, but yeah, they are separate projects. I mean, there are two different audiences after all. The screenwriter doesn't write for the public. The screenwriter's audience consists of the producers, director, and actors. And then the film itself, a separate project, has the audience of moviegoers.

IN: Can you elaborate a little? I think most people probably consider the entire enterprise of making a film, from writing to distribution, one project.

MM: Sure. Depending on the production, they can be as different as a novel is from a filmed adaptation of it. For example, take on-set improvisations or a "really cool afterthought," which is almost never actually cool, that the director may have come up with. Sometimes these can turn out really well and enhance your story in ways you didn't even know were possible.

However, that's not really even the point. Whether it's for better or for worse, what's scary is that it's even possible. Sure, I've read books where I thought it would be funny or cute or clever if a certain something happened at a specific point in the story, but imagine if I actually had the power to make it so, just by thinking it?

This is the power that producers, directors, and actors have over screenwriters. They're not actually changing the screenplay itself, of course, since the file is safely unchanged and untouched on my hard drive. But the vast majority of people are not going to read my screenplay, are they? No, they're going to go see the movie, which will list me in the credits as the writer. So I get to take credit for all the choices I had nothing to do with. A double edged sword depending on how competent the filmmakers are, but again, that's not the point.

IN: In the past I've heard you say how it's a completely different story for novelists. Did you mean that in terms of the writing process or in relation to the audience?

MM: Both, I guess. You already know this, but I was actually a short story writer before I ever wrote my first script. Since I was a teenager, I would always write little two or three page stories, mostly fantasy stuff. I would never show them to my friends but always to adults. [laughter] For approval, I guess.

I was always trying to get as much detail as possible into my stories. The cool thing about prose is that you can give someone an almost sensory

experience through what they read. They can imagine the sounds, the smells, and the sights you describe. This is one of the things I had to stop myself from doing when I became a film student. The last thing you want to do is direct through your writing.

You have to keep in mind that a screenplay, by its nature, has to be interpreted by someone else, and that someone may get very offended if you keep telling them how to angle their shots or deliver their lines. But that doesn't mean you have to be bland. That's the beauty of screenwriting as well, the idea that you can convey a lot of information with very little detail and very little word count. It took me a while to adjust my thinking. Now it's almost impossible for me to imagine going into all that detail.

However, when you first asked me the question about novels versus screenplays, I was referring to the relationship with the audience. Or, rather, the relationship between the author and the final product that the audience sees. With screenplays, like I said before, you have two different audiences: a prescriptive one and a receptive one.

IN: Can you go into some more detail about the differences between prescriptive and receptive audiences?

MM: Sure. A movie or a TV show pretty much only has a receptive audience; in other words, an audience that just sits there, takes in what is presented to them, and doesn't interact. The screenplay itself, however, usually only has a prescriptive audience, unless you count film students who go back and read award winning screenplays or whatever. For the most part, the only people reading your script are people who are actively trying to give you advice on how to make it better and are very much expecting you to make those changes. When that is your sole audience, writing for it is something that is very different from any other genre. This is different from a novel or even a theatrical play, which is the screenplay's closest cousin.

IN: Theatrical plays and screenplays basically serve the same function though, correct?

MM: Yeah, they are basically the blueprints for some kind of production.

IN: So how do you see them differently?

MM: First of all, there is a certain permanency to film that traditional plays simply do not have. Plays can be performed hundreds of different ways, even with the same cast and director, so there is never one definitive version of it. Unless, of course, you count the original manuscript itself. The original manuscript is often considered an important work in and of itself, at least in the plays that have endured.

Even though a playwright is creating something that is explicitly meant to be performed, just like a screenwriter is, they still get the benefit of having the manuscript itself be what everyone, even generations later, will come back to for inspiration. Whether it is for pleasure or in school, people can read a play without ever planning on seeing a live production of it. Think about it, how many people have read Sophocles, Shakespeare, or Arthur Miller, who have never, ever seen a performance of any of their plays? Probably a lot, right?

IN: Can we talk about novels a little bit more? What is the difference between the relationship a novelist has with the final product as opposed to a screenwriter?

MM: Well, a novelist will sit down to write a story and when they are done, including all the changes imposed by the editor, they will already know exactly what the audience is going to see. Screenwriters don't really have that; instead they have the antechamber of production. Where the job of a novelist usually ends is precisely the point where, for a screenwriter, their story gets taken and turned into something else that *then* will be presented to a public audience. At the end of the day, that is really the main difference between the two mediums, not the structure.

IN: I've heard you refer to screenplays as literature before. Traditionally, it seems uncommon to come across that sort of perspective of them.

MM: Yeah, there are reasons for it though.

IN: Like what?

MM: Well, it's a lot of things. You know, a screenplay is made up of essentially two types of writing. One is the prose descriptions, and then you have the dialogue. I guess it's three forms actually, if you count the location headers. The biggest difference in screenplays is that sparseness is revered above all else. You're not really commended for how many words you have on a page but rather for having more white [blank paper] than black [text].

Dialogue is also a big issue, and this is another place where the prescriptive and receptive audiences intersect. The receptive audience, the movie-goers, is only going to see what the prescriptive audience did with it. So in the case of dialogue, the prescriptive audience consists of the actors. Due to a lack of inflection or verbal tone, actors can interpret the written dialogue in all kinds of different ways. That's really the main problem with the written medium in general, I think. How does an author direct a reader's imagination toward the intended emotions and interpretations? Stylized writing and cleverly placed punctuation combine in an attempt to communicate the nuances of a line to the audience.

This is very much on an individual basis when it comes to novels so that even if one person reads a piece of dialogue in an unintended way, there is a pretty good chance that the next person may get what you were going for. However, with a script you ultimately only have the actor's interpretation. The director will have some say in it, but it really comes down to how those words leave the lips of that guy or girl who you just hope was properly cast.

IN: Which is a process that the screenwriter had nothing to do with?

MM: Exactly! This is the prime reason why dialogue is such a point of anxiety for screenwriters: no matter how careful or witty dialogue may be written, all it takes is just one bad actor's delivery to make the definitive reading of a work something less than it should be. To everyone. For all time. You can do your best to stop it, but sometimes even placing all the commas in the right spot isn't enough.

But I really want to get back to the difference between novelists and screenwriters in their relation to the final product, if that is okay. When a script is turned in, with all the required changes, a screenwriter doesn't get to sit back and watch the world eat it up the way a book or magazine author would. These are motion pictures after all, and they have to be filmed. One of my film teachers told me that what makes screenwriters different from other writers is the anguish of seeing our baby taken away. That's pretty much true.

IN: How is a script like a baby to you? How does that analogy work?

MM: It's going to sound kind of weird [laughter], but just bear with me. All writing, if it's done with any kind of passion, can be similar to raising a child. The concept is like a baby being born, full of potential. The early drafts are their first few toddler steps, you know? Constantly falling down and picking themselves up again until they can balance just right. As they get older a personality takes form and certain traits solidify, giving you a foundation to build upon. There really is nothing more beautiful than watching a story come into its own, with its own set of values and outlook on the world. At some point, it's like a real person. Even the back and forth with the studio can be seen like arguing with your wife about where to send the kid to school. Sure, you may disagree with her, but you know she ultimately wants what is best for it to succeed. And studios want nothing if not to see the films that they finance succeed.

IN: I think a novelist can say everything you just said about screenplays, except the thing about the studios.

MM: Yeah, they could. But there is more. With a novel, once you're done writing it and editing it, it just comes out. Scripts leave home, in a sense, and you never know how they're going to come back to you, or, in other words, how the movie is going to turn out.

IN: Screenwriters get empty nest syndrome? [Laughter]

MM: Sort of! I mean, like all children who make it out of adolescence alive, the story has to move out. It has to go to college. And then you are alone. For a while, anyway. Then eventually, one day your baby comes back to you. Sometimes it comes back with all the potential it had inside of it fully realized, guided by the values you spent years carefully instilling in it. Other times, it returns to you burnt out, tatted up, and God knows what else. The fact that the latter is always a possibility, if not a probability, is what defines our particular brand of intellectual misery.

IN: Okay, so one thing I really need to ask, this might be the last thing actually, is if a screenwriter feels this compromised and neglected, then why be a screenwriter? I don't mean just for the money, why do it as a form of art?

MM: There is a paradox at work here that you may have already noticed. On one hand, a screenwriter can complain about people taking their baby away and turning it into something other than what they intended, but on the other hand, isn't that exactly what a script is for? It's weird to think someone would be complaining about people using their product exactly for what it was meant to be. If they had this much of a problem with it, then they should just go write something else. Why keep writing scripts? Well, a big part of it is their economy. Simply put, it's the most concise and precise form of writing out there.

There is something beautiful about the simplicity of a screenplay. There are no long prose passages like in a novel, and there is rarely any flowery dialogue or soliloquizing going on like you would see in a play. It leaves much out, but it sacrifices nothing, allowing the reader to truly place the characters in their own film in their own minds. They are deceptively simple to read, but under the hood no medium has as much complexity to it, *precisely because* of how Spartan the pages are. Like I mentioned earlier, it's not the amount of black ink you see on the page that gives it worth, it's that each line, each letter, is surrounded by a glaring sea of white, making the black all the more powerful.

IN: Yeah, I think I get that now. So the sparseness of it is the draw?

MM: Yeah, there's no fat. That's what made me fall in love with the format. It is literature, and it is humanity. It is distilled, simplified, with all the extra bits cut out and its soul right there, bared to anyone who reads it. But, like all bared souls, I guess, they are vulnerable. They are made specifically to be vulnerable. Vulnerable to that prescriptive audience that, you hope, will do it justice and then present their product, not yours, to the receptive audience that wants to be entertained.

Endnote

1. This interview was not a single sit-down; rather it was a collaboration that took about a month. Michael and I had a series of conversations in person, over the phone, over email, and through a shared online document before I was able to recreate the discussion in interview format.



Irina Nersessova earned her Bachelor's and Master's in Literature from Eastern Michigan University. Her interests include postmodernism, comics, and moving back to her hometown of Los Angeles. She's currently a doctoral student at Illinois State University, which brings her one time zone closer to being back in California.

Commas Here, Commas There, Commas Everywhere!

Sarah Scharlau

In this article, Scharlau investigates how, and for what types of writing styles, commas are used. Using information from *Grammatically Correct* by Anne Stilman, Scharlau demonstrates features of commas from some of her own writing.

In an English class I took during my first semester at Illinois State University, I was required to read Anne Stilman's *Grammatically Correct*. After thirteen years of schooling, one probably believes that he or she is required to follow grammar rules regardless of the style of writing. This isn't always the case though; it depends on the genre. But for those times the rules need to be followed, Stilman helped me understand what the standards are. As I was reading through Stilman's book, I found myself "huh"-ing in just about every chapter. But I was particularly intrigued by the section on commas.

I soon realized I may not be the only one out there that doesn't know some key factors regarding comma use. But once I started paying attention to commas, I realized that many people don't follow Stilman's guidelines. To start off the chapter, Stilman says, "The comma is the most-used punctuation mark, typically outnumbering all the others put together" (77). Surprising, I know! (I always thought it would be the period.) Commas are used when separating the main elements of a sentence from each other, separating elements in a series, using *which* but not *that*, and separating a parenthetical element within an independent clause (77). Stilman covers all these topics

and more in twenty-two pages. My goal in this article is to help other writers quickly learn these simple rules so that they can use them in certain genres of their choosing. To demonstrate these rules, I use examples from writing completed by my fellow students in an English class. The assignment asked us to interview another classmate and write a short biography on them. My professor expected the class to follow standard grammar rules. After reviewing these rules, I will briefly discuss how these rules may or may not be used in different genres of writing.

Separating the Main Elements

The first rule for commas is separating the main elements of a sentence from each other (Stilman 78). According to Stilman, some commas need to be added or placed after different words in the following examples from my peers' writing:

Sentence 1: She's a freshman here at Illinois State, and is majoring in English Education.

Sentence 2: In order to help her reach her goal of becoming a successful educator she is enrolled in the following classes, English 100, English 102, Communication 110, Chemistry, and Spanish.

Sentence 3: It's a bit of a doozy, but he'll make it as long as he has sporadic events to keep him on his toes [. . .].

Sentence 4: Therefore, he changed his major to English where he could teach the students but also be there for them to come to when they needed someone to talk to.

Stilman explains that the "predicate gives some information about the subject, either describing a characteristic it possesses or identifying an action that it performs of that is preformed upon."

Sentence 1 strays from the rule, "Don't split two descriptions in a predicate. [...]" (79). Stilman explains that "When a string of words focuses on a single idea or on closely related ideas, it should be treated as an indivisible unit and not be broken up" (78). The word *she* is the noun, or subject, of the sentence and the rest is the predicate describing the subject. The author of this sentence split two descriptive phrases describing the same subject. Because of this, the words *is majoring in English Education* are left describing nothing. The comma separates the two descriptions, making it unclear who or what is majoring in English Education. The version that follows the rule would read, "She's a freshman here at Illinois State and is majoring in English Education."

Stilman advises, "Use a colon to introduce a list or series."

Sentence 2 should read, "In order to help her reach her goal of becoming a successful educator she is enrolled in the following classes: English 100[...]." The comma that comes after *following classes* is considered incorrect

by Stilman’s book because it makes it seem as if it were an item in the list of classes the student is taking. The colon distinguishes the classes that the student is taking.

Sentence 3 adheres to the rule, “Use a comma to separate the two independent clauses that are joined by a coordinating conjunction” (Stilman 80). The words *and*, *but*, *or*, *for*, *nor*, *yet*, and *so* are coordinating conjunctions. The underlined parts in sentence 3 are two separate independent clauses that are joined by the word *but* so the comma goes before the conjunction.

In sentence 4, the comma is also agreeing to the comma rules. Stilman explains that the comma provides a clear division between an independent clause and some element that comes before it (82). In this case, the word *therefore* is the element that comes before the independent clause. The sentence would work just as well without the *therefore*, but it adds a transition to the sentence.

Separating Elements in a Series

When it comes to the separation of elements in a series, there are certain instances where a comma is used. A serial comma is a comma that comes after the second-to-last item in a series (Stilman 93). Stilman says it’s the author’s choice whether to use a serial comma, or not as long as the sentence makes sense, which can be illustrated in the following sentences:

Sentence 1: Molly describes herself as protective, determined and spontaneous.

Sentence 2: She is currently enrolled in two English classes, Communications, a geology course, American Diversity, and University Band.

Sentence 3: Her young, inspiring teacher taught her that she can achieve anything.

A serial comma is not necessary in sentence 1, but if one were to be inserted, it would follow the word *determined*. In sentence 2, a serial comma is used following the word *diversity*, and without it, readers may be confused. If the sentence read, “She is currently enrolled in two English classes, Communications, a geology course, American Diversity and University Band,” one may think that the author is calling the band “American Diversity and University.”

In sentence 3, a serial comma is not used, nor can it be used, but it still falls under the category of the separation of elements in a series. Stilman

Series is “a group or a number of related or similar things, events, etc., arranged or occurring in temporal, spatial, or other order or succession; sequence.”

writes, “You do, however, need to separate two items when those items are adjectives and modifying a noun” (95). In the case of sentence 3, without the comma separating *young* and *inspiring*, one may read the sentence as *young inspiring* and a *teacher*; meaning that person inspired young people and also taught students. See the confusion? Because the sentence has the comma between *young* and *inspiring*, it can be presumed that the teacher is young and inspiring. I know, this can get a little confusing, and the rules have exceptions. So let’s move on to some things that may be more straightforward.

Using *Which* or *That*

One clear-cut rule Stilman writes in this chapter is “*which* takes a comma, *that* does not” (93). What does this mean? (I know, I may have just contradicted myself by quoting that rule, but the comma was necessary there.) Look over the following two sentences and see if you can catch what the rule is explaining:

Sentence 1: Quinn enjoys drawing and painting, which are two of his most favorite hobbies.

Sentence 2: She wants to work for the music company that has gained a positive reputation for women’s rights.

Did you catch the comma used before *which*, but no comma used before *that*? Why is this? The word *which* in the first sentence is used to describe drawing and painting, almost as if it is a side note. The word *that* in the second sentence is used to tell what company the woman wants to work for. The difference is *which* describes and *that* clarifies. But to make it easy on yourself, remember that “*which* takes a comma, *that* does not.”

Parenthetical Commas

A parenthetical element is “text that is not critical to the basic structure of the sentence; it interrupts the flow but does not interfere with the meaning.”

Another simple rule to follow is that parenthetical commas always come in pairs, just as parentheses do (Stilman 88). Parenthetical commas are used to separate a parenthetical element from the rest of the sentence (Stilman 87). Take a look at the following sentences (here, one sentence has been altered to make it two different sentences):

Sentence 1: His friend, says Victor, is the support system in his life.

Sentence 2: His friend says Victor is the support system in his life.

In the first sentence, *says Victor* is in between two commas. This is an example of a parenthetical element surrounded by parenthetical commas. *Says Victor* can be removed and the sentence will still have the same effect: His friend is the support system in his life. Taking a look at sentence 2, the sentence has a different effect than the first one: Victor’s friend says that Victor is the support system in his life. The sentence reads differently because the commas are not in place. Understand the importance yet? The purpose of the parenthetical element and the parenthetical commas is to add some more information that may or may not be of importance to the rest of the sentence (Stilman 86). Finally, remember that parenthetical commas are just like parentheses when it comes to pairs—without the other comma, the sentence would be unfinished.

Parenthetical elements can also be surrounded by parentheses or em-dashes (—), depending on the sentence.

Probably the Only Time You Can Be a Rule-Breaker

I hope that this review will help other writers understand commas; however, the use of these rules varies from genre to genre. For example, would you triple check your latest tweet to make sure you put the punctuation in the places Stilman would advise you to? Or, in a cover letters for a job application, would you leave out the comma after *Normal*, before *Illinois* in your return address? As an author, you decide when you would or wouldn’t use punctuation. But in order to be a rule-breaker, it helps to know the rules before you break them. When you’re debating on what is considered an “appropriate” time to follow Stilman’s punctuation rules, think about who your audience is and what their expectations are. Take, for example, the sentences used in this essay: my professor expected the class to put commas where today’s grammar handbooks would recommend. But then think about your last post on your friend’s Facebook wall. Did you make sure to put commas in where those handbooks would deem necessary? Chances are, you didn’t care and neither did your friend.

What’s considered “correct” and “incorrect” all depends on your audience’s expectations. It is likely that you will follow Stilman’s grammar rules when it comes to resumes, works submitted for publication, e-mails to your English professor, and so forth. If you’re applying for a job and you’re using run-on sentences, sentence fragments, and forgetting to capitalize the first letter of every sentence, chances are the people reviewing your resume are going to toss it in the trash. They are probably going through hundreds of resumes and narrowing them down based on grammar structure. They might figure that if you don’t take the time to go back and fix those mistakes, you would not go back and fix your mistakes on the job. Thus, situations

where your reader is going to look at your punctuation usage and base your credibility off of that are times when I would advise that you follow Stilman's rules. I also recommend that you use commas if the meaning would otherwise be unclear. But feel free to stray away from those rules when the purpose of the communication is for entertainment, as a part of a conversation, or something else.

In closing, I want to discuss an example where punctuation is used as a signal. Consider this line from the popular book *Hunger Games*:

“District 12. Where you can starve to death in safety” (Collins 6).

According to Stilman, these two sentences are not complete sentences. There is not a verb in the first sentence. There is a subordinating conjunction, *where*, in the second sentence, which is not followed by a main clause. But I assume that this sentence reads exactly as Suzanne Collins wants it to. It creates emphasis and makes the reader read it slowly. Collins thus shows that writers can break the rules if they find it useful. Other sentences in her book show that she knows how to use punctuation the way Stilman explains, such as the following:

“After the reaping, everyone is supposed to celebrate” (Collins 10).

The word *after* is a subordinating conjunction as well. The difference here is that there is a main clause attached to it: *everyone is supposed to celebrate*. Collins knows the grammar rules, but chooses to break them when she finds it useful. As writers, we all can make similar decisions.

It sounds like I am contradicting myself by explaining grammar rules about commas and then showing how to break them, but the point is that rules depend on the specific writing situation. We can better expand our talents as writers when we choose when and when not to use certain punctuation conventions. Sometimes rules are broken in order to get the intended meaning across or to emphasize something. Other times, rules are followed to meet the expectations of the audience. Based on these expectations and the genre you're writing in, you as an author should decide what's best for your use.

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Understanding Language and Culture with Cultural Historical Activity Theory

Tyler Kostecki

Drawing from his experience in ENG 145, an undergraduate writing course at Illinois State University, Kostecki breaks down the terminology of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). Using the terminology of CHAT and conventions from examples, he explains how each of the terms can be used to form a better understanding of genres, writing situations, language, and culture. Tyler also uses CHAT to analyze some aspects of the healthcare field and its communicative practices.

Genre analysis is a process in which we analyze productions, or texts, to understand the language and cultural aspects that impact them (Walker 72).¹ At first, the concept of genre analysis can be difficult to understand. Like many of my peers, I had been “primed” by middle school and high school teachers to write in a specific way. This way of writing involved creating a paper in a “standardized” format that included an introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. There is nothing wrong with this type of writing, but upon giving it more thought, I realized that I had been introduced to only one specific type of writing—one genre. In high school, all of the papers I wrote contained a similar format, audience, use of research, layout, and purpose. I now appreciate that being exposed to and encouraged to think through many different types of genres are a key to becoming a successful writer. Being familiar with different types of genres and analyzing them help writers make their productions, whether it is an article, advertisement, or casual email, more effective.

Utilizing genre analysis, I questioned how I would go about analyzing productions in my academic field before truly understanding it. This is a tough question, and a question that I could not answer until I was introduced

to Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). This theory was developed to help people think about the complexity of the production of all different kinds of texts. CHAT sets up a model and offers a way of understanding the complex nature of analyzing textual productions. This theory also helps people get a better understanding of language and culture (Walker 71-72). In her article entitled “Just CHATting,” Joyce Walker, the director of the Writing Program at Illinois State University, discusses the seven terms associated with CHAT: production, reception, representation, ecology, activity, socialization, and distribution. These terms can be used to investigate the factors that impact how, why, and when certain texts are created (Walker 72). CHAT is only one of many different ways that genre analysis can be done.

The terminology of CHAT can be very difficult to grasp, but applying these terms to texts in an academic field can be really helpful when conducting a genre analysis. During the process of analyzing a production, questions can be asked that pertain to each of the CHAT terms and many of the conventions of text, such as audience, language, layout, and organization. For example, the organization of an advertisement poster, a convention of text, can have a profound impact on how attracted people are to an advertisement poster. If shorter paragraphs and larger headings were used on the poster (aspects of the CHAT term “production”), it may have an impact on how many people take the time to read the poster and how well they understand what the poster is advertising. An endless amount of connections like this can be made to understand the reasons behind the creation of a text. Next, I will discuss the seven aspects of CHAT in more detail and then follow with a flowchart and a detailed example.

Production refers to all the aspects that went into creating the text. These can include tools, practices, materials, and other related elements (Walker 74). For example, if someone were to try and make a patient history form for medical doctors to use, they would have to consider whether they have sufficient materials to do so, such as a printer, ink, and computer. They would also have to think about the standard conventions of a patient history form, considering which formats and layouts should be used to make the form more familiar to patients. This would make the form easier to understand and fill out. Below are some questions that can be asked in order to think about how production can be applied when creating a genre analysis.

General

- What tools were used to create this text? Was a printer used? Was internet needed?
- Was the production created using a “standardized format?” What impact does this have?

- Is the text written in an informal or formal style? How was research cited in the text?
- What style of citation is used?

Layout

- What type of format is the article using and why might this be effective?
- If references were included, why were they placed in the text in this way?
- Are tables or charts used? Are page numbers included?

Organization

- Where are headings used? Why?
- How long is the document? What effect does this have?
- How long are the sentences and paragraphs?

Use of Research

- How many sources were needed to create the text? What difficulties may arise?
- How is the research presented in the text? Are endnotes used?
- How can the research be used to make the text more credible?

Representation refers to all of the ways the people who produce a text think about it and plan it (Walker 75). It also refers to all of the activities and materials that help make the creation of the text successful. For example, when creating an academic article, an author must carefully consider which academic journal they will try to publish their article in. This can have a huge impact on what type of audience will have access to the article. Representation might seem a little like production, and in reality, there is a lot of overlap between the two terms. Below are some questions that can help distinguish between the terms.

General

- Is the text found online or in a printed form? How might difficulties arise because of this?
- Are there restrictions to who can access the text?

Audience

- What is the texts' purpose? What does it inform the audience about?
- Is there an audience impact on the terminology chosen by the author of the text?

Language

- How much jargon is used throughout the text? What aspects might impact how much jargon is used?

Layout

- Is the format standardized at all? Why might using this type of format benefit those who read the text?

Reception deals with how the text is perceived by the audience and how it can influence them (Walker 75). Many factors can have an impact on what sort of impression the reader is left with after reading the article. For example, if a text includes too much jargon, the reader may not be able to understand what the author is trying to say.

Audience

- What is the educational background of the audience? How might this impact how well the audience understands the text?
- What effect does the topic have on the perceptions of the audience?
- How might the author alter audience reception?
- Where was the document found or presented to the audience? If the article was hard to access, how might this alter reception?
- Were professional organizations mentioned in the text?

Layout

- Is the audience familiar with the format?
- How long is the text? How might this alter audience reception?

Visuals

- If pictures, tables, diagrams, or charts were provided in the text, how might they have altered reception?

Language

- In what way does jargon alter audience reception?

Distribution is concerned about whom the text is given to and where the text can be found. It also talks about how the text is distributed, or given, to people (Walker 75). For example, a text could be distributed by mail, the internet, plane, phone, or boat. The way a text is distributed can impact what materials were used to make the text, what audience can access the text, and how many different types of interactions can take place between people because of the text.

General

- How might distribution of the text become easier?
- What trends in technology have an effect on the way the text is distributed? Does access to the internet have an effect?

Audience

- What difficulties may arise when trying to distribute the text to the audience?
- Depending on if the text can be found online, in a printed journal, or in other public areas, does it have an impact on the type of audience that can access it (Walker 75)?
- If the text was distributed through the internet, how might this make it easier for people to share their thoughts and interact with one another about the text?

Organization

- Is the way the text is distributed impacted by how the text is organized, such as the length of the text?

Socialization refers to the interactions of people that were initiated by the creation or reading of the text. When people are engaged in the text, they consciously and unconsciously engage in other types of language and cultural practices (Walker 76). An example of socialization is when a woman reads a brochure on heart disease. The information in the brochure causes the woman to think about her health and the risk factors that are associated with the disease. Wanting to learn more, the woman calls a number that the brochure provided. She then talks with a local cardiologist and sets up an appointment. Reading the brochure, a specific type of genre, initiated the interaction of the woman and the cardiologist. This is an example of socialization.

General

- What event initiated the text?
- Is a “call to action” provided in the text? How might this affect how the information in the text is distributed throughout a community?
- What aspects do people who read the text become more aware about?

Language

- Does the text help people communicate with each other?
- Are blogs or other types of language started as a result of reading the text?

Citations/References

- How might references included in the text bring about more research by people who have read the text?

Ecology refers to the biological and environmental forces that exist and impact many factors of the text (Walker 76). Ecology can impact how the text is produced and how it is distributed. For example, if someone wanted to read a scientific journal article that was only available in a library located 100 miles from their home, then the likelihood of that person accessing the article would decrease. Now if the journal article was available in that person's local library just 5 minutes away, then the likelihood of that person accessing the article would increase.

General

- How might weather have an impact on the text or on someone's access to the text (Walker 76)?
- Are there any ecological costs when producing the text? For example, how much ink or paper is needed to create and distribute the document (Walker 76)?

Audience

- If the text is available online, how might not having access to internet or technology impact the audience accessing the text?
- Is the text located at a public building such as a library? How might living far from this public place impact whether the text is read?
- If the text is located on an online academic journal, is membership (and thus a login and password) needed? How might this narrow the audience of the text?

Layout

- How might the "history" of the format that is used in the production impact the format choices the author makes?

Activity is concerned with the actual activities that people engage in when they are creating the text (Walker 76). An example is when an author reads multiple published articles on a specific academic database to learn about the format and other text conventions used by the articles included on the database. Connecting activity to specific conventions of text can be difficult, but there are some general questions that can be used to understand activity.

General

- What aspects or activities inspired the author to create the text?
- Did the author perform research when creating the text? What kind?

- Did creating the text increase the knowledge of the author on the topic?
- If the text was published, what steps were taken by the author in order to get the text published? For example, was the text peer-reviewed?
- Is a “call to action” included in the text? How does this facilitate activity among the community? In other words, does the text inspire those who read it to make a difference in the world?

The terminology of CHAT can be confusing at first, but applying these terms to a specific genre can help guide an analysis of that genre and help writers learn more about a text and the culture and activity of the field in which it was created. In order to understand the language and culture of a specific field in which a text was produced, it can be also useful to think about the connections between each of the CHAT terms. In other words, a writer can learn how each of the terms interacts with another to form a better understanding of language, culture, genre, and the writing situation. Consider the format and layout of an academic article and how those conventions affect and are affected by the production, reception, representation, ecology, and activity of the text. As you can see in Figure 1 below, these terms can interact in a number of ways.

So, why does all of this matter? Why should we even bother to use CHAT to analyze genres? I asked myself these questions when I began conducting my first genre analysis. I could not think of a reason why genre analysis could help me in my own academic discipline of healthcare. As I began my analysis, I started connecting all of the CHAT terms together and I realized that CHAT could help me understand the communication—including aspects of language and culture—that happens in healthcare. For example, something as simple as a patient prescription form can connect different types of health care professionals with one another. After a physician writes out a prescription, the patient can give the prescription form to a pharmacist. The prescription form initiates an interaction between both the physician and pharmacist and tells the pharmacist what drug and dosage the physician wants for his patient.

To apply CHAT to my field, I analyzed a patient history form using the CHAT concept of **socialization**; I found that the form facilitates face-to-face interactions. As I listed earlier, one of the questions that can be asked when applying socialization to a genre is, “Does the text help people communicate with each other?” The form itself initiates communication between physicians and patients when they come together to discuss the questions and topics that are included on the form.

CHAT also helped me realize that there are many different kinds of people who interact in the field. When I analyzed a prescription form, I considered whether or not the form was “standardized” and what sort of impact the format had on the production of the document. Using the CHAT

Type of production: Academic Article

Specific convention of the text: Format/Organization

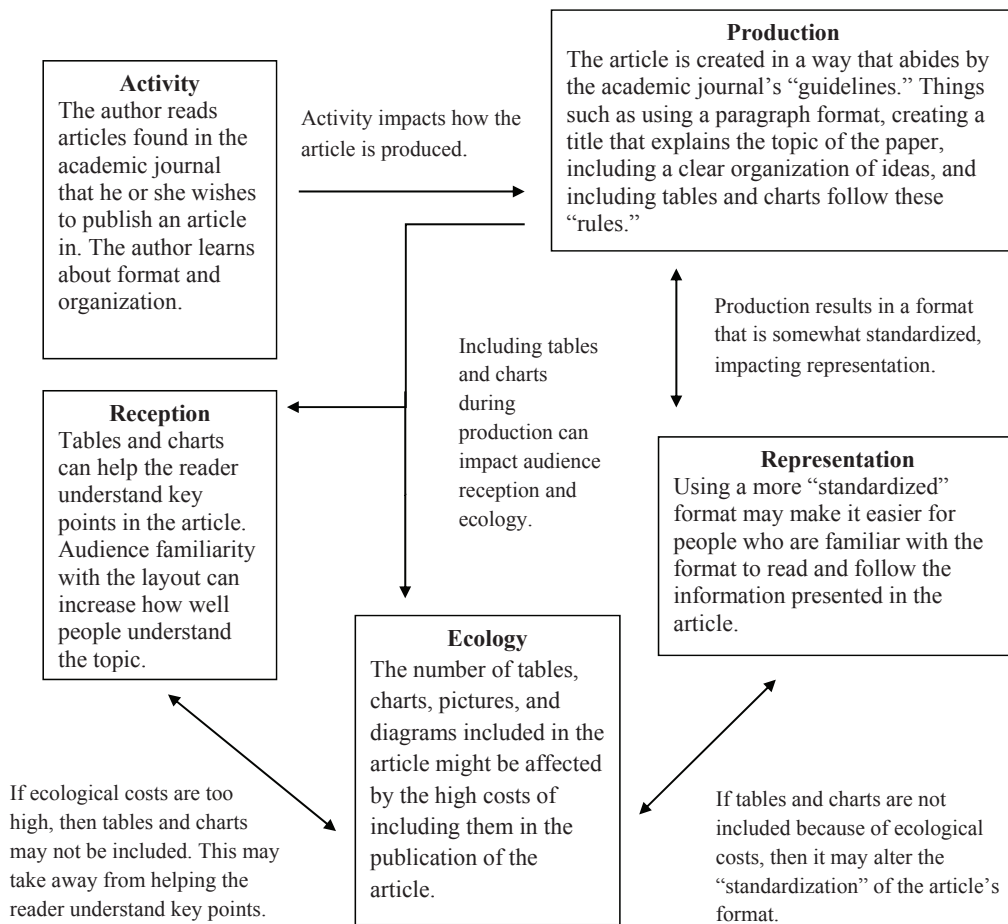


Figure 1: CHAT Flowchart

term **production**, I could see that characteristics of the prescription form, such as the size, the amount of check boxes and lines, and even where the space for a physician signature was located all fit into the "standardized" format of a historic patient history form. The "standardization" of this form makes the text easier to understand by many health care professionals.

In addition, CHAT helped me understand what sort of communication technologies and skills are used by professionals in healthcare. Using **distribution**, I noted how many different types of technology are used to distribute productions in the field, including print advertisements, phone calls, and the internet. I also saw how the use of medical technologies, such as an electrocardiogram (EKG), could make the distribution of information about

a patient's heart easier and more effective. Furthermore, the effectiveness and accessibility of the texts can be affected by how they are distributed. For example, if a person had an emergency, it would be much more effective to make a phone call and dial 911 rather than send an email to a nurse and wait for a response.

Another thing I learned is the importance of communication skills needed by professionals to distribute information clearly and effectively to patients. When a healthcare professional has an appointment with a patient, he or she must be able to present information in the best way possible. They can achieve this by emphasizing certain words or using hand gestures to make important points. These actions affect how well the message, or text, is distributed and impact the patient's **reception** of the production. If the healthcare professional uses too much medical jargon, the patient may have a hard time understanding the information.

All in all, features of CHAT can be used to analyze many specific productions, including a professional field and its communicative practices. It also can be used to better understand language and culture within that field. Professionals use genres in their field every day to facilitate the normal practices and types of communication that occur, and investigating these productions can help us better understand these communications.

Reference

1. Walker, Joyce. "Just CHATting." *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* 1. (2010): 71-80. Web. 17 Feb. 2012. Available at <http://isuwriting.com/resources/grassroots/>.



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The Grape Dimetapp™ Effect: Revising the “Revision as Medicine” Metaphor

Moria Torrington

Revision is a process that writers sometimes feel is a “necessary evil.” In this article, Torrington explains how seeing and enacting revision through a Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) perspective can make the process more useful and, ultimately, less painful for writers who want to improve their texts in any genre.

I once wrote that revision, to me, was Grape Dimetapp: it tastes horrible, but it’s good for you, so you should just suck it up because in the long run, you’ll be better for doing it.

I was young when I wrote that—not young enough to actually still be taking Dimetapp (which, for those of you who haven’t had the pleasure, is a nasty children’s cough medicine), but young enough to think I had come up with a brilliant metaphor. And I believed the sentiment so much that after each text I wrote, I forced myself to revise, carefully combing my writing for omitted commas, typos, and misplaced words. As I began to write different kinds of texts more often, I noticed that I could revise other things to improve my writing. I began to play with formats, organizations, phrasings, and the way I developed my ideas. I established a kind of two-step process for my own revisions; after I was finished drafting, I’d look at big-picture stuff like organization, paragraph development, and support first and then turn to proofreading or editing issues. In the process, I began to understand that revision is so much more than just “fixing” commas and words—it’s a writer’s chance to put his or her best foot forward in the text and to make sure that

the composition they're putting out there (wherever "there" happens to be) is the best it can be.

But the problem with this expanded notion of revision is that it still assumes that we must take our medicine—or, that our writing is "sick" and we must make it "healthy" by reviewing, re-examining, or rewriting it.¹ This definition fails to take into account all the ways that writers go about using and acting out the process in relation to their own work; in other words, this view of revision doesn't allow for an understanding of the fact that revision varies from writer to writer and text to text. Think about it this way:

1. Writers tend to use revision at all stages of their writing processes (in the middle of writing their text, for example).
2. Writers go about revising in all kinds of different ways (highlighting, making notes in the margins, using sticky notes, crossing and uncrossing out things, cutting/pasting text, and drawing attention to questionable parts of their compositions by putting the text in bold or in red, just to name a few).
3. Writers get help with revision from all kinds of places (their friends, family, peers, professors, their own ideas of what they think they're trying to do when they're writing in particular genres).
4. Writers revise many different parts of their compositions (from things like words, which can help make meaning clearer, to things like font type, which affect the look of the text on the page and therefore what genre the composition looks like).

When we think about revision this way, it becomes easier to see why it might be important and how it can help us during our own writing processes. But in order for revision to be as helpful as it could be, we need to think of it as more than just the step that comes after writing. In fact, I would argue that we all revise at some point or another during our composing processes. You might not give the text a "twice-over" (or even a "once-over") before sending it out into the world, but I'd bet at some point you've written a sentence, phrase, or word only to delete it two seconds later. Or started with one title and changed it two or three times while writing. In any case, the process isn't as clear or straightforward as we might think, and if we're going to start revising smarter, we (as writers) need to consider how exactly a complex notion of revision could improve our ability to communicate through writing.

One way we could achieve this notion is to take into account how the way that we revise is often inherently connected to the genre we're writing in.

For example, deleting an autocorrected word in a text message is technically an instance of revision, because the writer is making changes to the text to improve communication. Yet the way that we revise text messages is very different from the way we would revise research essays, which might involve doing more research to better support our argument and making sure our sources are appropriately credited throughout the text. These two revision processes are different still from the way we would revise a résumé, which is very different from the way we would revise a PowerPoint presentation, which is very different from the way we would revise a novel or a short story, which is very different from the way we would revise—well, you get the idea.

So how do we know how to revise a text we've composed? Well, it depends on both the genre and the way that the genre is situated within a cultural-historical moment. We may have an idea of what a genre looks like based on our research and our consideration of sample texts, and we can certainly revise with those things in mind, but reflecting on the context surrounding the genre will help us develop a fuller picture of the factors we need to take into account to get our message across in the clearest way possible. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)² becomes important here. CHAT gives us a way of looking at our composing process that shows us how, when, why, and for what reason we compose and revise the way that we do. A writer with a CHAT-focused idea of revision would especially want to keep in mind the representation, socialization, and reception aspects of the theory.³ Representation shows us the ideas we have about the genre we're writing in and where those ideas come from, while socialization and reception focus on the ways that we compose according to our already-set ideas of writing as well as our ideas about how our audience might interpret or use our texts. An approach to revising our texts with CHAT components in mind could help us think of the process in terms of making the most appropriate and effective choices for us, our audience, and the genre, rather than as "fixing" what's "broken" in our writing.

But what might a CHAT/genre approach to revision look like, and how exactly would it help our writing? Well, let's take as an example my cousin Cameron. Cameron is studying to become a marketing executive for a film company, and in order to do so, he must learn (and become really good at writing) the genres related to the field of business. Knowing that he's trying to break into a particular field by learning how to write in that field makes him especially aware of his revision process. But even with a clear idea of the genre he's writing and it what the purpose of his assignment is, his revision process can be complicated.

Here's one of his first major assignments for an upper-level Business Communications course:

ASSIGNMENT #1: Informative Document

Write an email, letter, or memo in which you explain something -- summarize a problem, outline a procedure, detail a process -- for readers unfamiliar with your topic. Your audience should be peers and/or subordinates.

Remember: you're *informing* and *explaining*, not persuading; this is a statement of facts, not opinions.

And his first draft of this assignment began this way (reviewer comments in *italics*):

How to buy a car?

Buying a car is a ~~huge~~*an important* financial investment, so it is no wonder ~~that~~ people spend a large portion of time in the car buying process. The first step in the car buying process is research. When making a ~~large~~*significant* purchase most people want to make sure they are getting the best they can afford so they look to reviews. There are many different sources where you can obtain information about a car including previous owner reviews and professional reviews (Car & Driver, and Consumer reports). *Why did you cite someone?!*

A couple things are clear from this piece of his draft; even though Cameron knew from the assignment sheet that the genre he was supposed to be writing in was either email, letter, or memo, his idea of what writing in school should look like—based on his socialization (that tells him what he should do in school papers) and his representation of the genre (as a paper for class)—made his first draft look more like an essay. He has a title and a main point that directly states what his paper is about, which are elements of essay writing that most of us learn during our primary or secondary writing education. The reviewer mostly reinforces the idea that this is a school paper, suggesting some changes that make his tone more formal (like it would be in a school paper) and help him sound less like he's talking to someone (like you might see in an email). However, the reviewer also questions why he would cite a fact, which suggests that on some level he or she knows the genre isn't necessarily supposed to look like "school writing," where you always cite sources in MLA, APA, or Chicago style.

From here, Cameron went back to his piece and did a second overall revision. At this point, he got feedback from a different friend. Here is the second draft with comments from the friend in *italics* and the call-out box:

The professor commented, Emails and letters don't usually have titles—so maybe take this out and put in either a subject line or a greeting like “Dear potential customer”?

How to buy a car?

Buying a car is an important financial investment to most people. It is also a very stressful time *to do so, not just from the financial aspect but both financially and* because consumers want to make the right choice and not end up with a lemon. I recently purchased my first car and employed the following steps to help me choose the right car for me.

First, you need to identify the need for a new car. Since purchasing a car is an important financial investment, you are not going to buy one if it is not necessary. After you have decided a new car is necessary, you *should* begin the research process. Most people look to get the best vehicle that they can afford, *and* to figure this out, they turn to reviews.

The second reviewer is able to recognize some aspects of Cameron's draft that might affect how it's received and interpreted by his target audience; he or she notes that emails and letters don't have titles, and that he should probably change his format so it looks like what the teacher wants. This reviewer also focuses on tone and grammar because he or she has an idea of what business writing is supposed to look like. Yet this representation doesn't take into account the audience specified in the assignment sheet. In other words, this reviewer seems to think that the “real” audience here is Cameron's teacher, which reflects a misunderstanding that stems from socialization, as the reviewer knows this is a school assignment and therefore thinks it should meet the conventions of grammar, style, and language that we typically see in school writing. Furthermore, his or her suggestions and comments don't have anything to do with helping the author fulfill the purpose of the assignment, which was to write an informative document that tells an uninformed reader what they need to know about buying a car; this oversight can happen when we don't consider the reception of our texts—how they will be received and used in the real world. If Cameron and the reviewer had thought about representation, socialization, and reception at this stage in the revision process, they might have realized that business genres have uses in the real world; they're not always just for teachers.

Cameron's (and the reviewers') misrepresentation of the genre and misunderstanding of reception are really clear when you look at the professor's comments (in *italics*) on the final draft:

Date?

Address?

John,

Buying a car is an important financial investment to most people. ~~It is~~ *It's* also a ~~very~~-stressful time to do so [*do what?*], both financially and because consumers want to make the right choice and not end up with a lemon. I recently purchased my first car and employed the following steps to help me choose the right car for me. [*Okay. But why don't you tell him—since this is supposed to be for and about him—that following these steps will help him choose the right car for him? AUDIENCE-ORIENTED, Cameron. Not Cameron-oriented.*]

IDENTIFY THE NEED [*If these are “steps,” could you list them? And give them headers?*]

First, you have to identify the need for a new car. Since purchasing a car is a financial burden, ~~you are~~ *you're* not going to buy one if ~~it is~~ *it's* not necessary. [*Are you sure?*] After ~~you have~~ *you've* decided a new car is necessary, you should begin the research process. [*Is that all you have on identifying the need? If so, is that really worthy of a full step?*]

The professor's comments—especially where he reminds Cameron that the piece should not only follow a certain format, but also must be focused on the reader—show how Cameron's revision process and the reviewers' comments were too narrowly focused. Think about what letters (the genre he ended up choosing) look like: are they concerned more with grammar or more with content? What do they do for their readers? Do they have formal or informal tones? Are contractions okay—even expected—in this genre?

By looking at Cameron's revision process overall, we can see that the reviewers' comments seem to stem from a misunderstanding of the genre and a failure to account for all the factors that might affect what Cameron's final draft looks like; while their changes to tone and word choice improve Cameron's sentence structure, they don't help as much as they could if the reviewers had reflected on the audience, purpose, and genre of the assignment as those aspects played out in the draft. Cameron's own changes show the same kind of misunderstanding. He takes the reviewers suggestions to change phrasing and punctuation because he knows he's writing for school and has been socialized to understand that in school, we write in standard English. But he could have improved his communication in this assignment overall if he had considered all of the complexities of representation, socialization, and reception in relation to the genre and the field he was being asked to write in. Ultimately, all of these considerations can happen during the revision

process; that is, thinking about CHAT components can help us make our compositions look more like the genre we’re trying to achieve if we pause to evaluate how they’re affecting our texts once we have a rough draft—whether that draft consists of a sentence, paragraph, outline, diagram, map, full text, or list of brainstormed ideas.

I use Cameron as an example here not because I want to recommend that writers begin to revise their own compositions in any set way; each writer has their own way of revising that works for them, and this process can change from text to text, situation to situation, or even draft to draft. I’m also not trying to convince writers to love revision as much as I do (and I really do love it—have I mentioned that yet?). What I think we can learn from Cameron’s process is that we should think about revision in more complex ways, in ways that consider the cultural, historic context of the genre, so that it can become more useful to us as writers. By putting aside the medicine metaphors and beginning to consider the complexities of revision, we could review and re-examine our texts in productive (rather than painful) ways.

Endnotes

1. Which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary is the primary definition of “revision.”
2. My understanding of this concept comes from (among other places) Joyce Walker’s 2010 GWRJ article “Just CHATing.” The seven elements of CHAT she outlines there (and the three I focus on here) not only help us understand the how/what/when/why of composition, but also help us think through the reasons for and uses of revision.
3. Though all seven aspects of CHAT could potentially affect the way our texts look and thus, help us revise smarter.



Moria Torrington is an English Studies Ph.D. student specializing in Rhetoric & Composition. In addition to Writing Studies and Writing Research, her interests include parody, pop culture, poetry, and plaid. She hopes one day to be able to teach a course on the rhetoric of *South Park*.

My Relationship with Writing

Samantha Stout

This article is a description of Stout's method of approaching writing in a way that is less of a formal structure and more of a romantic affair. Writing is personal, and the way we go about writing varies from person to person. Stout uses the stages of a relationship to describe how she goes about deciding on a topic, researching, preparing to write, and ultimately writing compositions.

I hate writing, plain and simple. Some people hate math, some people hate the cold, some people even hate brownies. (Crazy, I know! The chocolaty goodness!) For me, the idea of having to get the thoughts in my head to make sense, writing everything out on paper all pretty and what not, and then having it read and judged by people is less than inviting, and honestly scares the bagezezys out of me. I get a complex every time I think about it. In fact, it scares me so much that I tend to put off writing until the night before I have to have it done.

As you can imagine, and possibly sympathize with, I normally get myself into predicaments that involve having to write well and write fast. Throughout my years of trying to deal with this, I have developed a solid plan of execution to cope with this issue. I have come to think of writing as a relationship, starting with the first meeting until the point when you say, "I do." I think I've gotten it down to a science, and the best part about it is that I am able to use my tendency to procrastinate and my crazy, scattered brain to help out the process.

I wish someone I knew taught me this way of writing, or at least told me it was okay to be unconventional in the way I would go about writing, back

when I first started doing research papers. So I am going to share my process for both relationships and writing with other writers who may be stuck in front of a blank Word document.

Send the Flirty Eyes Over: Contemplate Your Topic

In relationships, making eye contact is the first step of the dating process. If you don't make eye contact, nothing will be able to come of anything. You'll just be left wondering "what if?"

Similarly, in writing, you first have to think about what you might want to write about. In order to write, you have to start by thinking about the subject matter. What is the purpose? What has to get done? By musing over the general ideas surrounding your paper, you'll get glimpses of things that hit a chord with you and could potentially turn into something real. This way you can get a tangible idea of the amount of work that you have to get done, and a good foundation of potential topics you would enjoy writing about.

Creep on Facebook: Research

The next step in forming a relationship is to creep the heck out of the person's Facebook page! Find your mutual friends and look at what they've been talking about with each other. Read up on the person's interests and check out the "About Me" section. If you want to get a little more in depth, look at the things that he or she has liked or comments that he or she has made. Even check out the last time the person's relationship status changed. It's intense and a little over the top, I agree, but it is better to know what you are getting yourself into on all of the general fronts before you're caught off guard and find out that the person is far from what you were looking for, because pursuing the person could end up being a waste of time and effort.

In writing, this is the research phase. Research anything and everything! The majority of us are glued to the Internet anyway, so instead of automatically hitting the Facebook bookmark, take a trip to Google and learn about your flirtatious idea(s). While you're sitting in the car or on the bus, instead of passing the time with a Twitter newsfeed, *Angry Birds* or (my favorite) *Bubble*, use your phone to Google random questions that could narrow the idea list. And look for everything; any feature of the topic could help. There is no harm in knowing too much on a topic especially when you have a rather large space to cover, and the extra knowledge could come in handy.

The Insanely Awkward First Date: Compile All of Your Ideas

After creeping on the person’s Facebook, it’s time to build up the courage to ask him or her out. The first date doesn’t have to be anything too spectacular; it’s just a way to see how you two get along. Be warned: there will be a lot of awkward looking around and less than riveting conversation at first. Don’t worry, this how it’s supposed to be. Both parties have to get used to being around each other. It may be an uncomfortable process, but the sooner it gets done, the sooner the easy, fun, free sailing dates will come. And someday, you can look back and laugh at what you’ve been through!

When writing, this is where I use my super unorganized and random brain to my advantage while composing a piece of writing. It’s a little thing called “stream of consciousness.” Way back when, a psychiatrist named Freud came up with the idea that the mind hides thoughts from itself (a weird concept, I know, but roll with me). Today this concept is used in psychotherapy to help bring repressed thoughts up to the surface so that problems can be addressed. Anything and everything that goes on in the person’s mind is said aloud or written down in order to allow subconscious feelings to come to the surface. How does this apply to writing, you ask? Well, when I think I have done as much broad research as possible, I switch to a scary Word document and dump onto the page everything I already know, have learned through my research, and all the things I’m still wondering about. I allow my stream of consciousness to spill out on to the page so my thoughts are tangible and easily manipulated to form into a paper. No worries about punctuation, correct spelling or anything. Hit enter as often as you want. You don’t even have to hit the space bar. Just start writing and don’t let anything in the outside world distract you or you could lose the stream and end up not able to get back on. This tactic might not be helpful for everyone, and it’s very difficult to explain, so I’ll give you a taste of my “awkward first date” with the handsome young topic of the article you are currently reading (good luck understanding):

hoping not to hit a brick wall—what if they do? do i have to answer every question? do i have to present all of the flaws... id think yes...

mulling it over—getting something to eat or dancing to some music

challenge of getting back on task

necessary for the scatterbrained so we dont explode

absence makes the heart grow fonder- Possible making it into a relationship kinda writing??? some parts wouldnt be very strong my love psychotic affair with writing??? Crazy love??

sitting down and looking the problem in the face! just type...type about how you suck at writing and how you hate this topic or the ham sandwich you just ate

get the first move out of the way as horrible or corny as it might be once it's done its done and the rest of this section is easy peasy.

As you can see, not only is it really out of order, but also, a lot of it probably doesn't make sense if you're not me (most of it didn't even end up in this article). But when I stumbled upon this tactic, I hit gold for my writing. After you think you've gotten it all out, go back and look it all over just to see if anything you wrote makes you think of something new, and then repeat the process once again. Then, say good night (figuratively).

Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder: Take a Break

Some people would tell you that the next step in a relationship is to make the person wait by the phone, not to smother them, and to let it all sink in. This is always the most delicate part of the situation. Some might argue that this is the wrong thing to do. If you're into someone, don't play games: dive in, and if they like you, they like you; if they don't, then they don't. Don't hide your interest or else they might be gone before you decide they've waited long enough. So continue with caution.

People who say that taking a break from your writing is the wrong thing to do might definitely have a point, which is why you have to treat this section with care, and if your will power to start again after you've stopped isn't strong enough, maybe this tactic isn't the right fit for you. I, however, need this or my already hectic scatterbrained mind will implode. Susana Rodriguez agrees with the idea of giving your piece of work some air. In her article, "Researching, or How I Fell in Love with Post-Its," she explains how she uses this same tactic to help her stay objective while brainstorming. After taking her "break," she is able to make connections in the writing she didn't see before (101).

When taking a break, feel free to pull up Facebook for a minute, but I suggest getting off of the computer all together. Get up and move around; get your blood circulating back to your legs. Make a sandwich, dance to some awesome music, forget all about whatever you just put onto the document, and take a break from it all. While you're not actively thinking about it, your subconscious is. Depending on your time schedule, this could include putting the paper away for the rest of the day or taking a nap. I'm normally stuck with five to ten minutes of dancing around my house to my iPod and eating a

ham sandwich while trying not to wake up the rest of my family (since by this time it's well past bed time).

Make the Commitment: Write Your Piece

If you want your relationship to continue to progress, it's time to call the person. Tell him or her you've been busy but you really want to get together again. Show off your charm and you've got it in the bag. You know that you are interested and that you like the person; you have given it time, so you know it is not a rash decision. Make it a steady thing, and commit exclusively.

In terms of composing, this is where you get down to business. This is not only the most important part, but it is also the hardest. After all of the fun freedom, you have to will yourself back in front of the computer. This is where you actually write your piece. I'm not going to tell you how to do this part. I don't even know a good, easy, uniform way to do this. I start from different parts of the paper all the time; sometimes I use an outline, sometimes, when writing a research paper, I get all of the quotations I want to use and start from there, but really, this part is still a mystery to me. However, no matter how you approach this section, whether it be head on, starting with the attention-getting lead, or dancing around the paper adding to paragraphs randomly (which is how I'm writing this paper, in case you were wondering), this is the most difficult part that inevitably must be done in order to get your piece to its final stages.

While I don't have a specific process for you to follow during this stage, keep in mind that all of the previous steps I discussed are meant to make this stage of the process a bit easier for other struggling writers. Also, the exclusivity of the relationship wasn't just cute metaphor talk: staying focused is key. I often find myself on a roll, spitting out awesome sentences with a really cool points to make, and then all of a sudden my mind is somewhere else. A drifting mind is kryptonite, so eliminate distractions as much as possible.

Get that Credit Check: Proofread

At this point in your relationship, things are probably pretty serious. Making this a permanent partnership is definitely in the cards. But, before you do anything too rash, get the credit check. Do whatever you have to do to put everything out on the table. This may not change your feelings for them, but it makes sure you both know what you are getting into.

In the writing process, this is what I like to call “no fun!” proofreading. After everything is out and is supposed to make sense, go back and make sure it all *actually* makes sense. Fix the spelling and grammatical errors, rearrange some sentences, omit and add information. If you’re up really late writing the paper, I suggest going to sleep after it is written and then getting up a little earlier than usual to reread it in the morning when you are a little more coherent and capable of seeing the little mistakes. Also, when I’m just looking for small proofreading errors, I find it more effective to read the paper backwards and fix it that way, because when I read it straight through, I tend to add or change things in my head as I read without realizing that that’s not the way it is on the paper. Another effective strategy is to trade papers with a friend and look for potential mistakes in each other’s work.

Take it to the Altar: Print it Out and Turn it In

As the great philosopher and poet Ms. Beyonce Knowles would say of relationships, “If you liked it then you should have put a ring on it!”

Once your writing is complete, print it out and turn that masterpiece in! Everything after this is out of your control, at least for the moment. Let the relief set in.

Writing, as I have found, is not going anywhere anytime soon. It’s a pretty consistent part of life, so why not build a solid relationship with it? Even if you don’t like it (like me), figuring out a way to make it easier to deal with can help a lot. Whether you find your own way, adapt my method, or use someone else’s to fit your style, believe me, it’s worth doing.

Work Cited

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Samantha Stout was born on Krypton, but due to some major environmental issues that place was destroyed, so her pops shipped her off and she was raised in sweet ole' Smallville, Kansas. Growing up, you could say she was a bit different from the rest, so she's faster than a bullet and can save a damsel in distress like nobody's business. But it's her poster child demeanor that really set her apart from the rest. Now she resides in Metropolis, with a weekend getaway to the fortress of solitude every once in awhile, working as a reporter and moonlighting as one of the men in tights.

From Cordially Yours to What's Up: Investigating Formal and Informal Letters

Brad Ure

The main goal of this article is to investigate differences and similarities between two genres of letters, formal and informal. Ure will review common conventions in each genre and discuss when each type may be use and conclude by explaining how the letter genre is changing and what it may be like in the future.

Introduction

Most people probably think they know what letters are because we use them so often; letters are written to family members, friends, business acquaintances, or more. Letters can be used to accomplish many tasks, such as persuading, informing, thanking, advertising, congratulating, and so forth, yet because they are used so often, many people may not think in depth about the genre of letters and how they might vary. This article is thus an investigation into genres of letter writing, including when they may be used.

For purposes of analyzing letters, I am considering two basic forms of letters: formal letters and informal letters. Although this categorization is very general, as there are really many genres of letters, we will look at differences between these two extremes in order to understand the generic features of letters. There are big differences between how these two types of letters are written, including the content, intent, language, and format. Informal letters are used when writing a letter to personal acquaintances of some kind, such as family or friends. Formal letters are used in situations where professionalism is required, such as for business purposes, government letters, letters to clients or companies, and so forth.

Formal Letter Writing

The conventions of formal letters often depend on the situation. Writers begin by thinking about why they want to write the letter and what they want to get out of it. Is the letter simply to share information or are is it to make a request? Most letters have a clear purpose, so writing the letter in the most rhetorically effective way to achieve that task is vital. Some types of formal letters will involve research, while informal letters will not. An example of a time that you would need to do research is if you're writing a follow up letter to an interview—doing research about the company and interviewer would be vital. The language in formal letters is usually much stricter than an informal letter; a formal letter often needs to sound professional and well thought out. Most of the

time, formal letters do not use language that makes them sound personal or emotional, while informal letters do. This is because formal letters are not meant to be personal, they are meant to accomplish a task. For example, contractions are not often used in these letters. The writer usually wants the letter to sound like he or she put effort into it because of the nature of the situation; letters to bosses, representatives, companies, and so forth should sound credible so that the recipients take the letter seriously. Writers often want formal letters to be crisp, with perfect grammar and certain format conventions. For example, a characteristic of formal letters is a formal salutation. In an informal letter, the salutation would not matter much, but in a formal letter, formal conventions like Dear with a title and family name matters more.

EXAMPLES OF FORMAL LETTERS

- Business (Most Common)
- Letters dealing with an institute or education
- Complaints
- Thanking/Apologizing
- Reference
- Application

Content of the Letter

Formal letters contain many variations, but many contain at least a clear and concise reason for writing the letter and a (sometimes short) description of who the writer is. The next paragraph can expand on the purpose of the letter and back it up with information, if needed. The concluding paragraph often tells the person receiving the letter what the expectations are or what action should happen next. Many times, writers will add something at the end of a letter to catch the attention of the person receiving the letter. Once the letter is finished, writers usually proofread the letter.

Common Conventions of Formal Letters

1. **Letterhead/Return address:** Most formal letters contain the sender's address in the header. Phone number and email address are sometimes included.
2. **Date:** The date is almost always included in formal letters. It often appears under letterhead/return address.

3. **Inside address:** The address of the person receiving the letter often appears here.
4. **Salutation:** The salutation for formal letters is often “Dear,” followed by the title (Mr., Mrs., Ms., Miss), first and last name. Sometimes only the name (with or without the title) appears without the Dear; other times “To whom it may concern” stands in as the entire salutation (but is considerably impersonal).
5. **Body:** The body of a formal letter usually contains the purpose of the letter and any relevant information to support the goals of the letter. Support could be statistics, lists, an invitation, an apology, and so forth.
6. **Closing:** The closing of this letter is often quite formulaic. A few of the most common options are Sincerely, Cordially Yours, Best Regards, and Yours Truly. Some closings may be more or less personal depending on the relationship between the writer and receiver.
7. **Signature:** Formal letters often include a signature followed by a typed name underneath. Titles may be included.

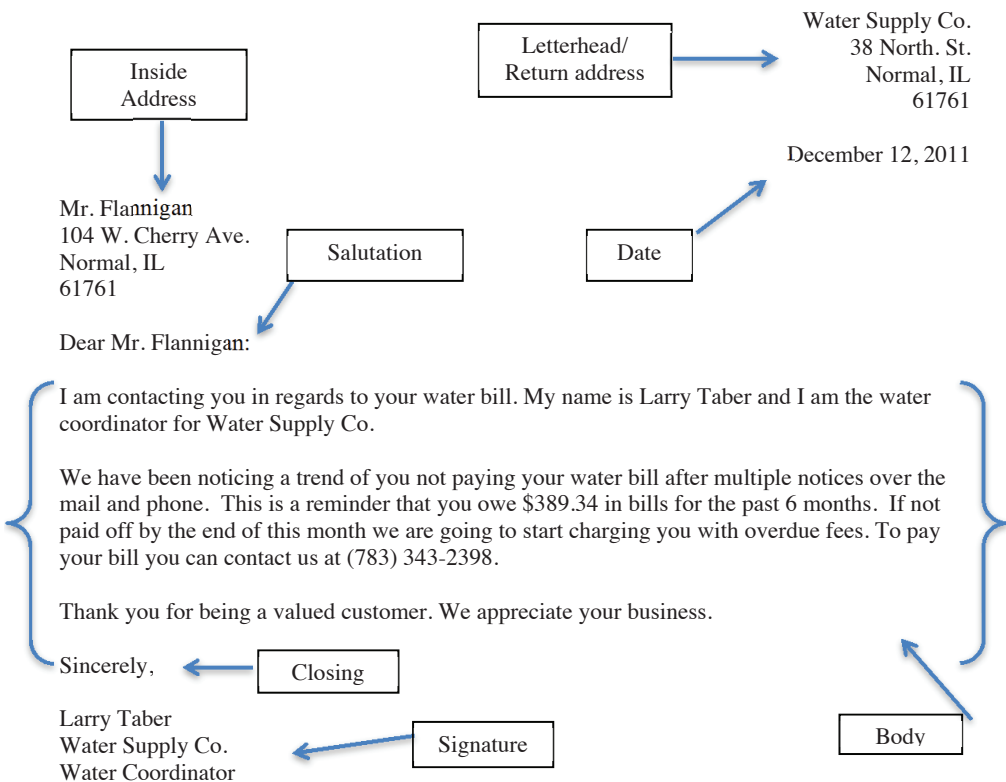


Figure 1: Example of a Formal Letter

Informal Letter Writing

Informal letters are usually used between two good acquaintances, although they can be written by many people in many different situations. The most typical informal letters are sent back and forth between relatives, friends, or anyone that you want to contact in a friendly way for any reason. Informal letters are also commonly called friendly letters. Most of the time, these letters are written back and forth on a personal level. Sometimes they are used just to see how people are doing and make sure all is well. A great example of informal letter usage is with college students. When at school, many students receive and send letters between family or friends to keep in touch.

Another reason people write informal letters is to convey a message to the reader, such as an invitation, thank you, birthday, or congratulation. After this purpose is stated, writers often add more to the letter, asking questions about the recipient's life or informing them about the writer's life. People usually respond to the letters by another letter or another type of communication. The next thing that differs greatly from a formal letter is the language used. Slang terms can be used, pretty much any language you want can be used, and this type of letter does not have very many limits when it comes

to language. One example is in the salutation and closing of these letters. There are endless options for what writers can put here and can involve exclamation points or anything else. Contractions are also allowed in these letters. Also, unlike formal letters, many times emotions are involved in the letters. When someone writes a friendly letter and involves something such as congratulation, emotions of pride and happiness are involved. Something sometimes added at the end of an informal letter is a postscript, better known as the P.S. Writers add small personal comments here about anything. A lot of the time it will be something like see you soon, love you, or a reference that only the recipient would know about.

EXAMPLES OF INFORMAL LETTERS

- Thank you letter
- Birthday letter
- Congratulating letter
- Personal letter
- Invitations
- Pen pals

Content of the Letter

The writing of informal letters is a lot less complex than formal letters and takes a lot less time and formatting. Writers can write informal letters in many different ways, but here are some common conventions. The first paragraph can show why the writer is writing the letter or at least allude to it, and the purpose can be responding to a letter, wanting to catch up, seeing how things are going, and so forth. If a writer has never written this person before, an introduction is often included in this first paragraph. The next part of the letter can consist of the details of the message. If the letter's main focus

is an invitation, for example, the details might include the where and when of the event. Another paragraph can be added before the closing of the letter, and this paragraph may sum up what the writer wrote, state a closing remark, or may not be present at all.

Genre Conventions of Informal Letters

1. **Heading:** The heading usually includes the date.
2. **Salutation:** Salutations can be a number of things such as Dear, Hi, Greetings, What's up, and so forth. It may or may not be followed by a name and a comma.
3. **Introduction:** The first paragraph that starts the letter may give an idea of what the letter will cover, or it may just be an opening line like a greeting. This part of the letter is optional.
4. **Body:** The main part of the letter may contain the message, the reason for the letter, and any related or even unrelated information.
5. **Conclusion:** Some letters may have conclusions that sum up the letter and contain any final remarks.
6. **Close/Signature:** The letter closing has many options, including Love, Talk to you later, Sincerely, and so forth. Informal letter closings are often more personal than informal letters. A signature follows and may include a full name, a first name, initials, or something else entirely.
7. **Postscript:** A postscript can be included after the signature. This is the P.S. at the end that usually contains a last small message.

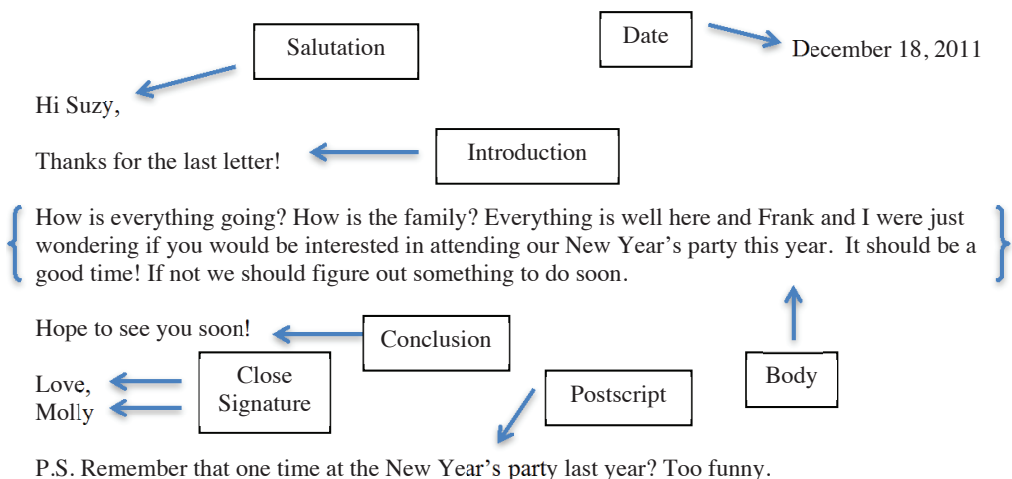
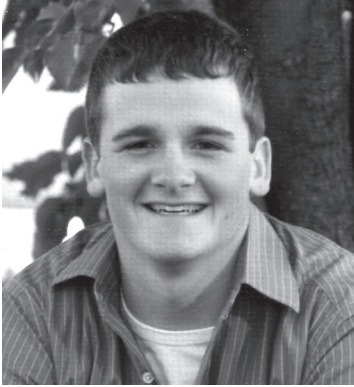


Figure 2: Example of an Informal Letter

Conclusion

After reading about the two general genres of letters and common ways of writing them, how can you use them? Try writing a personal letter to a friend or family member you have not talked to in a while, or, if you have had poor customer service lately, try writing a formal complaint letter. You might also consider how the genre of letters is changing. Currently, the number of informal and formal letters are diminishing with the use of technology. Email, Facebook, and other various social networking websites are being used to communicate. People may be writing letters by hand less and less as it is easier, faster, and cheaper to log onto the computer and type a message. Technology is especially affecting informal letters, as friends can check on status updates and send wall posts or private messages through Facebook. Even formal letters are being replaced by email, as business and professional inquiries can be done more conveniently that way. Eventually, I wonder if hard copy letters might eventually disappear. But in the meantime, letters are still used in many situations so this genre analysis of their conventions will hopefully prove useful to other writers.



Brad Ure is a 19-year old sophomore at Illinois State University studying Business Administration. He grew up in the northern suburbs and graduated from Lakes Community High School in 2011. In his free time, he is either socializing with friends or doing something outdoors.

So What's a Quad Chart, Exactly?: Exercises in Genre

Erin Frost

In this article, Frost details her experience with an unfamiliar genre—the quad chart. She explains the methodology behind her investigation of the genre, which involves doing research, consulting professionals, and producing the genre. Additionally, Erin examines the benefits of doing in-depth analyses when interacting with new genres.

Not too long ago, a student at the Missouri University of Science and Technology approached his professor for help. The student said that a proposal he was writing had to include a quad chart.

Hearing this story later, my first thought was: Huh? The only *quad* I know is the muscle. Why would a proposal need to include some sort of exercise chart?

Now, the professor in question, Kathryn Northcut, was a little savvier than that. No surprise there; Northcut is an experienced technical communication instructor and scholar. However, although she didn't think it had to do with exercise, she had never heard of a quad chart before either. So she sent out an email to the listserv for the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing.

I'm sitting at my desk trying to avoid homework when I receive this email.

[attw-l] Quad Chart teaching question

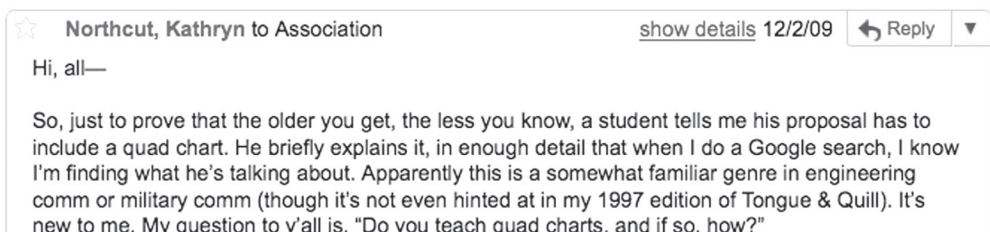


Figure 1: Email from Dr. Northcut about Quad Charts

At this point, I'm unsure of how to answer Dr. Northcut's question. More than that, my mistake in thinking a quad chart had something to do with tracking workout time reminds me how long it's been since I went to the gym. And it makes me feel even guiltier about the chocolate doughnut on my desk and the detective novel I've been reading during the time designated "rec center" on my weekly schedule. But...I'm a technical communicator, and a teacher, so don't I have an obligation to know what a quad chart really is? Wouldn't my time be better spent researching (and eating my doughnut) than selfishly going to the gym?

Research it is.

So I type "quad chart" into Google, and the first likely looking search result is at www.bids.tswg.gov/Content/QuadCharts.htm. This turns out to be one of those sites that has unannounced audio, and I'm so surprised I almost drop my doughnut onto my keyboard. Despite the surprise, the site is pretty helpful, and so are a couple other sites I find. It turns out that a quad chart is a one-page document—usually used to introduce a new product or offer a solution to a problem—that is divided into four sections (thus the *quad*). Lots of times it's the front page or summary of a lengthy proposal, or it's the document that gets you permission to submit a lengthy proposal. My dad is a civil engineer who often competes in bidding processes—that is, he submits proposals for bridge projects trying to convince companies that they should hire him to actually build the bridges. I wonder if Dad uses quad charts.

I glance at the clock and see I've still got more than an hour of "rec time" to blow, so I decide to create a quad chart cheat sheet to help me figure out how these things work. Maybe I can help Dad do one sometime and generate a little freelance work.

So here's my cheat sheet:

Quad Chart Cheat Sheet	
This section should contain some sort of image of the proposed concept. Maybe in engineer-world, it's the token "pretty" section.	This is the marketing part. It details the capabilities of the proposal. What's new and better about it?
I call this the "technology quadrant." It should include the technical aspects of the project, divided into logical phases.	I think of this as the "hard facts" section. It contains the project cost, schedule, deliverables, and contact information for the developer.

Okay, I think. This isn't so hard. What else does Google have to offer? I stumble across a database of quad chart samples at www.eng.umd.edu/nsf and am about to get sucked into perusing them when I start hearing my

past English teachers' voices in my head. Even though I'm getting lots of good information from Google, maybe I ought to be looking for some sort of scholarly article that I could cite if I ever use this in actual work for school.

Google is all well and good for finding examples and simple explanations of what a quad chart is, but if I'm going to use this for real, I should be learning about the quad chart as a *genre*. If this information is ever going to be something I can talk about and not sound like an idiot, I need to know more than rules and conventions. I need to know what scholars are saying about quad charts and why people think the genre is useful. It would be really embarrassing to start talking about quad charts in front of someone important and have them respond with something like, "Well, that article in the latest issue of *Technical Communication Quarterly* said that quad charts are *so* 2005."

I'm too full of doughnut for a long walk, so I decide to see what's available through the library's online databases. That search turns up an article called "Quad charts in software project management" by John Stamey and Thomas Honeycutt. It's only six pages, but it offers at least three variations on the definitions I've put in the quadrants on my practice chart. As I read, I realize that quad charts can be used in a bunch of different ways, and my goal for the chart will be the driving factor in how I decide which variation to use.

For example, Stamey and Honeycutt are writing about software engineers. One of the charts they offer is as simple as the one shown at right. Because we're talking about software here, a graphic isn't required. So, they use the top-left quadrant for **DO**ing: testing the idea on a small scale. Instead of marketing—because this chart is used early in development rather than as a formal proposal—they **PLAN** how to improve operations. And the other two quadrants are basically the same as what I've already learned, although these people are definitely adjusting based on context.

DO	PLAN
CHECK	ACT

All right, so I know there are a lot of different ways quad charts can be used, and the content of the quadrants will change along with those uses. But are there any *main* uses that I should know? How will I ever figure that out? I give up for a while and check Facebook. Then my email. And, lo and behold, there are a whole bunch of responses to Northcut's original question.

The first response that catches my eye is from Associate Professor Katherine Wikoff, who suggests that Northcut was actually looking for an A3 report. Wikoff says the A3 report is famously used by Toyota.

So I follow the thread of emails and do a little more searching, this time on A3 reports. I discover that "A3" refers to the size of paper used, which is 11 x 17. So maybe it's like a quad chart on steroids.

It turns out that quad charts and A3 reports are two distinct genres. For one thing, quad charts do not have to be done on 11x17 paper, and A3 reports are limited to that format. A3 reports always offer a solution to a problem while quad charts can do other things. But Wikoff said in her email that A3 reports are used often in engineering because of their visual orientation and ability to capture information for brief reports, and those concepts also apply to quad charts.

So, going back to Google. I find that while A3 reports and quad charts can be rhetorically similar, they're different in terms of formatting and delivery. Which means it's just as likely that my dad would use an A3 report in civil engineering rather than a quad chart, right? Now, I've got to figure this out.

Before long, I discover a clever site that explains A3 reports and gives samples at www.coe.montana.edu/IE/faculty/sobek/A3/. This site says there are six parts to the A3 report. The first part details research on the situation and the second part is a cause analysis. The third part offers solutions to the cause, and the fourth part describes an ideal solution. Finally, in part five, the author writes out the plan. And the last part offers predictions and any follow-up procedures.

Easy enough.

Except it's not.

I let my inner nerd out and attempt to make both a quad chart and an A3 report for fun. It takes forever. I just keep coming back and trying to cram in more information, but one page—even an A3-sized page—just isn't enough room to summarize a decently detailed proposal. I was playing with adding more parking on campus as a topic, but there simply isn't enough room to cover everything I want to cover in terms of pros and cons, new parking areas, and monetary changes. I realize, belatedly, that this would be even more frustrating if I had already written a report and now the contents of that report wouldn't fit in my summary document.

Then—after the fact—I read Professor Michael Albers' response to Northcut's email: "I encountered quad charts this summer while working in a Navy research lab. The person creating it was complaining how hard they are to create. He could produce a 6 slide PowerPoint with the same information in 30 minutes, but spent [a] couple of days tweaking the quad chart to get everything it had to contain [...] in readable form." Albers also says the same person liked quad charts...when he was the one receiving them instead of creating them.

It turns out that quad charts and A3 reports are just like everything else in technical communication, or in composition in general. The focus is on the user—as it should be.

Wow, I think. How much time could this save people who have to read tons of stuff for their jobs? If the people who wanted something from them had to do the work to summarize and make one of these charts, it might really streamline things. Not only would there be less work for the people getting the reports, but the people submitting them would get faster responses. If I teach my technical writing students about these two genres, I might be really giving them a step up in the workplace. I'm feeling less and less guilty about not going to the rec today, and then I read more of the replies to Northcut's email and discover that quad charts and A3 reports are often used in organizational administration, vehicle design, and government grant application.

That seals the deal. This really was time well spent learning two new genres.

To share my new understanding of quad charts and A3 reports, I ask my technical writing class in Spring 2010 to examine the genres and produce one or the other on a topic of their choice.

The following is one of the excellent quad charts produced in that class.

I guess it serves me right.

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Get Fit: A Plan For Weight Loss and Fitness

by Katie Fagan



  <p>Keep your eyes on the prize!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Technology</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedometers measure footsteps. A person should walk 10,000 steps in a day to burn calories. • Heart rate monitors show heart rates, which should be between 70-80 beats/minute when resting. • Weight Watchers sliding scales show people how many "points" they've eaten in a day. Less points = better! • BMI Scale measures body mass index, which shows how much fat a person has, which should be under 24.9. <p style="text-align: center;"><u>So What?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The more a person weighs, the higher risk they have for developing illnesses/diseases. • Using tools like pedometers, heart rate monitors, and eating tools will help monitor fitness. • Weight loss is publicized by TV shows, such as "The Biggest Loser."
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Participants</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ANYONE can lose weight if they put their mind to it and have goals for each week such as losing 1 pound & eating healthier foods. <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Schedule</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise in the morning. • Stretch arms, legs, back, etc before doing any cardio activity. • Do a form of cardio (walking at fast pace, jogging, running, jump rope, elliptical) for 30 minutes 3 times a week. If more weight is wanted to be lost, increase the length and intensity of exercise. • Eat breakfast with protein. 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Funding</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership at LA Fitness (monthly, after sign up fees): \$34 • Cost of average treadmill: \$1,000 • Exercise balls: \$20 • Exercise Floor Mat: \$40 • Exercise Videos: around \$20 <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Benefits</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is obvious that being healthy and fit comes at a financial cost, but it is less expensive to prevent excess weight and health problems than to have to fix the problems through prescription medicines and doctor visits. • Many fit people feel that they have a better quality of life, because that they can participate in more physical activities and they look and feel better.

Figure 2: Quad Chart Prepared by Katie Fagan for a Technical Writing Course



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Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*

GWRJ Editors

The *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* is published by the Illinois State University Writing Program, Joyce R Walker, Editor and Kristi McDuffie, Associate Editor. The journal is designed by the English Department's Publications Unit, Tara Reeser, Director.

Our Mission Statement

The *GWRJ* is dedicated to publishing work by writers and scholars whose work investigates the practices of people writing (and acting) in different writing situations and in a variety of different genres. We encourage both individuals and groups to submit work that studies and explores the different ways that writers learn how to write for different genres and in different settings, not just within the boundaries of academia, but in all kinds of settings where writing happens. Because we identify as “writing research” any type of composition that endeavors to uncover new information about how people work with writing or how writing works, a wide range of techniques and styles of writing might be applicable. For example, a first person narrative, an informal conversation about writing, a formal study of writing, or even an artistic production could all be useful techniques for developing a *GWRJ* article. However, accepted articles will be informed by either primary research into writing behaviors and activities and/or by scholarship in the field of writing studies that addresses theories of how people learn to compose in different situations.

Submissions

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

Queries and Drafts

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

Deadlines

Although articles, queries, and drafts can be submitted at any time, these are the initial deadlines for the production of the 4.1 (Fall 2013) and 4.2 (Spring 2014) issues:

October 1, 2012	Submit articles by this date for priority consideration for Issue 4.1 (Fall 2013).
January 15, 2013	Submit articles by this date for priority consideration for Issue 4.2 (Spring 2014).

Citation

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

Style and Tone

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

1. The readership of the *GWRJ* is **writers**. It is not “students,” or “ENG 101 students,” despite the fact that it is used as the “textbook” for English 101. *GWRJ* articles should attempt to provide valuable content to writers who are engaged in the activity of “learning how to learn about” genres. Our readers may be ISU students, staff, or faculty, but they might also be members of the wider Bloomington-Normal community or beyond.
2. “Teacher Narratives” are not acceptable as *GWRJ* articles. We are interested in material that looks at literate activities from the position of a “writer” or a “researcher,” but articles that discuss ways to “teach” people about writing are not appropriate for this journal.
3. However, many of our readers are both writers and students at ISU (in either ENG 145 or ENG 101). This means that articles that focus on learning that happens in school are considered appropriate (see the section on “School and Society” for more information).
4. Language and style that is overly formal or “academic” may be difficult or unappealing to our readers.
5. A tone that situates the author as a “master” writer is often problematic. (We call these “success” narratives, which are often how-to type articles, where the focus is on the author’s learned expertise.) Authors need to be careful to remember that no one “learns” a genre completely or in completely simple way. So while writers (especially of first-person narratives) may write about successes, they need to complicate the genres with which they are working.
6. Tone or content that situates the reader as a certain kind of writer (whether as a master or novice), with certain kinds of shared experiences, can be problematic, because the readership of the journal constitutes a wide variety of writers with different writing abilities and experiences.
7. Whenever possible, articles should make use of published research about writing practices, but the research should be incorporated into the text in a relevant and accessible way so that readers who are not used to reading scholarly research can still benefit from the references.
8. Articles are usually not strictly theoretical; while theoretical perspectives are useful, it’s important for authors to think about how to make the theories applicable (in practical ways) to our readers.

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

Subject Matter

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

Media, Mode, and Copyright Issues

The *GWRJ* can publish both visual and digital texts. We encourage multimodal texts, including still images, audio, video, and hypertexts. However, authors working in these technologies need to be very 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. Also, video/audio of research subjects can require special kinds of permission processes. So you should contact the *GWRJ* editors before beginning this kind of work. Research using subjects who are considered “protected” populations (people under 18 and people with mental disabilities, among others) are not acceptable for *GWRJ* articles unless the author has received approval from Illinois State University (or another institution) for Human Subjects research.

Honoraria

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

Research in School and Society

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

Personal Narrative (or Not?)

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

to a creative non-fiction story in many ways. Although we do encourage a relatively informal register for all articles, and while we are happy to publish personal narratives about writing experiences, we do want to stress that articles need not be written as first-person accounts, nor do they need to be written only about the author's experiences. Studies of the writing of others are equally as important work that relates a single, personal perspective, and, in addition, the *GWRJ* would like to encourage writing research that looks beyond the personal.