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GRASSROOTS WRITING RESEARCH JOURNAL

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Table of Contents

From the Editors

Rebecca Lorenzo

As we enter the eleventh year of publishing the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, we are thrilled to usher in this new decade with the eleven excellent articles and the two interviews featured in this issue. When Dr. Joyce Walker began the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* (*GWRJ*), she created a space that would go on to showcase students conducting writing research and exploring literate activity through genre and cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT). In the Writing Program at Illinois State University, we use a version of CHAT that is specifically aimed toward pedagogy. This is because the *GWRJ* informs and is informed by the first-year composition courses that make up its discourse community. Our pedagogical version of CHAT includes seven terms that provide a framework around which students can interrogate texts and genres as they exist in the world while accounting for the nuanced and dynamic nature of such texts. This version of CHAT is discussed at length in "Re-situating and Re-mediating the Cannons: A Cultural-historical Remapping of Rhetorical Activity: A Collaborative Webtext" (Prior et al.), and it's used in the subsequent articles to various generative ends.

Since its inception, the *GWRJ* has grown, and its discourse community continues to shift as the Writing Program's learning outcomes further develop. Plus, this decade, we've welcomed Dr. Rachel Gramer, our new Writing Program Director. Alongside the Writing Program Leadership Team (WPLT), the *GWRJ* team is working to better fit the needs of this ever-changing community. To that end, issue 11.1 includes a variety of articles by new voices that each provide intriguing and thought-provoking perspectives as they pursue investigations into a range of literate practices and genres. The thirteen new articles in this issue—which range from inquiries about how cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) can be used to make sense of literate activity to the importance of recognizing texts as working in larger systems of texts and genres—continue the journal's long tradition of interrogating writing and literate activity in a wide array of forms and digging deep into all of their myriad complexities. Each article offers a unique point of view about how writing works in the world while offering the author's personal experience with writing in a complex, nuanced, and sociocultural way. What we find particularly fascinating about this issue is the way it touches on a number of Writing Program Learning Outcomes through topics such as winter preparation, SoundCloud, League of Legends, and tattoos. Certainly, the work

of this issue's contributors continues to expand our collective understanding of the multifaceted nature of genres and the work of writing in the world in general. We hope you enjoy this new issue as much as we do.

To start off issue 11.1, the first two articles address a topic that has begun to be featured in the journal more often: discourse communities. First, **Leslie Hancock** describes her entrance and exploration of the League of Legends discourse community. Leslie discusses the genres within the League of Legends activity system and how her antecedent knowledge helped her navigate it, tracking her uptake of this ongoing experience. Next, **Allison Mool** interviews her parents in order to investigate genres and discourse communities associated with law. In doing so, Allison also illuminates some of the jargon, or specialized language in this field which is often a component of discourse communities.

Offering insights on a similarly underrepresented topic, the next two articles shed light on activity systems, ultimately facilitating students' uptake of other writing program concepts. **Kelly Pierce**, for instance, tackles activity systems from the inside as a member of the AMC discourse community. Kelly examines this activity system using CHAT and provides a relatable topic through which readers can discuss activity systems. Similarly, **Edmund Ankomah** examines preparing for a Midwest winter as an activity system, engaging with the various aspects of this system as he becomes a part of it. As a winter newbie, Edmund metaphorizes his experience through *Game of Thrones* and uses terms from Illinois State University's Writing Program—such as transfer—to talk about his experiences.

Following this, the next article enlightens us on the importance of considering one's position as an audience member. Specifically, **Zach Dukic** notes how one person can belong to various target audiences—especially somewhere like ISU—and how these target audience members have genre knowledge that helps them take up the advertisements on campus. Further discussing the importance of genre knowledge and analysis, albeit through a different topic, **Alexa Parker** examines fake news and illustrates how CHAT and other Writing Program concepts can be used to critically interrogate potentially fallacious stories. Together, these two articles work to show relevant ways that the skills students learn can be useful when engaging with writing in the world.

Next, Serenah Minasian and Eric Korankye address another Writing Program concept, multimodality, through two different Writing Program learning outcomes. First, **Serenah Minasian** couples CHAT with learning outcome number seven—(Multi)Media and (Multi)Modalities: The Forms, Structures, Tools, and Modes of Writing—and examines how even tattoos

can be approached with these frameworks in mind. Serenah's article also offers an entry point for discussing learning number one—Writing Research Identity—since she ties her tattoos to her identity and explains how these multimodal compositions on her skin speak to it. Then, **Eric Korankye** studies the multimodal genre of protest posters, his article speaking to learning outcome number eight—Cultures and Communities: Culturally Responsive and Ethical Representations in Writing—and learning outcome number nine—Translingual and Transnational Literacies: Attention to Diverse Language Practices. Eric breaks down his analysis of protest posters as a genre and bolsters it with his personal experiences, perhaps inviting further discussions of writing research identity.

While Korankye starts the discussion of translingualism, **Emily Fontenot** continues it by examining her own experience with Cajun French. In her article, Emily discusses translation, code-switching, and the discourse community built around this language, ultimately speaking to the ways that the myth of monolingualism, as enforced by schools and the like, effaces the heritage of many peoples. While Emily's article offers insight into how our identities are tied to our language practices, **Dr. Joyce Walker** uses her article to metaphorize all the resources and skills we may have implicitly or without recognizing how they might be transferred to new situations. With their focus on language practices, both Emily and Dr. Walker show how writing is tied to who we are!

Before our two excellent *Grassroots* Literacy Interviews, issue 11.1 finishes with an article investigating SoundCloud as a genre. Using concepts from the ISU Writing Program—including but not limited to CHAT—**Madeleine Renken** examines the multimodal and multimedia platform and breaks it down to call attention to its complexity. Essentially, Madeleine wraps up the articles of issue 11.1 by reminding the *GWRJ* readership that genres are often more complicated than we think, especially if we already have implicit genre knowledge under our belts.

Finally, the last two written pieces in this issue are *Grassroots* Literacy Interviews, a genre aimed at investigating the ways in which writing exists in the world through dialogues with community members and members of the workforce. First, **Laurel Krapivkin** interviews her father, Randy Hasper. Laurel and Randy discuss the latter's time writing for the *San Diego Reader*, and afterwards Laurel reflects on her father's words, demonstrating reception while also offering several insights about writing. Then, the *GWRJ* team proudly presents a conversation between our new intern, Eleanor Stamer, and Sara, the first *GWRJ* intern, who worked closely with Eleanor. Eleanor and Sara offer the inside scoop on what it's like to review articles for

the journal and how they see Writing Program concepts enmeshed in this process. Both articles, then, offer contextualized examinations of writing in the world in an engaging and interesting way.

In ushering in this second decade for the *GWRJ*, we end this issue with an edited version of "Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*," which we hope will continue to inspire future writing researchers to share their work with the *GWRJ*. As we look forward, we remain excited to work with writers to develop articles that continue to further our understanding of the complexity of literate activity and the way that writing works in the world. We are always inspired by the work of citizen writing researchers—their creativity and capacity for curiosity continually expands our collective knowledge and furthers the conversation into what writing is, what it means to be a writer, and what a writing research approach can teach us overall. We look forward to continuing to share new and innovative projects with you in future issues of the *GWRJ*.

From Noob to Veteran in *League of Legends*: Activity Systems and Genre Analysis in Video Games

Leslie Hancock

How do we learn to play video games? In this article, Leslie Hancock explores the process of learning how to play her favorite competitive game, *League of Legends*, using antecedent knowledge and genre analyses while participating in the game's discourse community. After researching across a variety of genres within *League*'s activity system, Hancock learns how to improve at the game and becomes a fan of the game's competitive esports scene.

When I talk to people about *League* and esports, I'm usually treated to a looooong blank stare. (That's OK—when people talk to me about traditional sports, I give them a blank stare, too.) Most people have heard of more casual and popular games like *World of Warcraft*, *Minecraft*, and *Fortnite*, but far fewer people know of one of the world's largest competitive games out there: *League of Legends*. As an avid *League* player, it was only a matter of time before I became an ardent fan of the vibrant and growing esports scene ("Let's Go, Cloud9!"). I've been a player and fan for seven years, so it's easy enough for me to talk about it now, but back when I was still learning how to play, it took me a while to grasp the basics of the game. There was so much I had to learn: the jargon used by the player base, the items and what they do, the champions and their abilities, the locations and layout of the map, the spawn locations of the monsters, and paths of the minions, the roles to choose from and their objectives—and so much more! If you're thinking, "I have no idea what any of that meant," that's exactly where I was when I first started playing *League*.

Learning how to play the game felt like an overwhelming and daunting task. Not only was I learning the visual layout and the controls of the game, I was also learning an entirely new *kind* of game! *League of Legends* is what's known as a MOBA, or a multiplayer online battle arena. I had never played a game from this genre, so I was pretty lost right from the beginning! Thankfully, I was able to tap into my library of **antecedent knowledge**, my prior knowledge and experiences, from other video games I had played. Not only could I call upon this prior knowledge and **transfer** it to this new game—taking my antecedent knowledge from a previous context or situation and applying it to a new one—but I also knew ways I might be able to do some research and learn more about it.

Welcome to Summoner's Rift

When I first started playing, I was fortunate enough to have a couple of friends who were able to help me develop a good understanding of the fundamentals of *League*. Actually, I hadn't originally wanted to play the game—I thought MOBAs were kind of a stupid game genre, and I wasn't very open-minded about playing one—but eventually they wore me down and convinced me to play a few games with them to at least try it out. Because hey, *League's* a free game, so why not? Right?

First, I had to install the game. Thankfully, I have lots of antecedent knowledge when it comes to downloading and installing new games to play! It made the whole thing a much easier and faster process. I knew from downloading other games that I could probably find the download link from a quick Google search. So, I went to Google, typed in "download League of Legends," and saw the first search result was the exact link I needed to install the game. I saw that I would be required to make an account before I could play the game, which is similar to many other games I've played. OK, no problem. I created an account and clicked the big "Download Game" button. I opened the installer file, let it do its thing, and finally a *League of Legends* icon popped up on my desktop. I was ready to play!

Game client: An interface where users can change their game settings, see news and information about the game, chat with friends, and launch the game. See Figure 1.

I double-clicked the *League* icon and opened the game client. I was ready to get right into a game with my friends, but first I had to take a moment to look over the client and ponder what all these different buttons meant (see Figure 1). Thanks to my antecedent knowledge, some aspects looked familiar because they resembled buttons or menu options I'd seen in other game

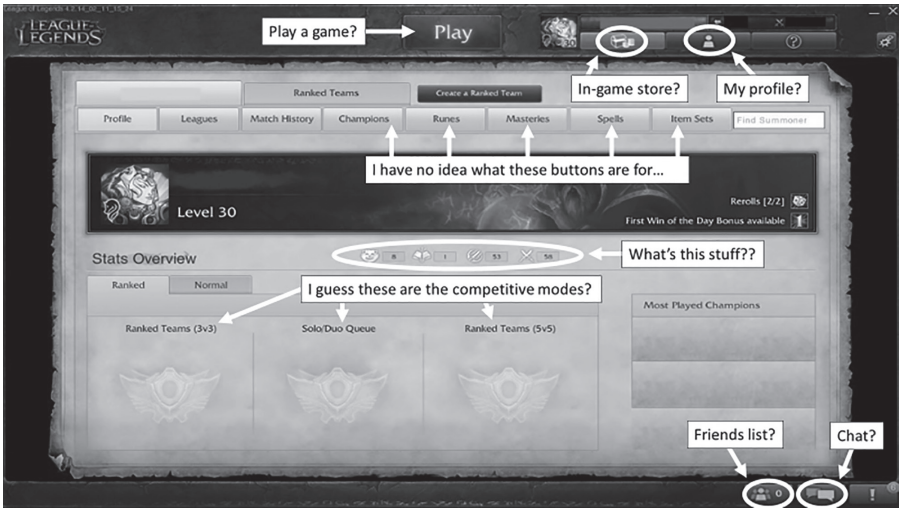

Figure 1: A modified screenshot of the *League* client from 2013. Arrows and textboxes added.

clients, like the icon with the silhouette shape of a person signaling a friends list, and the giant "Play" button signaling how I might go about entering a game. The client itself for any game could be considered a genre all on its own because gamers have come to expect certain features and common **genre conventions**, which are recognizable features of a genre that help us identify what it is. **Genres**—productions, texts, the "things" and "stuff" of our world—are made up of these common conventions. You might be thinking "Wait, aren't genres just stuff like books or poems or essays and other written stuff like that?" True, genres can be written texts, but genres can *also* be any kind of production or creation that we try to understand by identifying features or characteristics that are repeated. In relation to this article, genres include things like the video game itself (*League*), *League's* game client, the characters within the game, the written texts surrounding the game (game guides, YouTube videos), esports productions, and all sorts of other genres! For now, let's focus on the *League* client as an example of a genre following common genre conventions.

I recognized buttons in the *League* client that might take me to an in-game storefront, a profile page, a friend's list, and a chat window. I figured the "Ranked Teams" button must take me to the competitive ranks page, which is a pretty standard feature in any game with competitive play. Considering all the aspects of the client, its buttons and words and their meanings, was my conscious **uptake**—the process of taking up a new idea—of the *League* client. Using my antecedent knowledge and transferring what I knew from previous games, I was able to go through a quick uptake process of certain buttons and terms as I glanced around the client the first time I saw it.

But there were some buttons and pages within the client I *didn't* recognize. As you can see from the labels on the screenshot I've included (Figure 1), I had lots of questions about the interface, like, "What was the Runes page for? What are Masteries?" I knew what "Items" meant in other games (another common genre convention I recognized!), but I didn't know how they worked in this game. I also needed to know what "item sets" were and what I could (or should) do with them. I knew what the words "runes," "masteries," and "item sets" might mean, but I wasn't sure what they meant in the context of *League*. Unfortunately, my antecedent knowledge wasn't able to help me with this one, so I couldn't transfer what I already knew to this new situation.

Before I could get into too much of a panic, one of my friends sent me a message through the *League* client and told me how to join their game lobby. (We weren't cool enough to be using a voice chat program like Discord yet, so we typed to one another in the *League* client.) They also added me as a friend, and a notification popped up showing their friend request—another similar genre convention I can recognize from other games! My friend told me not to worry about runes and masteries for the time being; instead, I should just get into a game with them to try it out and get a feel for everything.

We finally got into a lobby together and . . . Oh, geez, more stuff I didn't recognize.

As you can see in Figure 2, there is an awful lot going on here. My friends referred to this as the "game lobby." I asked them what the heck all this stuff on my screen was about. This is when they explained that each team has

Figure 2: A modified screenshot of the *League* game lobby in 2013. Arrows and textboxes added.

five players who pick five champions, and each team is allowed to ban a certain number of champions so that neither team is allowed to play them. They told me to pick any champion to play, whatever looked fun. I think the first champion I chose to play was Soraka, a goat goddess champion (see Figure 3). My friends told me Soraka was a healer. In video games, "healer" is an archetypal class of character known for restoring health (or "hit points") to their allies. I had played other healers in other video games, so I thought maybe this would be a good place for me to start. Plus, she was just completely goofy looking. Soraka had a giant horn on her head and ridiculously oversized goat feet. And what even is her weapon? A giant *banana*? Soraka is *amazing*.

Figure 3: The character model for Soraka in 2013.

The lobby timer counted down from thirty seconds, then the game loaded. For the first time, I heard the announcer say, "Welcome to Summoner's Rift."

The UI (user interface) of the game was relatively simple and reminded me of other games I'd played (see Figure 4). I recognized the bar at the bottom of the screen as the abilities my champion was able to use, although I had no idea what they were yet. I recognized the map of the arena (often referred to

User Interface: The visual elements around the screen, like menus or boxes of information, that help the player play the game.

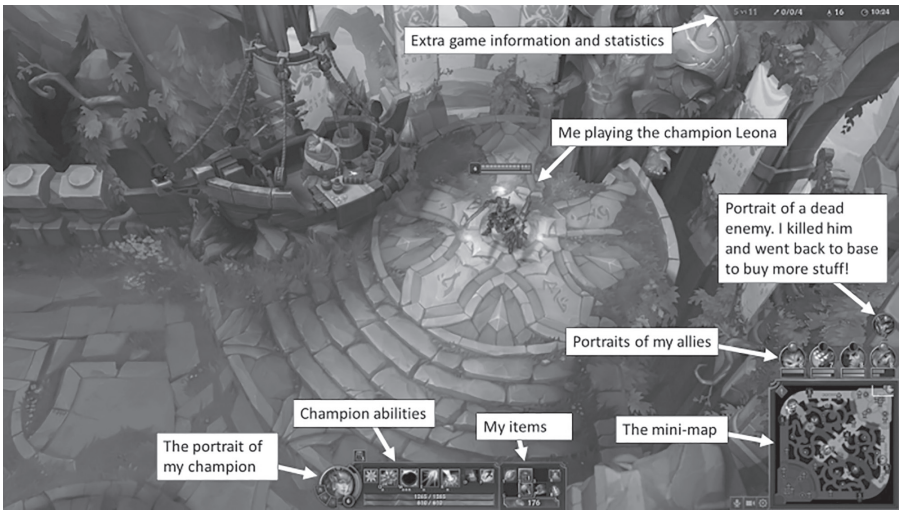

Figure 4: The user interface and player perspective in *League*. I am playing the champion Leona in this screenshot. Image captured Oct. 2019. Arrows and textboxes added.

as the "mini map" in most games) and the portrait of my character. Pulling from my antecedent knowledge once again, I knew that if I hit the Enter key on my keyboard, I could probably pull up an in-game chat box (and it worked!). Again, transferring my prior knowledge was really helpful for learning this new game!

At first, I tried using the arrow keys to move Soraka. Nothing happened. I tried left-clicking on the ground around her, and she still wouldn't move. (Way to let me down on this one, antecedent knowledge!) I tapped the Enter key to pull up the chat box and typed a quick message asking how to move my champion. My friends laughed and told me to try using the right-click button on my mouse. Magically, Soraka took her first steps away from our team's base and out into Summoner's Rift. My learning process and initial uptake of the game's controls was off to a rocky start, but it was exciting to see my champion take her first steps onto the Rift. I was finally playing the game!

Nooblife and Learning the Lingo–What's a Yordle?

In my first few games of *League*, I was exposed to all sorts of new terms, acronyms, and phrases I'd never heard before or didn't understand in the context of this particular game. This was my earliest foray into the discourse community of *League of Legends*.

A **discourse community** is a group of people who share a set of discourses—vocabulary, signs, and symbols, as well as methods and modes of communication—which are understood as basic values and assumptions and ways of communicating about their goals. These groups will often adhere to various rules (stated or implied) that govern what can and can't be said or done, and the group is generally unified by a common focus.

In the old game lobby (it has since been completely revamped), it used to be common for players to "claim" which of the five roles they wanted to play: Top, Jungle, Mid, ADC, or Support. Each of these five roles corresponded to a certain area of the map which became that player's domain (see Figure 5). Both in and out of the game, players use these terms and so many others to describe what each player's objective is in their role, classify types of champions, specific locations of the map, and so much more!

I could write a sizable dictionary filled with all the terms and references used by the *League of Legends* community. Here's a small sampling of some of the most commonly used words and acronyms that I had to learn to play

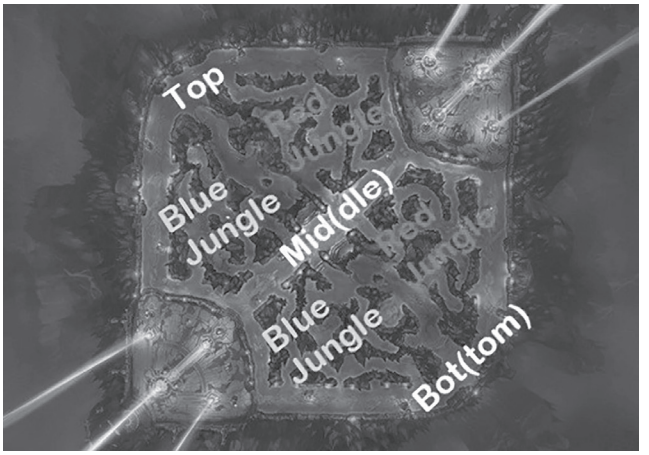

Figure 5: Summoner's Rift labeled with each region of the five player roles. Modified with text added.

the game. I've defined the terms as I understand them, so you may see them defined differently depending on where you look or who you ask.

- ADC – Attack damage carry; goes to Bot lane
- APC – Ability power carry; goes to Mid lane
- Baron (short for "Baron Nashor") – The toughest monster to kill on the Rift; a highly desirable prize both teams fight over
- Carry – A certain class of champions that have the ability to take over a game and "carry" their team to victory
- CC – Crowd control (stuns, roots, slows, disables, disarms)
- Champion(s) – The playable character(s) in the game
- Feeder – A player who intentionally kills their champion over and over again to try to force their team to lose and allow the enemy team to win (also called a "griefer" or "inter," short for "intentional feeder")
- Jungle – Refers to all the jungle areas of the map (see Figure 5) as well as the person playing that role, who may be called both "jungle" or the "jungler"
- Lanes – Refers to Top, Mid, and Bot, or the top, middle, and bottom lanes of the map (see Figure 5)
- Support – Champions who typically have abilities that heal or shield their allies, and/or abilities that have some sort of crowd control; goes to Bot lane

Figure 6: The *League* champion Teemo. Doesn't he just *look* completely evil?

- Yordle – One of the many races/species of champions in *League*. Yordles are short, furry, and have large ears. The Yordle "Teemo" is traditionally the most hated champion in the game (see Figure 6).

As a *League* player, it was mandatory that I learned all these words and acronyms. To play the game, I needed to learn the ins and outs of *League's* discourse community, and if I wanted to get better at the game, it would be necessary for me to *really* submerge myself within the community—into its discourse practices, values, and rules.

But *League's* discourse community extends beyond the immediate game to the greater genre and activity system surrounding it. *League's* terms are also used by players and fans in the forums, game guides, and esports communities. If I wanted to get better at *League* and climb the ranked ladder, not only did I have to learn how to become a participant in the discourse community, I also had to begin accessing genres produced by the community to start researching ways to improve.

Research and the *League* Community–Escaping Bronze 4!

I was *so excited* to start playing the competitive game mode (referred to as "ranked" by players). With my friends, I had only been playing "normal" mode (the unranked version) and against bots (artificial intelligence playing as the enemy team instead of real people), which had begun to bore me. I like to get involved in the more challenging competitive mode of all the games I play, so I was super stoked about trying my hand at competitive *League*. I played my ten placement matches and was placed into Bronze 4 . . . Next to the lowest possible ranking in the game.

The more I played ranked the more I became attached to one champion: Leona, "The Radiant Dawn" (see Figure 4). Leona's character story is that she's a warrior templar of the Solari, a group that worships the sun, who fights to protect the helpless and innocent. Her lore is pretty cool, but I also liked how hard it was for enemies to kill her (referred to as being "tanky" in gaming communities). And best of all, I liked that she bashed enemies with her shield as one of her attacks. There is something super satisfying and fun about walking up to enemies and—HOOYAAAAHH—bashing them in the face!

I was playing a ton of Leona, learning the ins and outs of her abilities, and I was able to climb to Bronze 2 with her. In each tier—Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum, Diamond—5 was the lowest level and 1 was the highest.[1] But I was having a hard time cracking Bronze 1, and I knew I was going to have trouble trying to win enough games to get to Silver 5, the rank I desired above everything else to prove that I was *not* the worst player in the game! Just, you know, kind of average-bad? Not the worst!

I started looking for *League* game guides, a common genre found in gaming communities that helps players improve their gameplay. This was my first experience with the numerous genres related to *League of Legends* produced by players and fans. Using my Google ninja skills, I typed in "Leona guide" into the search bar. One of the top hits was for the site Mobafire (*mobafire.com*), a very popular champion guide in the *League* community. I found a guide on Mobafire from a user named "Xpecial" that showed me what order I should level up Leona's abilities, what runes and masteries I should use, and lots of other general gameplay tips for playing Leona (Figure 7). I also found another guide from him on a site called "Team SoloMid" (*solomid.net*, which has since moved to *tsm.gg*). A third search result took me to a video guide for Leona (Figure 8). This was another guide created by Xpecial, on the site Lolclass (*lolclass.gg*). There were also a number of YouTube videos and many search results finding the keyword "Leona" on Reddit's subreddit discussion forum, r/LeagueofLegends (*reddit.com/r/leagueoflegends*).

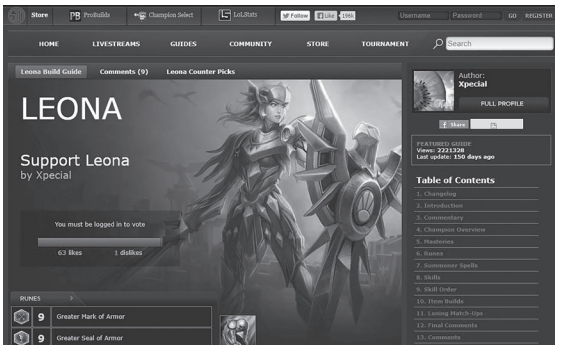

Figure 7: A Leona guide from 2013 written by the professional *League* player, Xpecial.

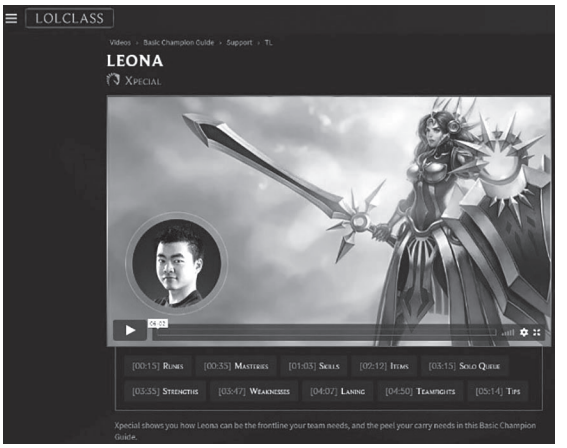

Figure 8: A LolClass Leona video guide recorded by Xpecial in 2014.

I spent my free time reading these guides, watching the videos, and subscribing to different communities such as the *League* subreddit and

1. A quick note to say this was changed a couple seasons ago. Rank 5 was removed from each tier, and rank 4 is now the lowest.

r/Summonerschool, the subreddit dedicated to helping players improve at the game. I discovered that Xpecial was a professional player and would sometimes do live streams of his game on the streaming site Twitch. Xpecial would usually have a webcam so you could see him while he played and a headset with a microphone so he could talk to his viewers about his games and answer their questions. I began watching Xpecial's stream and found out that he not only played the same role as me (Support) but was also a professional player! Xpecial was a member of Team SoloMid (TSM). He played with four other professional players, and they regularly competed in a tournament series—the North American League Championship Series (LCS), against other teams with professional players.

I started watching the professional games and got *hooked* on them. One of the most exciting matches I watched was the LCS summer split finals series with Cloud9 playing against TSM (see Figure 9). The adrenaline of watching these games, with the professional players, shoutcasters, analysts, hosts, a live audience . . . esports was so exciting! They were playing a game that I can play any time I want to! I can play the same champions that the professionals play! And at some point, it hit me: I was doing *research* by watching their games! Not only were they fun to watch, but they were helping me get better as a player because I could hear the analysts explain the game, and I got to see how the pros played it. Just by watching them play, I learned more about the champions, items, and the game's "meta" (the ever-evolving and shifting "best" way to play the game that emerges over time from the game's community).

Figure 9: The first game of the 2013 finals matches between Cloud9 (my favorite team!) and TSM. Xpecial sits on the top right—wearing the black TSM team t-shirt. The analyst, "Jatt," and the shoutcaster, "Rivington," are at the bottom with the PAX Prime 2013 live audience behind them.

By watching these professional games, reading the guides, watching the professional players streams (I eventually branched out to watching more than just Xpecial!), and participating in the forum communities, I was actually doing *real research*! I was researching across a number of genres—a whole **genre system** made up of all sorts of genres that all network together to help players improve and converse about the game (see Figure 10). And these genres, along with the players and people related to the game, have all been participants in *League's* discourse community.

As I began researching across *League's* genre system, I learned to expect certain common genre conventions for specific genres I looked at. For example, when I looked up champion guides ("guides" being the genre I was looking at), I would expect to see sections about a champion's masteries and items, as well as what order I should level up their abilities. It's also common to see sections where the guide's creator will explain how to play the champion and some of their basic strategies. Whether I looked up video guides or written guides, I'd come to expect the "champion basics" sections because they are common conventions in *League* champion guides. Through these guides and other genres created and used within *League's* discourse community, I began to learn more about the game's terms, strategies for playing my champions, and protocols for community member behavior. As I read guides and community boards and interacted with other players, I learned about behaviors and values accepted by the community (such as "trash talking" the enemy team) and those that were frowned upon (such as personally attacking other players or "trolling" in the game). Learning about

Figure 10: A web demonstrating the interconnection of *League's* discourse community with several genres participating across *League's* genre system and within its greater activity system.

expectations for player behavior was part of my uptake of the game and its discourse community, and it also helped me navigate behavior and language expectations across *League's* broader activity system.

The Activity System of *League of Legends*

By immersing myself in the discourse community of the game and *League's* large network of genres, and by the simple act of installing and playing the game, I had become a small part of *League's* **activity system**—the network of the game's people, texts, tools, and rules. The activity system for *League* is enormous because it's made up of layers upon layers of so many other activity systems! Just think about all the people and texts I had to interact with to learn how to play the game. All of those are part of their own activity systems and are within the giant *League* system. For a better sense of how *League's* activity system works—what it looks like and the different parts—here's a breakdown of some of the people, texts, tools, and rules involved:

People — *League's* broad community: the players (like me!), professional players, coaches, managers, owners, sports psychologists, fitness coaches, media managers, everyone involved with *League's* esports production crew (casters, analysts, the technical teams, makeup artists, and so on), esports journalists, freelance analysts, and the many developers at Riot Games (the company that develops and publishes the game)

Texts — The various genres relating to the game: game and champion guides, champion release videos, patch notes, developer blogs, esports journalist articles, official *League* merchandise, music videos produced for the game and its esports events, several Reddit forums, Twitch streams, team web pages, YouTube channels, the official *League* web page (*leagueoflegends.com*), the game itself (because that's also a text!), and so much more

Tools — For *League*, I generally think of "tools" as the basic hardware for playing the game and for accessing the community. The necessary equipment to play the game requires a halfway decent gaming computer or laptop with a mouse, keyboard, monitor, and stable Internet access. Only a computer or laptop is necessary for full engagement with the game and its community, but I also utilize my smartphone and television—both of which are connected to my house's Wi-Fi—to read the community's Reddit forum (r/leagueoflegends) and to watch

my team's weekly matches in the League Championship Series (the professional league). Many players also opt to use a headset and microphone setup so they can communicate with their teammates using *League's* in-game voice chat or by joining one another in Discord (a voice and text chat for gamers).

Rules — I would say there are three groups of rules in this large activity system: first, the rules set by Riot Games (the developer of *League*) in the Terms of Use user agreement; second, the unwritten rules negotiated by the community for how players are expected to play the game and how they are expected to behave toward other players; and third, a general category covering all the rules of the various sites, communities, forums, and so forth of all the genres *League* players interact with, which are all activity systems of their own within the larger activity system of the *League of Legends* community.

In the case of *League*, this very broad activity system integrates the game and the community together in a reciprocal and dialogic relationship. In other words, the game functions as a part of the greater community and the community functions within and as a part of the game. One way to think about it is this: the game doesn't exist without a community and the community can't exist without the game.

And somewhere in all of this is me, a single player, learning how to play *League of Legends* and cheering on my favorite team. I, too, am a part of this activity system!

Esports Fan and *League* Enthusiast–Continuing the Climb

Over the years I've been playing *League*, I've never stopped referencing my resources, reading game guides, and watching how the pros play in professional games. It's easy to say "I got out of Bronze! Mission accomplished!" but really, that was just the *beginning* of my journey. I've been researching, learning, practicing, and trying for years (*years!*) to climb the ranked ladder, slowly passing through Bronze to Silver, Silver to Gold, Gold to Platinum, and—finally!—after my years of effort, in 2019 I reached the elusive rank of Diamond 4. But I know I have so much more to learn if I want to continue the climb!

Learning how to play the game and continuing to improve at *League*, like most things in life, meant I had to (and *still* have to) perform research. I had to research across the genres within *League*'s activity system as well as

keep up with the language and behaviors of its discourse community. But I didn't do all this work just to research the game; I did it because playing and improving at the game is FUN! And speaking of having fun, I think it's time for me to play some *League*.

See you on the Rift!

Image Sources

1. Image provided by a user from the *League of Legends* Discord server. (User requested to remain anonymous)
2. Image provided by a user from the *League of Legends* Discord server. (User requested to remain anonymous)
3. Retrieved from League of Legends Fandom Wiki. 9 Oct. 2019, *leagueoflegends.fandom.com*.
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10. "League of Legends Activity and Genre Web" designed by Leslie Hancock. Special thanks to ISU's Redbird Esports for sharing the image file of the team's logo with me.

Leslie Hancock is an instructor and English Studies Master's student at Illinois State University. Her research interests focus on sociocultural pedagogies in the teaching of writing for nontraditional students in alternative learning environments. When she's not working, you can find her playing video or board games, watching KDramas, posting to her recipe blog, or trying to catch a Sizzlipede to complete her Pokédex . . . someday . . .

The Lawyers Are Now in Session: Genres, Discourse Groups, and Multimodality in Law

Allison Mool

In this article, Allison Mool interviews two lawyers to talk about the writing processes in law. They speak about how different texts in law are used, why the language used can sound so foreign and stiff, and what it actually takes to make these documents.

It is the opinion of the ISU Writing Program that a party should look at the processes of the people that produce texts using ISU's PCHAT model, based on cultural-historical activity theory. Cultural-historical activity theory is defined as a flexible framework that can be used to explore a genre, or type, of text. Henceforth, the aforementioned term will be referred to as CHAT . . .

Actually, it might be best if we leave the law talk to the lawyers . . .

Recently, I sat down and talked about writing with two lawyers, Robert and Deanna Mool, who are coincidentally my parents. They both graduated from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Law School and have been practicing law for over twenty-five years, so they have lots of knowledge to share! Robert is an attorney at the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and Deanna works in the private sector.

Chances are, not everyone who reads this article is planning on becoming a lawyer. So, why should you read this article? Well, God forbid, you may need legal help one day, and it's good to know about the system of law. But also, this article will show you that some of these ideas that we talk

about in the writing program do stick around. They are actively playing a role in law and the real world in general. From clients to courtrooms, lawyers have many writing practices to talk about, so let's dive in:

Allison: First of all, would you say writing is a big part of law?

Deanna: Yes, huge! Reading and writing and thinking are basically what you do as a lawyer.

Robert: It's one of the two ways we communicate. We communicate verbally with clients and judges and juries, and the other side (the other lawyers). We also communicate in written form with judges and other lawyers as well as our client.

Allison: Can you name some different types of text that you produce and use as a lawyer?

Deanna: Well, we write contracts. If you are going to buy a company in a transaction, there is a whole series of documents that go through. You have a letter of intent that both parties negotiate and sign as to what they think they want to do, and then they actually do the hard negotiation of the contract. After that, you do all the schedules of the assets that you're buying. You have to do a bill of sale for anything that's not titled.

Even when I am just communicating with a client, I'm writing emails to them all the time. I have a lot of hospital clients that I draft employment contracts for or licenses for people to use their space part time, which is required by the law. So, there's a lot of different things in the non-litigation world.

Robert: Yup, lawyers write basically three kinds of documents for communication. There is communicating to and from your client and keeping them up to speed. Mom was talking about that a little bit. But what she does normally is the second kind of communication, and that is when you're making a deal with somebody. You're communicating and writing about how you are going to agree to do business together or do some sort of activity together. So, there are things that you agree on, and stuff that you negotiate but you agree on. Then the third kind is when you disagree with people. That's usually what people think of when they think of litigation, because then lawyers go to court and they are disagreeing with the other party, and there is a lot of writing in that style, too.

Deanna: Those are called pleadings, when you write for a court. It is not that different from a contract. But I would say that there is also government

writing, which your dad does, and not every lawyer does. He is writing administrative rules that become regulatory pronouncements that the agency enforces.

Robert: As a government attorney, we do regulations. We regulate everything from how many deer you can kill every year, to how you drill oil wells, as well as how many trees you can cut down in the state. That kind of writing is similar to what the General Assembly does when they create the laws. Regulations are similar to laws.

Deanna: And I think it's funny, that when the laws are written, the legislators don't write the legislation. There's an office called the Legislative Reference Bureau that drafts every bill and every amendment so that the statutes are consistent. And when you use a term it's supposed to sound the same. Because if you had all fifty-nine senators and the 118 house members writing them, none of them would look the same. And I would say there's also a genre for courts because they set forth what type of font and margins it has to be in and whether it's double spaced or not.

Allison: What are the differences between those documents? Are there huge differences in how all of those texts are written and their goals? And why is it important as a lawyer to learn the difference?

Deanna: Well, the purpose of regulation is to control behavior. In some ways, when you do a pleading, you are asking for something most of the time. You are pleading your case. You are representing your client in the best way you know how in front of an innocent person—the judge—who is going to decide the case. When you do a contract, it is all about people coming together, agreeing, and negotiating.

Robert: Each of the kinds of writing that we do is based on tradition. Every complaint that you file to start a law suit is going to have the same framework.

Allison: Yeah, could you talk about any of the specific frameworks of these documents in comparison with one another?

Deanna: "Now comes" is written before every pleading. It's English tradition, I think.

Robert: Communication and writing in law is very traditional. That is why everyone goes to law school. They have to learn the same way to do things, because it's so much easier to do things when everyone is doing it the same way. That way you don't have to figure out what they're trying to accomplish.

Every complaint is going to start out the same: with "now comes, so-and-so, the plaintiff, represented by their attorney, and brings the following cause of action against so-and-so, the defendant."

Deanna: "And its court thereof states the following: 1. . . ." And then you just start numbering paragraphs and you do different counts. Each count is a different cause of action—if it's well-pleaded, anyway. Usually you incorporate by reference the paragraphs above. You have to establish that the court has jurisdiction, and that the parties are proper. So, you go through, and if it's a corporation you give their address, or if it's an individual you state where they live. You have to make sure you're identifying the right person. Once you file that, then you actually have to have somebody serve the person you're suing with that complaint. It's called a summons.

Robert: You end it the same way for everyone: "Therefore, for the following reasons, the plaintiff requests the following relief." And you list what you're asking for. So, it is very traditional. All the lawyers use the same traditional way of speaking and the same traditional terms, usually. There are lots of terms of art in law. Those terms of art help out because if I say "the plaintiff," it is the person who is bringing the lawsuit. So instead of saying, "Here is Joe, the guy who got hurt, has a cause of action, and is bringing a lawsuit," I can say plaintiff, which has those meanings wrapped up in it.

Deanna: You always end any motion that you are filing in front of the court with something like, "with any and for all just and proper relief in the premises." That gives the judge a way to order something else if he wants to. But if you file a complaint and you didn't put a prayer for relief at the bottom, then the judge would just dismiss it and say that you didn't ask for anything. It would just be facts that you gave them. So, a lot of law involves technical writing.

Allison: So, when you speak of these terms that lawyers use, such as a "cause of action," these are terms that others often wouldn't understand. But a **discourse group** is a group of people who have the same **literacies** and can communicate the things that people outside the group wouldn't understand. Lawyers sound like a large discourse group.

Deanna: Yes, they are a huge discourse group.

Robert: And it's intentionally that way.

Allison: So, could you talk a little bit about why or how that plays into your daily work? How the jargon you use connects you to others?

Deanna: We use it so much; I don't think we notice when we use it. I bet that you guys, as our kids, know more legal jargon than the average person. Your dad and I will be doing something, and someone will say something suddenly and I'll be like, "Yeah, that was suespante." Which means that it's spontaneous. It's Latin. There's a lot of Latin. And I sometimes butcher it; I use it however I think about it.

Robert: But it is Latin, and that's that tradition that goes back to the middle ages, actually.

Allison: When you say you "butcher it," do you mean as a group?

Deanna: No, I mean that sometimes I stretch the meaning to make a joke—when you know this code, and then you use that code to make a joke.

Allison: So, people in your discourse group would understand that joke.

Robert: Yeah, and lawyers have an entire dictionary for lawyers called Black's Law Dictionary. Black was a guy who was from England and wrote down all the meanings of all the legal terms that most lawyers use. Every lawyer has that dictionary. And that's what you learn in law school. So, everybody has that common vocabulary to use, making it efficient and allowing everybody to communicate effectively.

Deanna: I still have the book that I bought in law school in my office. It's not completely updated, but if I really need something . . . like, if I get a term like "replevin." I don't remember what that was, that was in property class twenty-five years ago. So, if someone asks if we have this, then we look it up so we can help our client.

Robert: What's interesting about communication is that you can pick up stuff that was written 100 years ago. They wrote much more formal back then, but the same vocabulary is used. It's based on old Latin words. The terms and concepts of the law has new stuff, but the old stuff comes up time and time again.

Allison: Because our system is based on England's, right?

Robert: Yes, we adopted English common law. Common law is when you keep track of cases. And how the courts have ruled on a fact pattern. That's why when you go into a lawyer's office or a law library, you see all of the books that are compilations of the cases that have been decided over the years. And then to argue your case, you figure out what your facts are and go back and find a case with the same facts. Then you say to the judge: "Here's

a case with the same facts that was decided thirty years ago. Here's what the court did, so you should do the same thing."

Allison: So, you use other people's writing as tools for your writing.

Deanna: That's right. We use precedent.

Robert: It builds on itself. That's why it is so helpful that everybody is writing in the same consistent way.

Allison: So, you said that you used Black's dictionary and previous cases. Why are those important and what other tools do you use?

Robert: We use case law. We use statutes, which are laws. We use administrative rules or regulations, which are similar to laws and are written by an executive branch of the government has. We also use journals that law schools put out, which talk about the law. Some concepts that are discussed there can be used as precedent.

Deanna: And many articles will compile multitude cases on one subject and then discuss them. You can pull cases out of there to get yourself started on your research.

Robert: There are also forms that you can buy from legal publishers that tell you how to plead a particular case for a cause of action or how to write a letter about a property issue or something. You can get overwhelmed by the amount of information out there.

Deanna: The other tool that you will use if you are in court are exhibits. For example, if you're suing on a contract, you would have to have the original contract. If you were suing for a personal injury action, you might have a video about what a day in the life of the plaintiff would look like.

Allison: Who do you communicate with, and how do you communicate when producing a text? For example, do you communicate with other lawyers or your clients when producing a text? Could you talk a little bit about that?

Deanna: Well, when you write something, you always send it to your client first and get their feedback, then you send it to the other side in a negotiation before you file it. Sometimes in a court case, such as an insurance defense case, you call the client and get authority to appear and answer the complaint. The client doesn't usually have to check that stuff, but if you are representing a business and you are negotiating a contract, you are constantly checking in with them. It's a back-and-forth.

Allison: Yeah, and would you also associate with the people in your discourse group?

Deanna: See, a lot of times what you are doing is explaining the law to your client. You're saying, "Okay, they wrote this in the contract, but the reason that we should ask for something else is this, because if you sign it with this in it, that means that they want to hold back $200,000 out of the deal in case you have taxes to pay on your business. So let's give them your tax returns and we'll do a $20,000 holdback." So a lot of that communication is explaining to your client the legalese that you are looking at.

Robert: And you don't have to do that when you are talking to another lawyer. It's almost like you translate the written communication for your client because they're not used to speaking in legal terms.

Allison: They don't have those literacies.

Robert: Right. And that's a big part of your job. The other part of your job is the opposite translation. You listen to your client really hard, take what they want to accomplish, and turn it into legalese. We tell them what legalese means.

Allison: Legalese? Like lawyer words?

Deanna: Yeah, it's actually called legalese if it's not plain English. I don't know why.

Robert: Yeah, but that type of communication is part of what we do.

Allison: So, once you've produced a text and you've talked to your client, say you're going to court, or something like that. How is that text used? Like, earlier, you talked about how it could be used in law school one day. What could happen to it after you produce it?

Robert: For documents, if a court writes an order or a ruling, in posterity, they keep track of it and put it in law books to look up for precedent in the future. So, a hundred years later, what a court does will be in books that are specifically put together for people later to use as precedent. They are meant to be the basis of the whole legal system, which is cool if you think about it. But the stuff that lawyers do on a day-to-day basis—like if you file a document in a court case—those documents will be fought about or used to try to win the case for the entirety of the case until the decision. So, you have to be very careful and accurate when you file a case in litigation—or you can mess it up. When it comes to contracts like Mom does, for the whole term of that contract, that document will be used by both parties for their relationship on whatever that contract is about going forward. So, if it's a contract to buy a property, then until the property is sold, that contract is going to be their reference every day to make sure things happen by the terms. When you are

a lawyer, getting the document correct is extremely important. These are the basis of either court cases or the relationship between parties going forward.

Deanna: Everybody relies on that document. That's the basis for discussion thereon out. Whether it's a discussion in front of court or whether it's a negotiation.

Robert: And it doesn't matter what people were thinking—

Deanna: —or what they intended, or what they thought they said.

Robert: It's what is written on that piece of paper.

Allison: That's a lot of pressure. What other tools would you use in court?

Deanna: Before you go to trial, you create exhibits that you want the jury to see.

Allison: What kinds of things would be those exhibits?

Deanna: Well, in a medical malpractice case, they could be pictures or drawings of anatomy. For the plaintiff, they might show how miserable this person is all day because of their injury and what they can and can't do. If the plaintiff says they can't do anything, the defense might have a "got ya" video of the plaintiff working in their front yard raking leaves or something. That is all stuff that the jury sees.

Robert: Photographs of the scene of an accident, diagrams of a product that you are saying isn't designed properly—all sorts of stuff.

Allison: Yeah, that's interesting. Thank you!

This interview illustrates that lawyers have very specific texts to produce. These texts follow rules and have conventions, which makes them specific **genres**. When producing these texts, lawyers communicate very specifically. They are trained to speak in the **literacy** of law, which is referred to as legalese. This allows them to communicate easily with people who share the literacy. A group that shares a literacy is a **discourse group**. This includes lawyers, judges, clerks, secretaries, and anyone else who interacts using this literacy as a part of their life. We also touched on **CHAT**, when speaking about how lawyers produce these texts. They use certain tools for the **production** of these documents. They participate in **socialization** with other lawyers and clients. They think about **distribution** because the documents must be handled in very clear ways.

As you can see, Illinois State University's Writing Program concepts can easily be applied to the world outside of academia. Lawyers specifically are taught to think about these things in order to do their jobs. Though they may not be given the same specific term names, these concepts are important to them and us. For example, as you go out in the world, understanding discourse groups and how to communicate within them versus communicating with people outside your discourse group may give you an advantage. Being conscious of what tools you should be using at your job through production could enable you to make a better product. You never know how these terms could apply to in your future, so it's important to be as aware and as knowledgeable as possible.

Allison Mool is currently a sophomore molecular and cellular biology major and theatre minor at Illinois State University. She is interested in going to medical school in the future. She is usually doing homework, but when she catches a break, she might be watching a Marvel movie or hanging out with friends.

Behind the Silver Screen: The Movie Theater as an Activity System

Kelly Pierce

Activity systems are everywhere–even at the movie theater. Looking at AMC Theatres, Kelly Pierce looks at the ways genres intersect to create one giant activity system that allows us to watch the movies we love on the big screen.

Every Friday, a new week begins at the movie theater. New films come in and audience members pour into the auditoriums, popcorn and soda in hand, to watch the latest thing to come out of Hollywood. It's a tale as old as time—or at least as old as 1905 when the Nickelodeon, an indoor space designed to show motion pictures, was first opened in Pittsburgh (Mondello). Sure, there have been a lot of changes in the last one-hundred-plus years, but what has not changed is the fact that the movie theater is an **activity system** many people are familiar with. Activity systems are "cooperative interactions aimed at achieving a goal" and the Writing Program website describes them as historically developed, inherently social, dialogic, collective rather than individual, and always changing (ISU Writing Program). I want to discuss the activities that surround going to the movies not only because I am an avid moviegoer myself, but also because I worked for AMC Theatres for six years. This means that I belong to the **discourse community** of the movie theater industry. A discourse community is a group or organization one belongs to that has certain social and cultural norms. Because I specifically worked for AMC Theatres, I will focus on the activity systems surrounding their business practices.

CHATing About the Movies

Some of you may be a little confused about why I am spending time talking about the activity system of any movie theater in a journal about writing. There are really two reasons for this. One is that I like movies, and if I am going to write about anything for several pages, it will have to be something I'm passionate about. The other reason is that there is a lot we can learn about the activity systems of writing from looking at other activity systems we interact with on a regular basis. This is done by using **CHAT**, or the Cultural-historical activity theory that the ISU Writing Program uses to analyze **genres** and activities. Genre is a word that can be used to describe a text or artifact (or even an activity) that tends to solidify over time in different situations, but it's also important to remember that genres are always in action—always evolving and changing. For example, a book is a print artifact, and when we say the word "book" people might often imagine a physical object with a cover and pages. But many people now might also include digital books in their understanding of what a "book" is, and these texts are very different. And yet, a Kindle book usually does still have a cover and pages; this is because genres also tend to retain some characteristics, even as they adapt and change over time. In this article, I will be looking at different genres within the different activity sets (the groups of activities that make up an entire activity system) of going to the movies and applying the following CHAT terms:

These CHAT terms have been paraphrased in my own words based on the definitions on ISUwriting.com on the "Key Terms & Concepts" page.

- **Distribution**: The way a genre is sent out to an audience.
- **Reception**: The way the audience takes up (interprets or reacts to) a genre.
- **Socialization**: The way people communicate about or interact with other people because of or about a genre.
- **Production**: The technology, products, and other items that go into creating a genre.
- **Representation**: How the people involved in the genre plan and conceptualize it; or, how they think and talk about the genre.
- **Ecology**: the environmental conditions surrounding the creation of a genre.

The seventh CHAT term, activity, involves all of the practices people engage in when creating the genre. However, I will be focusing more on

the activity customers perform as movie-goers and their **uptake** of the genres mentioned in this article. Uptake is another ISU Writing Program term that means the way an audience member makes sense of a new—or even familiar—genre. Another term I will use throughout this article is **antecedent knowledge**, which can include everything a person knows about a genre (or similar genres), particularly knowledge that helps them interpret new genres. All of these terms can be found on the ISU Writing Program page at isuwriting.com.

Coming Soon

So, it's Friday night and you want to watch a movie. How do you decide which movie to see? Part of this decision rests on how often a person watches movies at the theater. For me, I often know which movies are coming out each week because I watch a lot of trailers on several platforms. The genre of trailers is important to my process because they are short clips—usually between one-and-a-half or two-and-a-half minutes—that give the audience an overview of what the movie will be about. However, there are many genres that can help people decide what to watch, many of which are based on the time the movie starts. Because the movie theater is an activity system that is always changing, the genres surrounding it are also changing.

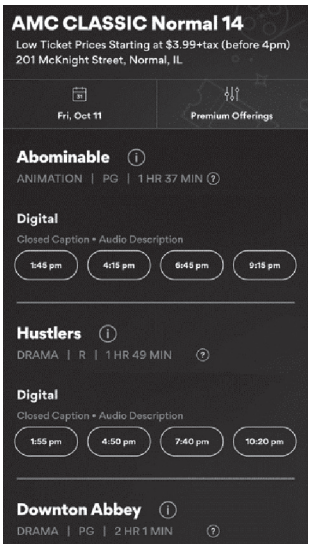

Figure 1: A screenshot of showtimes on my AMC Theatres app

Two genres that used to exist to help audiences make their decision based on time were newspapers and automated phone systems. While there are still a few newspapers that print showtimes for local movie theaters, most large companies, like AMC, no longer send their times to the newspapers or phone systems because of the cost and the fact that their customers are now more likely to use different technology to find showtimes. AMC changed the distribution of their showtimes to meet the demand from their customers; they now provide showtimes on their website as well as their AMC Theatres app, shown in Figure 1. By moving to these new genres, AMC has responded to their customers' growing needs to get their information quickly.

This is not to say, however, that all customers appreciated the move from print media to online access. While the reception was generally positive, many of the customers I interacted with did not receive the change in business practices well, complaining vehemently when they could no longer open the newspaper and find accurate showtimes for the movies they wanted

to see. As with any change, there are always people whose uptake of a new genre will be different from others.

No matter how customers get their information, the showtimes are always separated by what the movie theater calls "sets." Each set of showtimes is scheduled between one to two hours around 12, 4, 6, and 9 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. Weekday sets during school years generally lose the 9 p.m. set because Sundays through Thursdays see very low attendance after 8 p.m. This shows how theaters have responded to the demands and needs of their customers by changing the way the movie itself is distributed at times that are most convenient to the maximum number of customers.

Show Me the Movie Ticket!

Once the movie has been chosen—possibly after endless debates—it's time to get the tickets. Based on many people's antecedent knowledge of this activity, a lot of customers think about buying their tickets at the box office. This is still the primary method most movie patrons use, which is pretty clear on a weekend night when a new big movie is released and there's a line out the door.

In recent years, AMC has introduced two new ways to buy tickets without going to the box office. Knowing that patrons do not like standing in those long, opening-night lines, AMC began opening sales on their website as well as through Fandango, a third-party website that sells movie tickets. Once they launched their app, AMC also allowed people to buy tickets through that platform. Customers who buy their tickets online or through the app are able to go to kiosks at the front of the lobby to print out their tickets. If they do not want to deal with the kiosk, they can still go to the box office to let the employee at the register print the tickets instead.

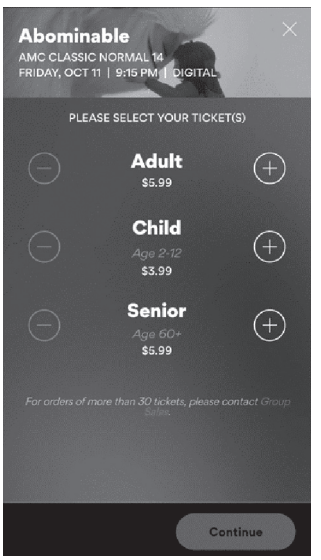

Figure 2: The ticket prices for a matinee showing of *Abominable*.

All these activities involve different genres. The app conforms to the standard conventions of most phone applications because it is easy to navigate with the touch of your thumb. Figure 2 shows the image that appears when a patron selects a movie from the showtimes listed as shown in Figure 1. Once the movie is selected, the customer chooses the appropriate number of tickets for the needed age group and moves on with their purchase, all from the comfort of their own phone. The website

genre allows customers to click through the page to find their movie and buy their ticket. AMC has transferred many of the style choices across their platforms to make buying tickets online or through the app easy. Even the physical box office has genres customers are used to seeing. For example, the main genre is the box office marquee, which displays the movies being shown and the times they will play throughout the day.

All these genres come with slightly different socializations that cause the customer to respond in certain ways. No matter how the customer purchases their ticket, every method results in the same genre: the physical ticket. This particular genre tells the customer when and where they bought the ticket, when their movie starts, where their auditorium is, and how much they spent. Though most people forget about their tickets almost immediately, this is one genre that accounts for some very important activities. If the movie stops unexpectedly, or if there is an emergency, the ticket is necessary to receive a refund or free passes to return.

Depending on the movie you have chosen, there is one more genre that might play a part in this activity set, and it is one you will have to show to the box office attendant. If you choose to see an R-rated movie, you may be asked to show your driver's license or ID card because R-rated movies require customers to be seventeen or older or to have an adult present. This is perhaps one of the most contentious moments of the activity for people on both sides of the counter. I cannot count the number of times I have had to turn customers away from a movie because they weren't old enough, did not have an ID that proved they were old enough, or did not bring an adult along. While I would have happily let anyone in to watch whatever movie they wanted, doing so may have resulted in a genre no customer gets to see: a write-up. In fact, failure to card young-looking people for an R-rated movie could even result in getting fired. So if you go to an R-rated movie, make sure you are ready to produce that important genre of your ID (and tell all your friends, too).

I'll Have What She's Having

With your ticket in hand, it is time to make a fateful decision: to snack or not to snack? That is the question. For many people, this is an easy question to answer because they do not believe anyone can truly enjoy the movie-going experience without a large bag of popcorn and soda in hand. When it comes time to buying concessions, there are two major genres: menu boards and the smells of the concession stand.

Figure 3: A fleet of large popcorn bags from AMC

I will start with the last genre because it seems like the most unlikely genre to impact someone's decision to buy anything. This is, however, the most basic selling concept of a movie theater. Think about the last time you went to a movie theater. Do you remember the smell of freshly popped popcorn when you entered the lobby? That is because concession employees pop a new batch of popcorn at the beginning of each set. This smell is of vital importance to the sale of popcorn and other concession items. During my years at the theater, I can attest to the fact that nothing lowers sales like the smell of burnt popcorn. Even the lack of that fresh popcorn scent can affect sales. And, even as more food has been added to the menu, popcorn remains the top seller. Part of this is because of the socialization and reception that surrounds popcorn. Most people receive the idea of popcorn as almost synonymous with going to the movies. In fact, it's so much a part of movie culture that if a movie has a scene where the characters watch a movie, they will have popcorn. Just see if I'm wrong. I'll wait. Eating popcorn is also included in socialization because customers take up the smell and decide to share their popcorn with the person they are watching the movie with. If they don't share their popcorn, you might want to rethink socializing with them.

The other genre I mentioned, menu boards, seems like a more standard genre. It displays images of the different products available as well as the cost of individual items and combos. Each theater has different menu boards based on what food and drinks are available, but they all have the same basic set up of pictures, words, and prices. However, the distribution of this information may change based on the type of menu displays the theater has. Some theaters still have the original stationary menu boards, while others have updated their displays to LED screens that give information along with short videos advertising different products on a continuous loop. Many times, these videos represent the food in ways that are meant to have the customer receive the items as delicious and necessary for watching the movie.

The products themselves could also be considered genres because their packaging is designed to both catch the eye or signal that the product is tasty. The distribution of food and drinks can depend upon the ecology of the theater. While the Normal AMC Theatre uses the traditional method of distributing their products over the counter, there are an increasing number of dine-in theaters, especially in bigger cities. At these theaters, the

audience members order food from menus handed to them by servers, and their meal can be delivered to their seat at any point in the movie. The dine-in experience also changes the socialization of getting concessions. Instead of standing in a line, customers can interact with their server more quickly. They also do not have to miss as much of the movie to get refills on drinks or to order more food. No matter how or what someone decides to buy, the important part is that they have something to munch on as they watch their movie.

Yippee-Ki-Yay, Cell Phone Talker

Now that you have your ticket and concession items, it's time to sit down and watch the movie. This is perhaps the most important activity in the system. Okay, it is absolutely the most important activity in the system. But this comes with its own activity set. Before you can start watching, you have to choose a seat. In most theaters, this is a choice you make when you walk through the doors of your movie's respective auditorium. In some places, this activity is changing as theaters add a pick-your-seat feature when the tickets are purchased. The new option allows customers to choose their seats before ever stepping foot in the auditorium. Not only does this cut down on the number of empty seats between people in the same group, but it has also changed the ticket genre; theaters with this feature have added the seat location to their tickets, so—much like a seat on an airplane—no one else can sit in that chair. Once the seat is chosen (and sat in), it is time for the main event.

Watching a movie has also changed somewhat over the years, with the most noticeable change being the addition of the pre-movie announcement. This relatively new genre can be analyzed through several aspects of CHAT as it informs audience behavior so that everyone can enjoy the movie. The AMC announcement provides emergency information and hypes the products and services offered by AMC. In order to ensure maximum viewership, this announcement is distributed as a short clip before the trailers. Socialization is an important factor because the announcement relies on the audience's awareness of theater etiquette and presumes an agreement about what that behavior should be. The announcement does this by asking patrons to silence their cell phones, stop talking, and refrain from posting on social media. All of these rules are ended with the directive, "Don't ruin the movie." While planning this announcement (representation), AMC likely considered how they could best display the cultural norms they are asking their audience to perform while also using the announcement as a space to advertise.

For me, the most important aspect of CHAT in this scenario is the audience's reception of the announcement. Not every audience member takes up this announcement the same way. Many people do silence or put away their cell phones. Most even refrain from talking while watching the movie. Unfortunately, some people receive the announcement as an easily ignored suggestion. These people seem to be unaware that when they look at their cell phone, even briefly, it can be seen by everyone else in the auditorium. The etiquette around talking in movies is also impacted by socialization and reception. There are appropriate and inappropriate kinds of talking or noise-making depending on the type of movie someone is watching. There will of course be laughing during a comedy and gasps and screams during horror movies—at least there should be if the filmmakers did their jobs right. The amount of appropriate noise may vary depending on different movies and discourse communities, but at no point is it appropriate to hold full conversations during a movie. This goes against the whole activity of watching a movie at a theater.

When certain movie goers use their cell phones or talk loudly, the activity that follows is not always a public shaming of the person or people behaving against the social norms. However, as the movie theater is an ever-changing activity system, perhaps this will be socialized differently in the future. For now, the hope is that everyone learns to take up the announcement AMC produced and cease annoying their fellow movie goers.

You're Still Here? It's Over. Go Home.

Not many people know this, but we watch movies in reverse these days. Up until the early 1960s, credits were always displayed at the beginning of the movie. All of the actors, producers, sound stage workers, and everyone else who worked to create the movie had their names displayed before the audience's eyes for the first minute or two of the film. When the movie was over, the previews for new movies coming out in the coming months would begin to play. In fact, that is why movie previews are called trailers, because they *trailed* the feature film. Today, the trailers run first, followed by the feature film. Then, finally, the credits roll, signaling to the audience that the movie is over. However, in recent years, filmmakers have begun to add end-credit scenes, which have changed how audiences take up credits and have also sparked a new genre: end credit notifications.

Long before Marvel became known for this practice, one of the first end credit scenes was featured in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (Figure 4). Matthew Broderick, as Ferris, tells his audience to go home because there is no more

Figure 4: The final end credit scene from *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.

Figure 5: The final end credit scene from *Deadpool*.

to see. This tongue-in-cheek end credit scene was the beginning of a slow change in how Hollywood produces their films and how audiences receive them.

Today, many Marvel fans often know not to leave the movie theater when the credits start rolling, as there are generally two end credit scenes. One occurs somewhere in the middle of the credits while the second appears after the music and studio credits roll away. This fact is so ingrained in the socialization of the Marvel discourse community that fans often laugh when they see people leave when the credits start rolling and are mad if there are no end credit scenes or if the final scene doesn't meet their expectations. One of my favorite Marvel end credit scenes is the one where *Deadpool* pays homage to the original end credit phenomenon (Figure 5). Deadpool uses the same set, costume, and lines from *Ferris Bueller.* Moreover, a website called RunPee has been incorporated into the AMC app for most new films. Beyond showing audience members moments in the movie when they could possibly go to the bathroom without missing something important to the plot, the app

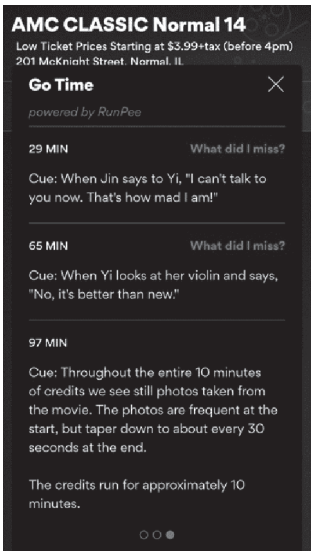

Figure 6: A screenshot of The RunPee times and end credit information for *Abominable*.

provides information on whether there is an end credit scene (or two) the audience should wait for.

Credits have also changed over the years in that they are longer than they once were. As technology has advanced and more movies are adding digital effects such as CGI, more people have become involved in the production of each movie. These longer credits and end credit scenes have changed the way theaters have scheduled their sets so their employees have time to clean the auditoriums between showings. This time must include the fact that more people are staying for the full length of the credits—unless they check apps like RunPee that let them know if there is nothing to wait for. Before the advent of end credit scenes, employees could feel fairly confident that people would leave during the credits, giving the ushers—employees in charge of cleaning the auditorium—more than enough time to clean the theater in time for the next showing. This brings the activity system full circle: the consideration of long credits with possible end scenes affects the times at which movies are scheduled, which can also affect how the next customer chooses a movie.

I'm Ready for My Close-Up(take)

As technology advances and movie theaters compete more and more with in-home entertainment, it will be interesting to see how the activity system of going to the movies changes over time. For now, many of the activities I have mentioned are the activities that have been around for almost 100 years.

However, after all of this you may still be wondering: what does any of this have to do with writing? The fact is that writing is an activity system that is every bit as complicated as you never knew watching a movie could be. Much like the activity system I just described, writing involves all aspects of CHAT to produce the genre you are trying to create. Whether you are writing an essay for a class, posting to social media, or doing any other kind of writing, you are engaged in every facet of CHAT. The conditions of where you write—the ecology—impacts how you write. The way you plan your text—the representation—impacts how you write. Just know that every time you engage in an activity, there are so many factors that go into it, and CHAT can help you figure out how your audience may take up any genre you produce.

Well, that's all folks. Happy writing and movie-watching!

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Snowpiercer: Preparing for Winter as an Activity System

Edmund Ankomah

Preparing for battle, getting battle gear, and learning all there is to know about the unrelenting adversary in the hope that your conquest and victory ensures your survival. This is what preparing for winter means for those new to snow and the icy cold. In this article, Edmund Ankomah explores finding winter gear as an activity system, and how it compares to acquainting oneself in new writing situations.

> "It was a time for warm embraces, for smiles, for toasts and reconciliations, for renewing old friendships and making new ones, for laughter and kisses. It was a good time, a golden autumn, a time of peace and plenty.
>
> But winter was coming."
>
> — George R.R. Martin, *Fire & Blood*

There is an Akan proverb that says *Obi nnim a, Obi kyere*; to wit, "if someone does not know, someone teaches." The principles underlying this proverb are that there is no shame in not knowing, that no single individual is a repository of knowledge, and that knowledge sharing is an important communal activity. Often, the reluctance to seek knowledge or information when one requires this form of assistance owes largely to an unwillingness to acknowledge our limitations as individuals and a misguided desire to not appear vulnerable. This might seem like every day, conventional wisdom, but sadly, it's wisdom that we, as individuals, struggle to accept. As writers, whether we are cognizant of this or not, every act of writing, the process of transmuting ideas to words on a page, requires some form of collaboration. No act of writing is an isolated or disinterested activity. We draw on influences

from varying mental and social spaces when we write; engage with other writers; enact and initiate conversations within a community of readers and writers we may not know about; and employ different tools. Being aware of and acknowledging how important this community of knowledge resource is to our writing practices can be very rewarding. As writers, we often find ourselves in unfamiliar "literate" situations. It is important to remember, as you join me on this quest towards finding winter gear, that literacy does not only exist in the classroom space; that all around us, in the social space within which we live, are different enactments of literacies, each requiring different sets of tools and rules. I hope that by sharing my story of "seeking information" from different people (community) and employing varying research tools in my activity to prepare "adequately" for winter, you'd gain some insight on how to employ relevant research tools in your writing activity.

Why Do I Call This An "Activity"?

Like most Africans who come to the United States for school, vacation or whatever purpose, I had not experienced snow or winter prior to moving. In fact, this was the first time I was moving from the mostly sweltering heat of a tropical region to a region whose weather dynamics were nothing like I had been used to. I come from Ghana, a West African country whose climate is tropical, with basically two fixed variations: rainy season and a (harsh) dry season (a bit like what you'd describe as summer in the Northern Hemisphere). The rainy season typically lasts from May to September in the north of the country, from April to October in the center, and from April to November in the south. Along the east coast, the rainy season is shorter and goes from April to June, with a break in July and August and a slight recovery in September and October.[1] In Accra, the central administrative capital where I am from, the first showers arrive in March, peak in June, and increase again in September and October. On the coast, as well as in the rest of the country, the "summer" months are the least hot of the year, though the humidity is higher than in inland areas because of the proximity to the sea.

So, I guess, what I've tried to do is to describe my experience of weather; I'd perhaps like to call this my antecedent knowledge of weather patterns before hopping on an airplane to the United States. **Antecedent knowledge** refers to the knowledge that a person brings with them from their past to new situations and venues. So, perhaps my antecedent knowledge of climate as it functions in the United States, it's fair to say at this point, was generally a

1. *https://www.climatestotravel.com/climate/ghana*

medley of misconceptions, misguided generalizations, and myths. Because I had had no actual experience of winter, the only information I was working with was images from popular culture and the media. Indeed, one of my misconceptions was that it snowed everywhere in the United States—like a lot! Also, I assumed that if you were born in the United States and had lived here all your life, you probably had a stockpile of winter gear. During the course of this project, I unlearned a lot of these misconceptions. Actually, maybe it's fair to mention that, even though I hadn't had prior experience of winter or snow, when I informed a couple of my professors back in Ghana that I was going to Illinois State University (ISU) to pursue my PhD, the response was either shock or sympathy—"shock" that I had taken the ill-informed decision to move to a place with vindictive winter and "sympathy" that I was beyond redemption. I had no choice but to endure the harsh cold for five years of doctoral study.

So, these are but a few reasons I see preparing for winter as a deliberate, involved activity; I don't know if it compares to other activities like learning how to swim for the first time or the adrenaline rush and asphyxiating fear that occasions being behind a steering wheel for the first time. "Preparing for winter" bears an uncanny resemblance to a quest into the unknown, a journey filled with mystery, uncertainty, excitement, and fear—lots of it. I compare this sense of mystery and anxiety to the experience of staring at a blank page or screen. The sense of uncertainty and sometimes inadequacy we feel as writers right before we type the first couple words that would herald a march of 1,500 or 3,000 more words. If you love adventures—especially reading exciting tales of death-defying quests into unknown lands to slay monsters in order to win a much-coveted prize—you might understand how and why I see the process of preparing for winter as an exciting activity.

Knowing What You're Up Against: A Crucial Part of the Activity

So like I mentioned earlier, because I had had no prior experience of winter or snow and everything I had heard about Illinois weather were frightening tales about how terribly cold it got in Illinois at times, I knew I had to do some real investigation about everything I needed to do in order to *survive* the winter. Who did I need to speak with? What meteorological/climatic data did I need to consult in order to get a true picture of the wintery evil I was about to face? What tools did I need to slay the frosty horror I was about to face? I also needed to know the local lore about winter in Illinois; what were the documented and unspoken rules in dealing with winter? I remembered we were in the month of September, and in a few months, this arctic fiend

would rise from its slumber, and wreak icy terror on us all! Thinking about all of these decisions I had to make and the people I had to speak with, I forged in my mind the image of an **activity system**: a network of actors (components) that aid in the realization of a particular goal (objective). It is a collective formation with a complex structure that serves as the primary unit of analysis in **cultural-historical activity theory** (**CHAT**).[2]

CHAT can be useful for making sense of the world, and, in ISU's Writing Program, we use a version of CHAT to make sense of the literate activity. Oh! **Literate activity**—that is another writing program concept which refers to all the things people do when they produce and use different kinds of writing in the world. It is important to remember that any/every literate activity is a system of encodings that informs and creates discourse. Thus, literate activities exist in different rhetorical situations. So, in trying to compare the process of preparing for winter to the activity of producing written work, I intend to show how different writing scenarios require different preparatory rituals and tools in order to enact writing in those particular situations. "Preparing for winter," for me, was kind of like preparing to produce a new kind of writing or genre I had not previously engaged with. I needed to do some research; I needed to acquaint myself with the rules of the activity; I needed to clearly define what my outcome/goal/objective was; I needed to engage with a community of practice that was familiar with the activity in order to be successful. That's essentially what we do when we engage with new or different genres of writing; we engage with a network of resources that help us create the genre.

Every activity relies on a network of actors to make it possible. The actors are the people, ideas, social concepts, and tools that make the activity possible. Activity systems list a network of six interdependent actors: Subject, Object, Tools, Community, Division of Labor and Rules. The subject of an activity system is the person performing the action; in this case, that will be me. In other specific writing situations, the subject will be the writing researcher: the individual who goes about gathering and analyzing data for a particular writing project. The object (or objective) is the purpose, outcome, or goal for which the activity is being carried out. In this case, the objective will be finding winter gear (being adequately prepared for winter). The tools refer to any apparatus or gear that people within this activity system use to get things done. For our purposes, because our objective is to survive winter, the tools we would need to actually achieve this would be our winter gear (jackets, boots, scarves, gloves, etc.). In this case, our objective and tools intersect. The community refers to the social group/environment where

2. *https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/cultural-historical-activity-theory/480*

the activity takes place. Again, for the purposes of our activity and intended objective, our community consists of the actual geographical space (Normal, Illinois) as well as the people who inhabit this space, including indigenous folk, other Bloomington-Normal residents, and the university community. Identifying and acknowledging the community for which an activity is intended or within which that activity is carried out, is an important part of why we are framing this as a rhetorical activity. A rhetorical activity is one that is situated and contextually cognizant; it recognizes that actions do not happen in a vacuum and are always mediated by prevailing social-cultural factors.

This was going to be my first winter ever, and I had no prior experience of winter. I don't believe I can emphasize how real my trepidation and anxiety were! I needed to familiarize myself with the social-cultural rules and implications of being in an entirely new geographical space. The rules are the social, cultural, or other norms and practices that influence the activity. They are the invisible actors that can still have a major impact on the activity, and they can be explicit or implied. Rules also provide necessary context and help us appreciate what may or may not work in a particular rhetorical situation. You cannot cheer or applaud while the orchestra is still performing or whisper in the ears of participants during a poker game. In order to "survive" in these different rhetorical situations, we'd need to know and adhere to the rules that mediate action in these social spaces. I say "survive" because there is always some form of (undesirable) consequence that arises from not observing the rules.

Knowing What You're Up Against: Engaging with the Community

"If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle" (Sun Tzu, Art of War). Even though it was September, I could sense, with each rising of the sun, at the beginning of each day, a noticeable waning of its glory; gradually, the frosty fiend was pulling the sun into its cold embrace, and soon, one day, we'd awake to grey, gloomy skies, the sun usurped, its warmth no more, and in its place the merciless, icy hands of winter. So, I knew "winter was coming"; like a brother of the Night's watch—the shield that guards the realms of men—I had to prepare for the Long Night.[3]

3. This is a reference to HBO's *Game of Thrones*.

My first decision in my bid to understand the wintery evil I was up against was to do some research on the climate in Illinois over the past decade. I found so much information, perhaps more than I bargained for. I even put in a request for climatological data for Illinois from the National Center for Environmental Information (NCEI), and they sent a 195-page climatological summary of daily temperature and precipitation patterns.

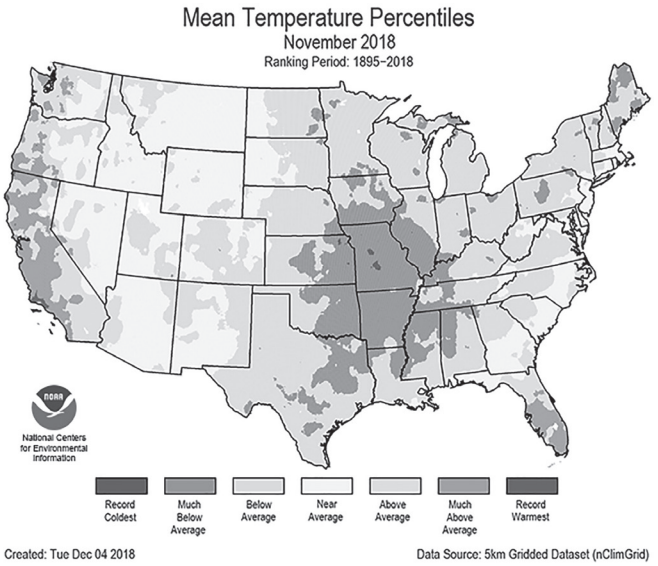


Figure 1: Mean Temperature Percentiles (1895–2018)
Source: WeatherNation, *https://www.weathernationtv.com/news/november-recap-fires-colder-and-wetter/*.

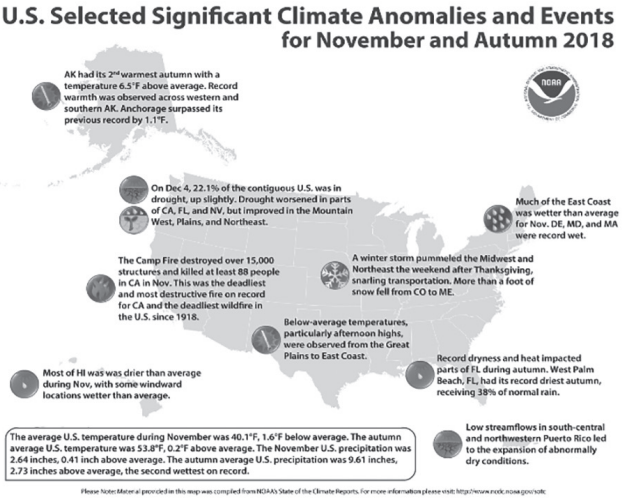


Figure 2: Climate Anomalies and Events (Autumn 2018)
Source: WeatherNation, *https://www.weathernationtv.com/news/november-recap-fires-colder-and-wetter/*.

The data I got from "WeatherNation" confirmed my fears: in the period spanning 1895 to 2018, the Illinois region had recorded "above average" precipitation and "record coldest to much above average" mean temperature percentiles. The icy villain had indeed terrorized the local folk for as long as memory could serve.

Another decision I made in my attempt at understanding the true nature of the icy villain, whose presence inched closer by the day, was to speak with some local folks. Ring a bell? Community, one of our activity system concepts! I had a chat with Kelly Pierce, one of my classmates, who is a local and has spent thirty-one winters in Illinois. Thirty-one! Clearly Kelly had some interesting insights to share on the whole process of preparing for and surviving the Illinois winter. Here is a brief transcript of the conversation I had with Kelly:

How frequently do you go shopping for winter gear?

Not very often, actually. I have a couple decent pieces of winter gear I keep in my closet. I don't have my winter stuff with me right now. They're in the basement at my father's place. I definitely intend to go grab them before winter. I guess I go winter coat-shopping every five years, maybe, because sometimes the lining in the coat gets ripped and it becomes necessary to replace it.

Do you typically do walk-ins or online shopping?

I prefer shopping in person, generally. I tend to do my shopping on Black Friday sales. Sometimes I shop in April in anticipation of the next year's winter. Otherwise, some of the shops I have been to are Kohl's, JCPenney, and Burlington. Fifty to a hundred dollars might get you something decent. I tend to buy coats that are a size up so it will still fit when I'm wearing bulkier clothing. I don't shop online because I like to try my clothes on before I buy them. I want to touch and feel the fabric as well.

Could you describe to me what your attire looks like on a typical chilly winter day?

Errrmmm . . . so, I think the winters we've had in the last couple of years have not been as intense as in previous years. I think last year we had temperatures as low as thirty degree Fahrenheit or negative four degrees Celsius. For something like that, I would probably wear a t-shirt, another piece of clothing underneath that, a hoodie, and a coat. Also, a scarf, gloves, a stocking cap, and boots (mid-calf to knee-level). It always helps to remember that jeans get soaked easily in the snow—and trust me, you don't want that! So, it always helps to invest in some really good boots.

Figure 3: Kelly Pierce in her winter armor.

So, my intent in carrying out these interviews, like I mentioned earlier, was to try to understand the wintery demon I was about to face. I approached this activity as a kind of **genre research**, which is research that is conducted to create a specific kind of text for a specific kind of situation. Genre research is a crucial aspect of learning outcomes three and four of ISU's Writing Program. According to the ISU Writing Program website:

> Our program uses the study of genres as a key part of our learning. This means we don't agree with the idea that "writing" is something you can teach (or learn) by writing just one kind of text (like school essays, for example). Instead, we focus on looking at all the different kinds of texts that are produced, and at how a specific writer's skills need to change and adapt to meet these diverse writing needs.[4]

Even though the ultimate objective of my research wasn't to produce a particular kind of text, my investigative approach to understanding a particular context is an important activity that writing researchers do. As writers, once we learn to understand and evaluate how particular texts work in particular rhetorical situations, we gain knowledge that helps us disrupt or modify genre conventions to meet our peculiar writing demands. For me, this activity of research—of understanding the "fiend" one was up against—was an invaluable tactic if I was ever going to survive five years of wintery purgatory in Illinois.

I had interviewed one "local" (a white American who was born in the United States). I thought it'd also be interesting to get the perspective of another African student at ISU who was once in my situation to see what strategies she adopted to survive the cold. Miss Fatima Mohammed is an MBA student at ISU. She is Ghanaian (like me!). At the time of the interview, this was her third year at ISU; she had earlier completed a masters program in Agricultural Economics at ISU.

> *Had you been to the United States prior to being admitted to ISU? Had you experienced winter prior to being admitted to ISU?*
>
> Yes, before the master's program at ISU, I had been to the US on three other occasions, and I'd had some experience of winter.
>
> *Could you share with me what your preparatory ritual is for winter? What are some of the things you do, decisions you make, etc.?*
>
> I get my flu shot first. I normally check if my shoes fit and whether I need a new pair. I check for what I don't have, or any winter gear I want to try, then I buy it. For instance, this winter, I want to try mittens since my hands always get cold—even with the gloves. Then, I unbox and hang my winter clothing (I pack and box all my winter gear after winter for space).

4. *http://isuwriting.com/learning-outcomes/*

Could you describe to me what your attire looks like on a typical chilly winter day?

So, my key to staying warm is layering and covering all parts up. I put on tights before my jeans or dress pants (I wear the former the most in the winter). On the top, I wear a thermal or tight sweater top, then a bigger shirt or sweatshirt. Apparently, the tight layer keeps the warmth and the loose layers help trap warm air from leaving your body while keeping away cold air. This was a tip I got when I was trying to figure out what works best. On top of it all, I put on my winter coat and winter boats. I wear thicker socks, too. The kind of coat and boots I will wear depends on how cold it is, and whether the ground is dry or not. My hair is covered with my veil, and I wear a scarf and gloves when I have to.

Figure 4: Fatima, all wrapped up, braving the wintery menace.

Do you typically do walk-ins or online shopping?

I got a large part of my winter stuff as gifts. I get the rest from Ross, Goodwill, and online. I consider pricing, primarily, but it has to be fashionable (she laughs) and has to serve the purpose. I find myself going a bit over the budget to meet these specifications.

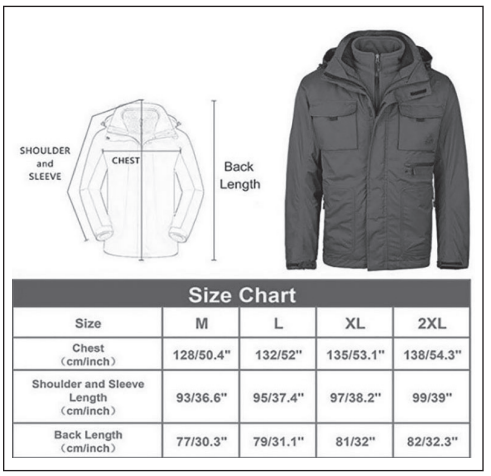
The Literacy of Finding Winter Gear

I began this article by hinting at the complexity of research—the involved activity that informs and sustains acts of "knowing." That research of the nature and purpose I intended to embark upon, has a sort of relatedness with literate activity conceived as the set of activities we undertake to produce writing of any kind in the world. I would like to foreground this idea of literacies we find around us, everywhere in the world, in social spaces that we may not be aware of. This is an essential component of the Writing Program here at ISU—an underlying ethos that sets it apart from writing programs that exist elsewhere. The program asks that we be aware of the different kinds of writing that exist in the world; the communication and composition processes we find on web pages, online spaces, within social media spaces, in coffee shops, and even on clothing that we purchase require a special set of skills to produce the sort of composition that we engage with in those places, in those multimodal ecologies. ISU's Writing Program believes it's important to explore types of writing well beyond the traditional modalities of writing classes (which often involve mostly writing or typing text). It is important to realize that the world has moved beyond print-based texts; there exist a range of possible modes of production (both digital and material modes), and as writers who recognize that writing is always a situated activity, we need to be

able to learn to use the tools necessary for these kinds of productions. Visual literacy is just as important as textual literacy.

In my quest to find warm armor (clothing) to arm myself against the menacing hounds about to be unleashed from Arctic Hell, I engaged with some multimodal online shopping sites in a bid to find the perfect battle gear. The literate activity I found on these online spaces varied, but there were obvious similarities I found in the conventions that informed the information these merchants wanted to emphasize about their clothing.

I noticed five features that cut across the online sites I visited: photos of the product, size charts, fabric properties, a customer review section, and, of course, pricing. All of these were extremely helpful in choosing a fitting armor. For instance, the star-rated customer review section offered insight into the product's insulation effectiveness. As writer-researchers, it is important always to engage with multiple sources in order to better understand a topic or genre we're working with. Even though there were photos of the product and product specifications, there was also the star-rated customer review section to help potential purchasers make their decision. Engaging with the multimodal interactive content on these sites was very informative. It was almost like Jon Snow's quest to find dragon-glass—the perfect weapon to slay the Night King and his army of undead, blue-eyed, frosty demons. Engaging with the literacy on these multimodal pages, I also realized how technical, scientific language was used to emphasize the product's effectiveness and reliability against harsh winter conditions. For example, the product's amazon page, which has since been taken down, uses phrases such as "waterproof, breathable technology," "polyurethane (PU) coating," "tri-component," multi-layer, and "lab- and field-tested." The use



Size Chart				
Size	M	L	XL	2XL
Chest (cm/inch)	128/50.4"	132/52"	135/53.1"	138/54.3"
Shoulder and Sleeve Length (cm/inch)	93/36.6"	95/37.4"	97/38.2"	99/39"
Back Length (cm/inch)	77/30.3"	79/31.1"	81/32"	82/32.3"

Figure 5: Multimodal descriptors of a jacket, indicating size chart and layers.

Figure 6: Multimodal descriptors of a jacket, highlighting its properties.[5]

of this specialized language, for me, was persuasive. I felt I could trust the product. The emphasis on thermal technology, waterproof, breathable and windbreaker/wind protection technology were important considerations in deciding on a winter jacket. This was a crucial uptake during my research. Through my research on fabric properties for winter jackets, I found that polyester and fleece liners were common and important material compositions. As writers, understanding how a particular genre works, engaging with all its moving parts can be very rewarding for other literate activities we engage in.

Uptake and Transfer for Writers

Now, you may ask, how does all of this talk of preparing for winter gear connect to writing? This is where transfer comes in. **Transfer** is the act of taking knowledge from one context and applying it to another (ISU Writing Program). Sometimes, as writers, we encounter new writing situations that require us to engage in a particular discourse community, which requires us to engage with the rules and norms that underlie that particular situation. It's always important to remember that all writing is rhetorical; all writing is informed by particular situations, undertaken to meet particular goals and serve a particular audience. Writing does not happen in a vacuum. It is not a disinterested activity. There are actors that enable writing to happen. The

5. Find these images at *https://www.amazon.com/MECASTAR-Snowboard-Waterproof-Windproof-Detachable/dp/B07KC67FM1/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=MECASTAR+snowboard+waterproof+B07KC67FM1&qid=1588212308&sr=8-1*

tools we employ in a particular rhetorical context, whether they are visual or aural, will largely be informed by who our audience is and what our goal is.

As writers, if we recognize that writing is an activity, and that there are people and tools that we engage with (whether we are conscious of this interaction or not) in the production of writing, our decisions become more focused and we are able to produce rhetorically conscious writing. Outside of your class, you are going to engage with writing space that is variegated; you'll find that there exist many ways of writing in the world, a rhetorical community that will make different demands on your ability as a writer. Different writing genres require different skill sets. Adaptability becomes a writer's way of managing new writing situations, engaging with the actors in that genre, learning the rules, and engaging with the community.

Figure 7: Edmund vs the Icy Villain.[6]

The main takeaway I've had from working on this project and working as a writer is that learning to create a new genre is not something you can do on your own. Writing is collaborative. This is perhaps the most important advice I can give to my fellow writers: we are not alone, and it's okay to have anxieties or fears when we encounter a new writing situation. But there's always help. There's always a system of actors that can help us acquaint ourselves with the new situation and help us to become comfortable with that genre.

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6. This meme is based on the popular HBO series, *Game of Thrones.*

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All the World's a Stage: The Multiplicity of Audience

Zack Dukic

In this article, Zack Dukic discusses the reader's potential membership in target audiences using examples from ISU campus and articles from prominent news outlets. Awareness of one's inclusion in a target audience is not always obvious, but through active reading and with the help of the Activity Triangle, an individual can realize their agency as a member of a target audience.

You are a member of multiple audiences—sometimes simultaneously—during any given day. Social media is the most obvious example of simultaneous participation in multiple audiences; as you scroll through Facebook you are targeted by advertisements, your friends' posts, posts of groups you follow, and news articles, just to name a few. But the multiplicity of audience isn't just virtual. Consider all of the flyers posted around campus, the chalk advertisements on the grounds around the quad, or the shops and restaurants of downtown Normal with their sales and specials taped up on their windows. These examples are not just arbitrary productions, they are made specifically with *you*, the target audience[1], in mind. Recognizing yourself as a member of multiple target audiences is an awareness that can keep you from being manipulated by reporting and marketing language.

It is important to be aware of the nuances and variations in the language that surrounds you every day. This is the same type of awareness used when analyzing a literary production or a text of any kind really. The trick is to

1. Target Audience: "A particular group at which a product [or service] . . . is aimed" (definition from lexico.com)

Antecedent knowledge is the information and skills you already possess that can be applied to a new task. Whenever you try something new, you depend on what you know to guide you. So, despite whether or not you think you're prepared, in a lot of ways, you already are!

transfer your **antecedent knowledge** about genre analysis to analyzing the details or conventions of the information being presented to you. In this article, I discuss several examples of target audience in news articles and advertisements. Both news articles and advertisements are genres with specific conventions that identify them as such, and they share important characteristics that make them good genres for analyzing audience. The objective they share isn't necessarily obvious but is no less important despite its subtlety. News articles and advertisements are trying to convince you of something. This is obvious with an advertisement (i.e., whatever is being advertised can fill a need you have), but less so with news articles, which on the surface can be seen as informative rather than persuasive. However, there are distinct choices involved in the production of a news article that inform your interpretation of the content. With a careful analysis, the connection between the genre's characteristics (terminology, visuals, content, distribution choices, etc.) and its goals (to inform or persuade—or both) can become more clear, and this sort of investigation can help us understand how these genres work to shape the thinking and/or behavior of their target audience.

Figure 1: Stevenson Hall bulletin board.

Multiplicity of "Audience"

I took a walk around the ISU quad, making my way from the State Farm Hall of Business to the Bone Student Center, and, along the way, I took pictures of different advertisements around campus. Usually, I don't pay any mind to all the flyers and other ads when I'm walking from building to building, but I found that when I actually went out looking for them, that there were too many to count! I took far more pictures than could be included in this article, and I was also surprised by how much I noticed through simply paying attention. There were the bulletin boards with all sorts of flyers attached as well as stationary signs and ads posted; on storefront windows, hanging off of buildings, and all over the place in the Student Center.

Consider Figure 1 above. All of the flyers in Figure 1 were made with you in mind! Just from a brief glance at them I found some commonalities: bright colors, dynamic imagery, and large print. In the discussion that follows, I will analyze a few examples in detail and try to identify the multiple audiences targeted by the production while also noting the **genre conventions** of advertisements.

Genre conventions are the answers to the questions: what features do different examples of a particular genre have in common? Do these features help to distinguish this genre from another one? Looking at multiple examples of a genre can help you to spot conventions, and many of them you identify without even thinking about it! For example, conventions can help us to spot the difference between a page from a book and a page from a newspaper.

Awareness of genre conventions is how you understand the differences between genres and can also reveal the audience being targeted by the genre. For example, bright colors, dynamic imagery, and large print are all conventions which are attention-grabbing conventions and immediately demonstrate that the target audience at the most inclusive level is anyone whose attention can be momentarily arrested by the advertisement. Let's take a closer look at that bulletin board!

The flyers in Figures 2 and 3 are from the bulletin board in Stevenson Hall (Figure 1), and both target multiple audiences. The first audience I could identify would be college students; after all, these flyers are posted on a college campus in a university building. While there are also university employees in this space, looking closely, we can see that these ads are definitely more oriented toward the student population: Figure 2 is an advertisement for the

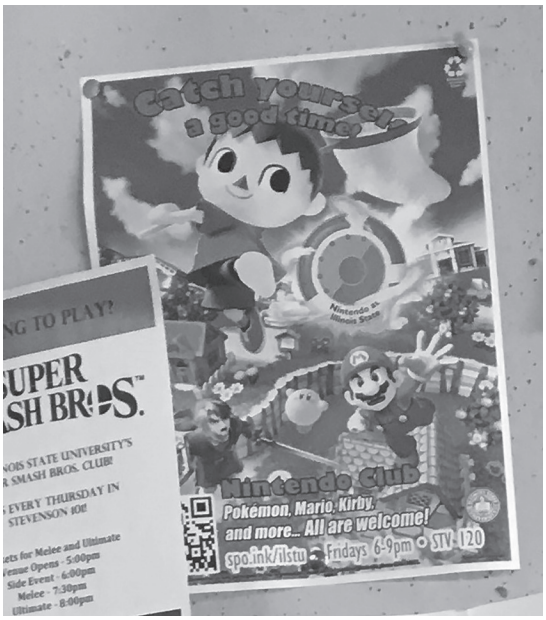

Figure 2: Nintendo Club flyer

Figure 3: Food Pantry and Meredith's Properties flyers.

"Nintendo Club," and clubs generally are meant for student participants. We can identify more target audiences by further scrutinizing the flyer. Not only is this flyer meant for the student population, but more specifically the students who play video games. Though some may think all young adults play video games, this is not the case. We can identify another more specific target audience: students who play video games and are fans of *Nintendo* games. The ad is for the "Nintendo Club," so at the most specific level, it is targeting students who are fans of Nintendo video game franchises, but more generally it is targeting students who play video games, and even more generally it is simply targeting the student population. We've just identified three target audiences for a single flyer and there are probably many more of them on this billboard alone! Any given student could be a member of one or all three audiences targeted by this flyer.

In Figure 3, the "Meredith's Properties" ad states that their two-bedroom apartments are "close to the Bone Student Center & ISU Athletic Facilities" and feature "FLEXIBLE LEASING TERMS!" There is nothing that explicitly targets students. I mean, university employees need a place to live too, right? However, the specifics of the ad above are more applicable to students than employees. Being in close proximity to the Student Center is more relevant to students, who are more likely to have a need to go there. The same could be said of the reference to the athletic facilities; employees surely use these facilities but any given day the majority of the people there are students. The biggest giveaway that this ad is meant more for the

student population is the capitalized and exclaimed "FLEXIBLE LEASING TERMS!." Employees are generally looking for a living situation that is more stable since they will be living and working in the area. Students, on the other hand, may complete their degree in two to four years and then move on to another place. Month-to-month or six-month leases could be more appealing to students because employees are usually looking to stay where they are living for a longer period of time. We can also narrow this ad down into several target audiences: the university population (students and employees), the part of that population who own vehicles ("FREE on-site parking for all tenants"), the student population, and more specifically the student population with a variable time frame (e.g., students close to graduation).

The other ad in Figure 3, the "School Street Food Pantry," isn't so much targeting students in general as it is university employees or students who could volunteer. Though the Food Pantry is for students and it does mention when the pantry will be open, the majority of the space on the ad is oriented towards those who can volunteer "to drive students home." By referencing Dean Diane Zosky and the "distance in the rain, sleet, snow or blistering heat" that students sometimes have to walk through, the ad is meant to encourage possible volunteers. We can narrow the target audiences of this ad down from the university population (students and employees) to students or employees who have vehicles and then further to students or employees who have vehicles and want to volunteer.

All three of these ads share distinct genre conventions, some of which are: some application of color (none are simply white paper with black texts), dynamic print with different fonts and sizes, exclamation points for emphasis, reasons to consider their content (e.g., "Catch yourself a good time!"), and how to contact someone if interested. Identification of these conventions not only makes us aware that these examples all belong to the genre of advertisements but also helps us to be more aware of who these ads are targeting. The more exclusive the target audience, the more specific the conventions. For example, the Nintendo Club's most exclusive audience are fans of the Nintendo company's video games, which is revealed by the most specific conventions: character imagery and distinct terminology. These conventions could apply to any advertisement flyer (think about the School Street Food Pantry from Figure 3 with the background imagery of a red bird) but are used in a specific way to target an exclusive audience. Genre conventions can simultaneously target both a general, inclusive audience (e.g., bright colors) as well as a more specific, exclusive audience (e.g., a brightly colored character).

Transfer of learning is when we re-use, adapt, and transform our existing knowledge from a previous situation or activity to a new one.

Variations in Reporting Language

Now, let's **transfer** our analytical skills from the genre of advertisements to the genre of news articles. First, we'll take a look at the titles of four news articles (two from CNN and two from FOX) posted online to identify variations in reporting language.

On October 3, 2019, there was a knife attack at the police headquarters in the city of Paris, France. The same day, CNN reported: "Four killed in knife attack at Paris police headquarters" (Vandoorne and Crouin). On the same day, Fox News reported: "Paris knife attack in police station kills at least 4, including 3 officers, assailant shot dead: officials" (Sorace). We can see there are discrepancies in the reporting language; CNN's article title is less descriptive but more accurate as the attack did occur at the police headquarters and not just a police station. Fox's article elaborates on who has been killed and also makes the distinction that the attacker is dead while citing its sources ("officials"). A key difference between the titles is that the CNN title does not refer to the attacker. This could lead to the interpretation that the situation is ongoing. The Fox article title, on the other hand, specifies "assailant shot dead," orienting the reader to the interpretation that the situation has ended. Each of these news outlets made specific choices, and their article titles shape the audience's interpretation of the event being reported. Now, let's look at another example of discrepancy in reporting language.

On October 6, 2019, CNN News posted an article titled, "Pope opens meeting that could lead to some married men becoming priests" (Gallagher and John). The next day, Fox News posted, "Catholic Church to debate married men becoming priests." In this instance, CNN's article title is more descriptive and more accurate than the Fox article title. Both articles are about a meeting called by the Pope to discuss allowing married men to become priests in a specific region of South America—one that is suffering from a shortage of priests. By directly stating the "*Pope* opens meeting" and "*some* married men," the CNN article title is much clearer about what the content will describe, while the Fox article title is more vaguely worded, less direct, and could lead to the interpretation that the whole of the Catholic Church is considering allowing married men to be priests. This type of interpretation could illicit strong emotions from readers and immediately skew their reading of the article as they align themselves against or for it only after reading the title and not the actual content of the article.

These are two brief examples of how language can orient a reader's interpretation of the information reported on. Applying an analytical perspective (just like when analyzing a genre!) when reading a news article can

make clear the interpretation of the content that the writers are attempting. As a reader, you need to be ready to situate yourself as an *active* reader; using genre analysis and rhetorical analysis, you can better understand how the actions and choices of the writer are affecting you as the reader.

Activity System: Be an Active Reader!

There are many definitions of *active reading*. I would define it as reading with the objective of understanding, analyzing, and engaging with the material in order to comprehend the author's intent.

When active reading is your goal, the tools you have to work with include your antecedent knowledge, which can help you make sense of the image and the different modes found in a single flyer. For example, being literate in the English language allows you to interpret what is written, and how much you are involved in or aware of video game culture helps you to recognize the characters in the picture. Using your antecedent knowledge is the first step in active reading! A second step is to start asking a lot of questions. For example, "Why did the creators of this production choose those characters for the flyer? Are they popular characters? What are they supposed to make people think? Do they make me (or others) think of fun memories or enjoyable times spent playing video games? Could the creators of this flyer have chosen those characters to grab attention and to specifically appeal to a reader's potential (presumably positive) experience with them?"

This advertisement, like most advertisements, is **multimodal**. Not only does it apply the alphabetic mode with written English, but it also utilized the visual mode through imagery.

Multimodal composing "specifically refers to ALL of the modes that humans can use to communicate that would include Alphabetic (stuff we write using the alphabet), Visual (pictures), Aural (sound), Oral (spoken), and Symbolic (using symbols that aren't alphabetic, like emoticons or emojis)" (isuwriting.com)." In the case of these flyers, the use of multiple modes communicates different information to different audiences.

In addition, you can use some of the ISU CHAT terms to think in even more complex ways about how the genre is constructed. For example, you can think about the different individuals and groups who might have been involved in the production of these texts. The flyer was most likely sanctioned by the Nintendo Club. Once the image was created it needed to be copied and printed, and then someone, or several people, must have walked around campus posting the copies. All of this was done with its own objective: to promote interest in the Nintendo Club. When the club decided that a flyer was how they would raise awareness for their group, they had to make that decision based on

some expectation about how the community might respond to such a flyer. While making the image, the authors had to consider which modes would best attract people's attention (bright colors, recognizable characters, etc.), and those who posted the flyer around campus would have to consider where the flyer would get the most attention and be seen by the largest number of community members. The rules governing this planning (which in ISU CHAT terms might be understood as **representation**) would abide by the rules and norms of the university; the image posted couldn't be offensive to the community or otherwise cause any kind of disruption with its presence. There are also the rules of the format; they couldn't include anything that didn't fit on that sheet of paper. When we add all these considerations together, we get a thorough understanding of the authors' intent as well as how this production pertains to we, the readers.

It's possible to think about the news articles I've presented using a similar understanding of complex relationships between people, texts, tools, cultures, and situations. For example, the rules governing news articles posted online are also determined by institutional regulations. Neither of these news outlets would post an article with profanity in the title (unless it was edited appropriately; e.g., sh*t) because that could be offensive to the reader. The rules of format would apply here as well. Article titles, especially news articles, need to be short and descriptive so as to catch the reader's attention with just a few words. The community, in this case, is much larger than just a university community; the online articles posted by these news outlets, are read all over the world. Though they are primarily targeting American audiences (they are American news outlets after all), both CNN and Fox must maintain an awareness that their content reaches people across the globe. In addition, a text with this kind of global reach involves a much wider range of people in its **production**: the reporters (who can be all over the world), the editors (who work with the content and format of the story), the technicians (who make sure the articles are posted online appropriately), editors (who decide if the article will be published on the website), and other stakeholders. Each step and decision can include multiple people. In addition, the articles referenced previously used multiple modes. This included alphabetic and image modalities, but also the aural mode. On the website, there was the option to play a video in which the story was reported using video and audio. The modality or modes used can help to further reveal the scope or intent of a production. For example, the option to receive the news articles' information through the aural mode further extends the possible audience of that content (i.e., someone who is visually impaired or unable to read). As *active readers*, while we read, we think about all the effort that goes into what we read (e.g., a news article or an advertisement), the reasons these texts were created, and how specific choices affect our interpretation.

Agency of Audience

The writer does not have all the power in the production of a text; as the audience, we also have power! The most important consideration, for most writers, is their target audience. Thus, as a (possible) member of that audience, you are actually influencing the writer's efforts through your expected reception of the material. Whether you agree/disagree or enjoy/dislike the text is incidental, regardless of the reception you were a consideration in the production of that text. If all the students on ISU's campus who played Nintendo video games agreed that Yoshi was the best Nintendo character, the next Nintendo Club flyer would undoubtedly include an image of Yoshi. That's the agency of audience; while an individual rarely influences the production of a text meant to reach hundreds (or thousands or millions!) of people, the audience that individual belongs to is actually the most influential consideration in the production of such a text.

Awareness of your agency as a target audience member can keep you from being misled, duped, or manipulated by the multimodal advertisements and news articles that are targeting you. If you see a flyer with bright colors, you don't have to keep looking at it. If you read a news article and disagree with how its content is presented, then you'll know that article might have been written with a different audience in mind. Though these options can seem obvious, you may be surprised how often your attention is diverted without you thinking about it. Next time you're scrolling through Instagram or Facebook, think about what you do when ads or news articles appear. Do you scroll past them? Probably yes, most of the time. But every so often you watch or read them because they capture your attention. This is because of the efforts of multiple people and institutions utilizing specific modes and conventions in these productions, in an attempt to influence your opinions or actions. Being an active reader means discerning the intent of a production so that you can decide whether and how to respond, fully aware of the effect it is meant to have on you.

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Navigating the Labyrinth of Information Fluency in an Era of Fake News

Alexa Parker

In this article, Alexa Parker explores the concept of fake news using the ISU Writing Program concepts of genre and CHAT. Using genre analysis and CHAT analysis, Parker creates a snapshot of what Fake News is today as well as what impact it has on the world. Parker also explores how to develop good information-seeking behaviors to combat the spread of misinformation via fake news.

Fake news. We are constantly hearing this term thrown around—by our president, by various media platforms, and in everyday conversation. We know it is a bad thing. I've noticed that the term fake news is most often used when someone wants to delegitimize a particular text or piece of information. The more I thought about this topic, the more I realized that we often fail to recognize something as fake news until someone else accuses the news of being fake. And, additionally, fake news is a broad label that tries to fit many different things within it. It can be a term that is used to delegitimize a false story, but it can also be used to delegitimize a factual story. As the term has moved forward, it has become a sort of meme or joke. There are even bitmojis—or personalized emojis—that allow you to put the phrase fake news into a conversation (Figure 1).

Figure 1: My personal fake news bitmoji.

In this article, I will examine fake news through the lens of the ISU Writing Program concepts genre and CHAT. Using genre analysis, we will

discover what fake and real news even are, helping us to see why the fake news has become so integrated in our daily lives. The ISU Writing Program version of **CHAT, or cultural-historical activity theory**, is used to "help us think about and study the complex genres that we encounter in the world" and "focus on any aspect of the myriad elements of textual production" (ISU Writing Program). This will allow us to investigate how fake news is made and where our role lies in the production of it. Writing is complex, even if it is writing about fake news. Without the proper tools—such as genre analysis and CHAT—we would have no way to understand and combat the consequences of it, which can range from mildly annoying to severe. With fake news, sometimes these consequences can be harmless, but other times, the consequences can range from mildly annoying to severe.

Misinformation can spread through one fake news story, such as in the case of Pizzagate. The Pizzagate case was a news story made up by Alt-right communities claiming that Hillary Clinton and her campaign ran a hidden pedophilia trafficking ring out of a pizzeria in D.C. This story took off and became viral globally, resulting in a man named Edgar Welch going to a D.C. pizza place, Comet Ping Pong, and firing shots. This reveals the dire impact fake news stories can have in the world. So, with all of that in mind, what is fake news really, and how can we recognize it without someone telling us first?

Diving In: What Is Fake News? What Can It Tell Us?

According to the Center for Information Technology and Society at the University of California (CITS), "Fake news is a multi-step process that involves making or taking content that others have produced, passing it off as real news, and capitalizing on social media to get as much attention as possible." But why do creators want this attention? Well, CITS proposes that the attention is sought for two reasons: either the creator wants to spread their ideologies and/or they want people to be led to see more content so that they can obtain advertising revenue (Walthers et al.). And the thing is, this is working. A Pew Research Center study found that "64 percent of U.S. adults say that fabricated news stories cause a great deal of confusion about the basic facts of current issues and events" (Barthel, Mitchell, and Holcomb). Additionally, they found that 16 percent of U.S. adults said they have shared fake political news inadvertently, while 14 percent say they have shared fake news that they knew was completely made-up (Barthel, Mitchell, and Holcomb). So, what's going on with this? Why in the world are people simultaneously panicking about the spread of fake news while also admittedly spreading it themselves?

Fake vs. Real: Separating the Two with Genre Analysis

The problem seems to be that people know fake news is a thing, and they are worried about it, but they don't know how to fix it. Additionally, identifying a fake news story isn't something that American media consumers tend to conceptualize as being a problem that they need to fix. In fact, Barthel, Mitchell, and Holcomb state that "45 percent of U.S. adults say government, politicians and elected officials bear a great deal of responsibility for preventing made-up stories from gaining attention, on par with the 43 percent that say this of the public and the 42 percent who say this of social networking sites and search engines" (Figure 2). However, considering that the people consuming fake news stories are also spreading it, the problem might be something that we should consider taking into our own hands.

How do I recommended we do this? Well, I think we need to first conduct a **genre analysis**, which the ISU Writing Program defines as "looking very closely at a particular genre (multiple samples and variations) and investigating all the different features that might be present (or features that are absent)" as well as "looking underneath the surface features of visual design, sentence-level qualities, and style and tone to uncover how genres

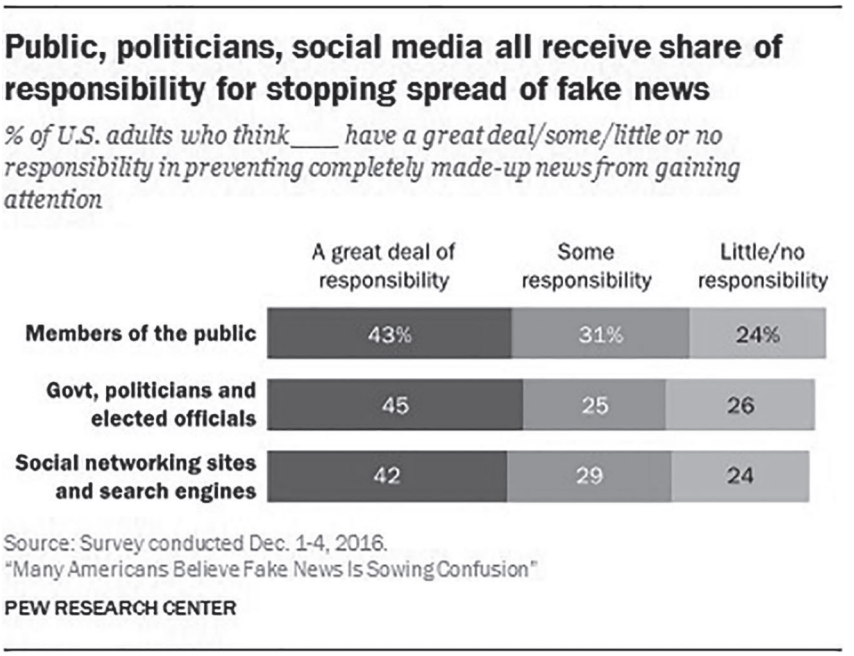

Figure 2: Who's to Blame for Fake News Spreading?

can be subject to (and can enforce) cultural, social, commercial, and political agendas." Genre analysis provides a snapshot of what a genre looks like at a particular moment in time—as you probably know, as time passes things change, and genre is no exception. When I use genre analysis in this article to examine fake news, I am looking at what the genre of fake news is for me as a writer researcher today—that genre could completely change. Hopefully, though, by investigating all the features of the fake news genre versus the real news genre, we can identify some strategies that help us delineate between the fact and the fiction being circulated in media today.

Wait. . . But They Kind of Look the Same

So, first, we are going to try and identify some of the **genre conventions**, or all the things a writer could discover (and discuss) about a particular genre that makes us recognize it as that genre (ISU Writing Program). After looking around at examples of news sources I deemed factual and news sources I deemed fictional, I created a comparative list of conventions (Figure 3). Well, the problem is, the lists are almost identical. Sometimes there are slight differences, but these are not differences that readers can count on. For example, sometimes fake news will not have an author, but other times it does. The author may or may not be made up, but they could still be listed. Plus, legitimate news sources sometimes don't list an author even if this is a less common occurrence. This is made evident in the Works Cited page of this article, in which multiple of my own sources, which I have deemed trustworthy, did not have authors listed. In a similar vein, both fake news and legitimate sources will usually have logos, but those logos alone do not tell us if the source is reliable or not. CBS News created a website that focused on this exact topic, which they fittingly called "Don't Get Fooled by These Fake News Sites." I have included an image of one of the fake news web pages CBS features, along with an image of real new site (Figures 4 and 5). The fact of the matter is, fake news sites are often good at seeming real—which means we have to do some extra digging.

"Real News"	"Fake News"
• Headline • Date • Logo • Author • Photos	• Headline • Date • Logo • Author (not as often) • Photos

Figure 3: Comparative list of conventions.

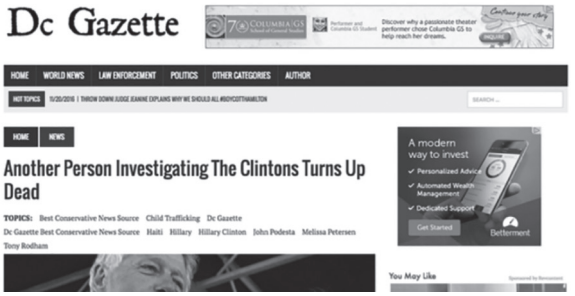

Figure 4: Fake news website—DC Gazette.

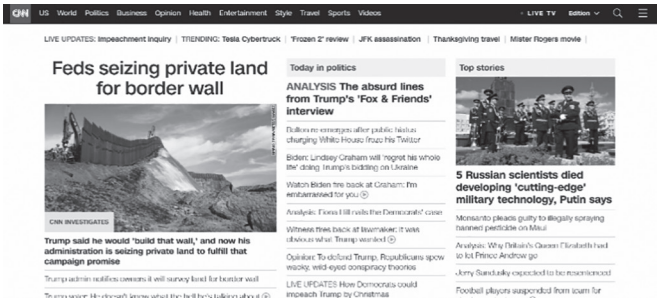

Figure 5: Real news website – CNN.

Where Do We Go from Here? Using CHAT Analysis to Spot the Difference

While genre analysis was extremely helpful for recognizing what a news source is supposed to look like, it wasn't enough on its own for us to unmask the bad guys—or in this case, bad news. Genre conventions don't consider who is reading the text, how the text is going to be produced and distributed, or how people will be interacting with the text. This is where ISU Writing Program's version of CHAT comes in; combined with genre analysis, it can give us the tools to have a nearly complete understanding of a text. Looking at some of the aspects of CHAT, we can spot the differences in the writing of fake news versus real news. This helps us figure out what sources are trustworthy and allows us to examine our own agency in this era of fake news.

So, let's start with **production**: the part of CHAT that deals with the means through which a text is produced (ISU Writing Program). This can include both the tools (e.g., using a computer vs. a cell phone) and the practices (e.g., typing on keyboard vs. touchscreen) that go into creating a text. We are in luck, because CITS has created a step-by-step guide for how a fake news website is created (Walthers et al.). The first two tools they identify is the need for a domain name for the website and the host of the

website itself—which, they say, can be relatively inexpensive. Second, after obtaining those two tools, the creators of fake news must find content for the site. According to CITS, fake news website owners often steal their content from satire websites such as The Onion or Clickhole (Walthers et. al). While those original websites had the intention of using their websites for humor and commentary, these fake news websites take the satire and try to pass it off as fact.

This idea takes us into **representation**—or, how people who produce a text conceptualize and plan it, as well as all the activities and materials that help shape how people do this. The intent of a fake news source versus a real news source is totally different; one author is trying to spread true information, while the other is not. Fake news creators do not do everything different from real news creators, though. For example, because they want to get as many views and clicks as possible, they will dig through headlines that have been successful in the past (Figure 6). CITS states, "The headline is most important. Catchy and explosive headlines can make people click on a fake news story without even looking at who shared it or where it originated" (Walthers et al.). Real news sites do the same thing, though; they try to come up with catchy headlines, and they also want as many people as possible to click their story in order to gain advertising revenue. It's common sense: journalists would like to help their companies earn money so that they can continue to keep their wages.

So, if the goal of creating fake news and real news is to get people to click on the story and spread the information, what comes next? Well, I

Figure 6: An eye-catching newspaper headline.
Image source: *https://carpedia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Maxim_32-360x240.jpg.*

would say that this part of the goal has everything to do with the reception part of CHAT. **Reception** deals with how a text is taken up and used by others (ISU Writing Program). In our case, what happens when someone clicks on and reads the fake news source and the real news source? Well, in one scenario, people fall for the fake news and perceive it as real news. In the 2019 study "Who Falls for Fake News? The Roles of Bullshit Receptivity, Overclaiming, Familiarity, and Analytic Thinking," Gordon Pennycook and David G. Rand found that people who were instinctively open-minded tended to be more accepting of weak claims lacking in support and thus accepted fake news as real. This also correlated with familiarity factors; for example, if a person was more familiar with a headline, they were more likely to rate it as accurate (Pennycook and Rand 29).

This connects back to the production and representation processes of CHAT in the creation of fake news; the creators of fake news would use other sources already created, such as satirical news sites, in order to create familiarity and trust. Interestingly, reception probably doesn't differ much between real news sources and fake news sources. The familiarity created is because the two sources look similar, which we can see from the examination of the genre conventions. Additionally, the spread of fake news is done because the people reading it believe it is real news, and thus they treat it the same way as real news. Sure, sometimes people will figure out a fake news source isn't real and not share it or declare that it is fake to others, but when they do fall for it, they react the exact same way they would with real news.

But how are the people sharing and accessing these news sources in the first place? Well, according to CITS, "The most common route to fake news websites was through Facebook" (Walthers et al.). And this probably makes sense to anyone who uses Facebook out there. Facebook often has articles on your News Feed, and of course, people often share articles that they think are worth reading on Facebook. I have done it plenty of times, and I am sure many of those who are reading this have as well. According to its Help Center, Facebook often features articles on your News Feed when a friend commented on it. Facebook explains, "Posts that you see first are influenced by your connections and activity on Facebook. The number of comments, likes and reactions a post receives and what kind of story it is (example: photo, video, status update) can also make it more likely to appear higher up in your News Feed" (Facebook Help Center). They then list the three things that make a post appear on your News Feed first:

- A friend or family member commenting on or liking another friend's photo or status update.
- A person reacting to a post from a publisher that a friend has shared.

- Multiple people replying to each other's comments on a video they watched or an article they read in the News Feed. (Facebook Help Center)

To refer back to our real-world example of the Pizzagate case, that story had been re-tweeted by people internationally—as well as plenty of bots—in order to get the story across social media as much as possible and therefore gain more attention (Walthers et al.). Thus, I argue that social media sites, especially sites like Facebook, are strongly intertwined with the spread of fake news.

So where can this fit into our CHAT analysis? Well, I would argue that we could discuss **socialization**, or the interactions of people and institutions as they produce, distribute, and use texts (ISU Writing Program). When we use Facebook or Twitter to access news sources, fake or real, we are interacting with and using the institution of social media (and, more broadly, the Internet) to distribute and use the text. Additionally, because social media platforms are often where these news sources are shared, it could be said that they help in the production of fake news and even real news. This is because part of the production process, as we discussed earlier, involves accessing other news sources (such as satirical news sources) to come up with content for a fake news article. Similarly, for a real news source, it would likely be the case that they would take inspiration from other sources shared on social media during their own production process.

Did CHAT Tell Us That We Are the Problem?

After looking at CHAT, it becomes clear that every aspect is intertwined with one another. What I mean by this is that each part of CHAT overlaps: the tools used to create the fake news will affect how it is taken up by the audience, past audience reactions to news and fake news will alter how new fake articles are created, etc. You may be thinking, *That's cool, but what does that have to do with me?* Well, these news sources continue to spread largely because of the interactions between readers and fake news. We aren't ignoring it; we are accessing it, sharing it, and—ultimately—falling for it. Fortunately, there are many articles and guides out there about how to avoid falling for fake news, so let's dive into one of those.

The Ela Area Public Library (in Lake Zurich, Illinois) published "Avoiding Fake News and Scams," a guide that outlines the steps readers need to take when reading a news source before blindly trusting it (Figure 7). Having read through the guide, I would like to touch on some of the steps I found to be the most helpful.

Figure 7: Image from the ELA Area Public Library guide to "Avoiding Fake News and Scams"

First, they state it is important to check the byline to see if there are any listed authors. The absence of an author could be a red flag. They also dive into the conventions that appear in different subgenres as news. They write, "Opinion pieces tend to be marked with bylines like 'contributor', 'op-ed'. Press releases may say 'FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE' or mention the name of the PR firm releasing it such as PRNewswire" (Ela Area Public Library 1). Similarly, they also state the conventions of URLs that tend to be followed by fake news sources. They tell users to beware of web addresses that end in "lo.com," ".com.co," and ".ru" (3). Additionally, they tell readers to watch out for misspellings, similar spellings, typos, and visual fakes that impersonate real websites' URLs (Ela Area Public Library 3). Looking for these things is a quick and easy way to find (or not find) a red flag in a news source.

Second, they discuss how readers need to evaluate the tone for objectivity. When reading a news source, we need to try and understand the goal of the author. Are they trying to push a certain agenda? Is their language purposefully inflammatory in order to get reactions out of readers and cause them to share the story? Consider once more the case of Pizzagate; according to the Center for Information Technology and Society (CITS), that story had been created by alt-right groups to delegitimize the presidential campaign

of Hillary Clinton by claiming she had been involved in a trafficking ring. Clearly, an agenda was being pushed using a circumstance that would be inflammatory, causing an emotional and angry response in its readers. However, news sources that are based on facts can also use inflammatory language and lack objectiveness. Thus, I would add a caveat to this "fake" versus "real" distinction, and I propose that maybe there is some grey area for us to consider when consuming news articles (or any articles, really): we need consider not only whether something is "fake" or "real" but also whether and how it is trying to sway us in a certain direction.

Where Do We Go from Here?

Clearly, we need to figure out how to stop spreading false information. Adopting some helpful **information-seeking behaviors**, or all the things that people do when they are trying to find out about stuff they want to know (such as finding information, evaluating information, and documenting and citing resources), would be helpful. These behaviors should include some of the ones from the article by the Ela Area Public Library, in which a healthy dose of skepticism should be adopted when looking at a source.

However, the next steps do not end there. We also need to be highly aware of the effect of our actions—specifically when sharing news in a public forum such as social media. Sharing a link to an article is no small act; it continues spreading far beyond our friends list. We already know that the fabricated Pizzagate story had catastrophic effects, leading to shots being fired in the D.C. pizzeria. To give another example, CITS also discusses a study done by Kate Starbird, who collected tweets related to conspiracy theories that mass shootings aren't real. Amid the 99,474 tweets she collected, she found references to 117 websites—80 of which were fake news websites (Walthers et al.). Clearly, the effects of fake news spreading across social media can have truly terrible consequences. Tragedies can be delegitimized for thousands upon thousands of people, and some tragedies can be encouraged to occur.

We need to be conscious not only of whether the news we are sharing is fake, but also what it is trying to make us think and how our use of that source will affect the world around us. I have no easy answer to the maze that is **information fluency** (the ability to critically think while engaging with, creating and utilizing information and technology regardless of format or platform) in an era of fake news, but I do have some suggestions. We need to be aware of the conventions of the news genres we are looking for. Sometimes simple things such as a URL can tell us whether something is off.

Also, we need to think about everything that went into creating that news source. Why and how was the text created? What are the goals? Is this clearly researched, or does it seem like it was just copied from somewhere else with very little thought put into it? Finally, we need to consider the tone of the information and how it is going to affect the ways in which we, and others, understand the content—and the world.

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Inked: How a Tattoo Comes to Be a Bigger Part of Our World

Serenah Minasian

In this article, Serenah Minasian discusses how tattoos attend to both language and writing. Minasian shares her experience with her own tattoos and applies the process of a tattoo entering the world to Illinois State University's version of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT).

How Does a Tattoo Relate to Language and Writing?

When I first wanted to get a tattoo, I thought, *What on Earth do I want to get? Why would I want to get that specific thing, and have it inked on me for the rest of my life?* I was conflicted; I wanted a tattoo that had meaning, but I also wanted something that I would not grow tired of once I was an old wrinkled woman who wore a sleeveless shirt. Thinking of what design I wanted and what the meaning behind it would be (if there would be any) was a very long process. Tattoos are more than just awesome permanent things on people's bodies; they become a text. To show how tattoos relate to language and writing, I will be using Illinois State University's Writing Program concepts of CHAT and multimodal composition. Specifically, I will use the CHAT terms representation, activity, distribution, reception, and socialization as well as the Writing Program concept of multimodal composing.

The Process

The process of getting a tattoo is actually very detailed and complex when you break it down, so that is exactly what I will do in relation to my own experience. Personally, I have many different tattoos that all have their own unique story, so I will describe a few of those processes. The first thing you are usually faced with when wanting to get a tattoo is thinking about whether there is any specific inspiration behind the tattoo. Inspiration often helps spark an idea (at least, it did for me). My inspiration behind my first tattoo was my grandma. My family on my dad's side is Armenian, and my grandma has always told me a certain Armenian saying since I was a child, which has impacted the person I am today. The statement literally translates into English as: "you are my foot's power," but direct translations do not always work from language to language. Because I am fluent in Armenian and English, I know the statement can be translated in our modern English language to mean "you are the strength beneath my feet." To me, this process seems similar to my writing process when completing a project or paper for a class in academia. I first ask myself, "What do I want to write about, and why do I want to write about it?" Therefore, I realized that my tattoo inspiration and preparation followed the same path as my inspiration and preparation behind my writing. Next, when getting a tattoo, the person getting the tattoo may have some words or photos in mind. For me, specifically, I chose a basic Christian cross shaded in black. Above and below it, my grandma's saying is tattooed in its original Armenian form in her handwriting.

Figure 1: My tattoo inspired by my grandma.

The next step in a tattoo's production is finding a tattoo artist. For me, I went to a tattoo artist who was close to home after hearing good reviews about them. Next, you must contact the tattoo artist. After you contact your chosen tattoo artist, you go and discuss the tattoo with them. Then, they draw up your tattoo and show you. If you do not like the original draw up, you ask them to revise it and draw up another one. I did not like the original drawing, so I asked my tattoo artist to revise it. Once they did, it fit my expectations. After you decide on your imagined tattoo and it is exactly what you have dreamed of, the tattooing begins. The tattoo outline will be placed on you, and then it will be permanently inked into your skin. This process can take any amount of time, depending on what you are deciding on getting. Your tattoo will now be introduced to the world and others will

probably see it. Your new tattoo has officially become a piece of language and writing, and now we will examine how.

How Does a Tattoo Involve Multimodality?

As humans and students, we communicate in many different ways. A tattoo involves many different modes of communication. Thinking back to the Writing Program's definition of multimodal composing, ideas that are turned into tattoos can be alphabetic, visual, or symbolic. For me, personally, my tattoos begun as alphabetic and oral. One of my tattoos was a letter from my grandpa, which was alphabetic, and another one of my tattoos is a saying my grandma always said to me, so it was oral as she said it and aural as I heard it. I later took these modes and turned them into other modes by having my tattoos drawn up and then inked into my body. Now, my tattoos serve as visual and symbolic modes of communication that are a part of society and my personal identity.

CHAT and Tattoos

Before we move on to CHAT terms, it is important to know that the ISU Writing Program explains CHAT (cultural-historical activity theory) as, "a tool to help us think about and study the complex genres that we encounter in the world." In this case, the complex genre is tattoos. After getting seven different tattoos, I've realized that the process for each was so different that I wasn't sure how they could be described as a single activity: getting a tattoo. But by doing some CHAT mapping of the process of one of my tattoos, I was able to see how all of my tattoos do engage in a kind of literate practice where writing and language are important. To examine one specific tattoo process that I underwent, I created a CHAT map of one of my tattoos as well as how each individual tattoo has a different relationship to language and writing. By doing this, I was able to see how language and writing are important to the genre of tattoos. Let's dive into some specific CHAT terms and how they relate to the genre of tattoos.

Representation

In the tattoo process, the first CHAT term I thought of was **representation**. Our ISU Writing Program defines representation as "the way that the people who produce a text conceptualize and plan it (how they think about it, how they talk about it), as well as all the activities and materials that help

to shape how people do this" (ISU Writing Program). In terms of a tattoo, this includes the planning process. CHAT helps an individual think about what influenced the tattoo and what words or images an individual decides to incorporate into their tattoo. The materials that shape how you came up with your tattoo idea are an important part of representation as well. For me, my grandma was the inspiration behind my first tattoo, so the materials that shaped it were words and feelings. Since I came up with my tattoo idea, I then brainstormed several design ideas for it and planned out the process. First, I needed a hard copy of the statement, written by my grandma. Next, I found a picture of the Christian cross that I wanted to be paired with my grandma's words. I also had to decide on the way that I wanted the image and text to correspond with one another and how I wanted it to be laid out on my skin. Then, I had to find a tattoo artist and then schedule a date and time with my tattoo artist to complete the actual tattoo and bring it to life. Now I see that this entire process was representation!

Activity

During the actual process of being tattooed, there are many elements of the CHAT term, activity. ISU Writing Programs defines this as "a term that encompasses the actual practices that people engage in as they create text (writing, drawing, walking across the hall to ask someone else what they think, getting a peer review, etc.)." So, in terms of activity, what happened *during* the tattoo? In my case, my tattoo artist sanitized my arm first, shaved it, and then they wiped it down to make sure my arm was dry and clean. After that, my artist had me sit on a chair and keep my arm still while the process began. The practices that occurred during the creation of this text were my tattoo artist wiping my arm about every five minutes. There were also times that my artist got up and left the room for a few minutes during the tattooing. They asked me several times how I was doing, and I answered each time. During the tattoo my tattoo artist also had to dip the tattoo gun in the ink several times. I also heard the tattoo gun continuously buzzing the entire time. In addition, I listened to music during this process to try and relax.

Distribution

There are a couple different ways the CHAT term distribution can be seen in the process of getting a tattoo. First, it is important to consider how the Writing Program at ISU defines distribution: "Distribution involves the consideration of where texts go and who might take them up. It also considers the tools and methods that can be used to distribute text, and how

distribution can sometimes move beyond the original purpose intended by the author(s)." A tattoo begins by being only a draft; it is an idea that is then distributed into an actual text or image on an individual's body. The tools that are used to distribute the text (tattoo) are the ink and the tattoo gun that cause the text to be permanent. An unfortunate example of distribution is the pain that the one getting tattooed undergoes; the pain isn't intentional, but it does occur when the text is transforming from an idea to an actual permanent piece.

An example of distribution that I have personally experienced was when I planned to get a tattoo on my leg. The tattoo ended up becoming an inspiration for my dad's tattoo. My text (the tattoo) and the idea behind it was distributed to my dad who then took it up and made it his text (his tattoo) as well. This was totally unexpected! We ended up getting tattooed together, and it was clearer than ever that my tattoo and the idea around it had surpassed my initial expectations regarding its distribution. In this case, my tattoo's distribution was personally significant and this connection between my dad and I imbued the tattoo with more meaning than I initially expected. My experience showed me how distribution is evident when we see tattoos influence others or become a part of something larger than originally planned.

Reception

The CHAT term that I find most intriguing in relation to tattoos is reception, which "deals with how a text is taken up and used by others." Further, reception "takes into account the ways people might use or re-purpose a text (sometimes in ways the author may not have anticipated or intended)" (ISU Writing Program). When I got a tattoo of text that was taken from a letter that my grandpa wrote me that was in his actual handwriting, one of the first things that popped into my head was, "How will this specific text be taken up by others?" After my grandpa passed away, this text became a tribute to him, which shows how a tattoo's significance can shift over time. I am able to memorialize my grandpa through this tribute on my arm (Figure 2). When people see this tattoo, they are curious as to who wrote the text, and they end up using the text to gain more information about who my grandpa was and the relationship that he and I shared. When my grandpa wrote the letter to me, he probably did not expect that I would repurpose it into a tattoo. When he did see it, he was pleasantly shocked, but honored.

Now that he is gone, the tattoo serves as a way for me to remember the words my grandpa wrote to me and to keep his memory alive. The way

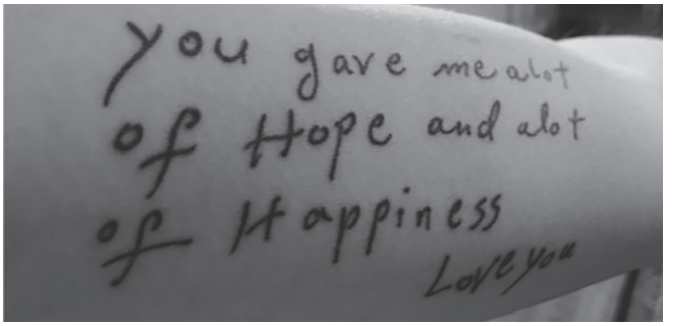

Figure 2: The tattoo repurposed from my grandpa's letter.

others may perceive the text may not be the same way I perceive the text. To me, my tattoo is special because they are the words that my grandpa wrote to me. Others may not be aware of the significance of these words, and it might not even be clear who wrote them. People could also repurpose this text and turn it into an idea that creates a text personal to them. It is important to ask: what does the text mean to you? What does the text mean to others? Reception is essentially the way that individuals perceive a text and how they can reuse the text in another way.

Socialization

According to the ISU Writing Program, "Socialization describes the interactions of people and institutions as they produce, distribute and use texts. When people engage with texts, they are also (consciously and unconsciously) engaged in the practice of representing and transforming different kinds of social and cultural practices." In the process of getting a tattoo, the individual faces several interactions with people while trying to produce their text. First, the person wanting the tattoo may talk to their friends or family about their ideas for their tattoo to as they brainstorm. Additionally, the individual wanting the tattoo will have to discuss the text with the tattoo artist.

Another example of socialization is how the text will be used. For me, personally, my tattoos are texts and images that describe what I have gone through in my life and the people who have impacted my life. I use these texts to express myself, showing the things and people that have shaped me and inspired me throughout my life. In addition, tattoos can represent and transform different kinds of social and cultural practices as described in socialization. For example, my tattoo that is written in my grandma's handwriting in Armenian can be seen as paying homage to my Armenian

culture. Many people will ask me what language my tattoo is written in, which then leads to a conversation about Armenia and the Armenian language and culture. As an Armenian individual, this text serves as a way of educating others about a culture that does not get much attention and acknowledgement. Socialization is a way for people to interact with a text and create more out of a text that can relate both to society and culture.

Conclusion

Related to both language and writing, a tattoo is a multimodal text that undergoes a specific process in order to enter into the real world. How is the tattoo composed and communicated? Visually, alphabetically, aurally, orally, or symbolically? In relation to tattoos and CHAT, things to consider relating to each term are the following questions:

- Reception: What does the text mean to you? What do others see?
- Representation: How do you plan out the text? What is the process?
- Distribution: How does the text enter into the bigger picture? Who does it effect and how?
- Activity: What occurred during the process? What happened physically as in motions, actions, etc.?
- Socialization: How does the text impact society or culture? How many people are involved in making this text?

All in all, these questions are important to thinking critically about the many texts that impact our identities and the world around us, which we can better understand through the lens of CHAT.

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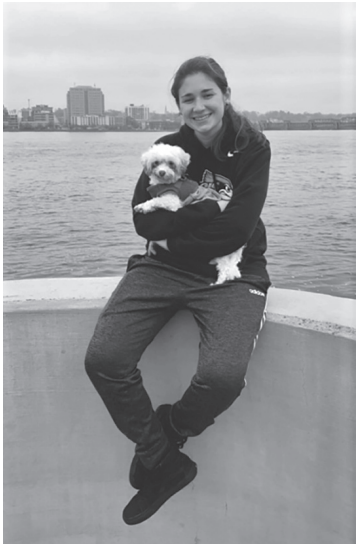

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Activism and Activity: How Posters Work as Genres of Protest

Eric Korankye

In this article, Eric Korankye explores the genre composition of posters[1] and placards that are used universally in protest marches, examining the ways in which they communicate information. Korankye applies the Writing Program's version of CHAT (cultural-historical activity theory) in order to examine how posters serve as rhetorical genres and historical artifacts.

> "He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it."
>
> —Martin Luther King, Jr.
> ("Letter from the Birmingham Jail," 1963)

The phenomenon of protest marches is not new; it has been in existence since the beginning of human civilization. The Civil Rights Movement in the United States is a well-known example that used nonviolence and civil disobedience under the direction of Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders, to combat racial inequality and advance civil rights, to current protests on climate change. Today, we're seeing movements all over the world working to protest climate change. Historically, these protests have been used as an alternative medium for people to voice their displeasure at injustices and systemic defects.

1. A large piece of paper or cardstock, typically featuring writing and/or pictures. Posters often function as notices, advertisements, or decoration.

Figure 1: Civil rights protest.
(Wikimedia Commons. Warren K. Leffler/Public domain)

Figure 2: Climate change protest.
(Wikimedia Commons. ChiralJon / CC BY.)

Across the globe, human lives are progressively endangered, rights of people are continuously infringed upon, and the futures of young people are being jeopardized. When it becomes unbearable, "the only weapon that we have in our hands . . . is the weapon of protest . . . We have no alternative but to protest . . ." (Martin Luther King, Jr., The Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955).

Today, people protest regarding a wide range of causes, including gender activism, rape culture, human rights abuse, misogyny, sexual harassment, corruption in political spaces, socioeconomic injustices, gender inequality, religious intolerance, xenophobia, culture dereliction, voyeurism and sexual abuse, climate change, racism, and much more. Protest marches have proven to be an effective mechanism for creating awareness about issues—writing has, too.

A Sociocultural Perspective of Posters

People all over the world understand the rhetorics of protests, regardless of their differences in language, culture, and sociological make-up. Protests are born out of a resistance to a disorder and usually this resistance is couched in a theme. You may be familiar with hashtags or taglines such as *BlackLivesMatter, Metoo, OpenUpLegalEducation, SaveOurClimateNow,* and what have you. Themes and catchphrases can be found in most protest movements, and they often make their way onto posters.

Culturally, it's important to be aware of how writing is accomplished differently in cultures and communities beyond the environments we are familiar with, including social, civic, and professional settings. Learning to make ethical and responsive decisions about writing within (and across) different cultures and communities is a key activity to the multimodal composition of posters.

Figure 3: A section of protestors in Ghana all clad in red t-shirts and headbands.

Protests speak a lot about the group, society, organization, or movement which is embarking on the protest. When groups embark on protest to demand dignity, respect, or their human or civil rights, it creates a worldview about them. It either reaffirms people's perception about them or deconstructs misperceptions about them. For example, in Ghana, where I'm from, almost every protestor wears a red t-shirt, with a red hand band or headband. Red depicts anger, seriousness, and danger in Ghana, whereas a color such as white depicts joy and happiness. Due to the seriousness of protest marches, you would rarely find any protestor in Ghana in a white shirt. Red is the default color, and this is culturally rooted.

In the US, on the other hand, people might wear a range of colors—except in situations where they purposefully use a uniform color to tell a story or send a message.

Posters used in protest marches are also archived as historical artifacts. A quick Internet image search of "protests the world has witnessed" will give you results of posters used in various protests from the past. Such archives are good for preserving history. The phenomenon of protests is old, but the effluxion of time has seen to the change in the modus operandi of the ways in which protest posters are created has changed over time. Some decades ago, posters had to be handwritten, painted, or drawn. These days, in addition to these techniques, some posters are more sophisticated in their design and can be professionally printed or stenciled because of the advancement in technology. The audience dynamics have also changed dramatically as a result of the modern information dissemination tools we have today; in the past, only passersby could witness protests and see the posters that were used, but these days, they can be streamed live by the media or other broadcast techniques for people across the world to see.

A Cursory Look at My Experiences

Of the many firsthand incidents of protest marches I can recall, what readily come to mind are those I reported on as an intern journalist for a news agency in Ghana. These protests were vehement industrial strikes by diverse

groups of workers who demanded better conditions of service from their employers. I recall huge numbers of protestors wearing red shirts with red bands on hands and heads, holding placards of varied sizes with inscriptions on them, as they marched. I would like to take you with me as I explore some of the tools used in protest marches, with the hope that you'll be able to connect my examples to your own experiences.

Posters and Placards seem to be a common aspect of most protest marches and public demonstrations. Have you also observed this? Have you ever witnessed a protest march where there was no use of posters or placards? I have yet to see one for myself! If posters are that important for protests, then it seems useful to consider the role they play in these events. Who designs them? Who writes on them? Who determines what goes into the content of posters or placards?

To discuss the genre of posters, I shall be using an analytical theory called **cultural-historical activity theory** (**CHAT**). Illinois State University's Writing Program adapts this theory as a tool for examining literate activities and the ways in which thinking critically about the complex genres that we encounter in the world. We use ISU's version of CHAT to analyze all kinds of texts and literate activities through seven terms: production, distribution, socialization, representation, reception, ecology, and activity. Specifically, I'd like to use ISU's CHAT terms to explore activism events (protests, marches, demonstrations) as a **literate activity**. That is, these events (and the texts and tools used in creating and producing them) are historically developed. They involve changing systems of interaction between people, tools, environments, and cultures, and they include a wide range of social processes and texts uses to achieve particular goals. If activism events can be understood as literate activities (people and tools and texts interacting over time) then the most appropriate tool to examine these systems and their genres is CHAT.

Writing Program Learning Outcomes

If you're interested, you can learn more about the ISU Writing Program Learning Outcomes at *www.isuwriting.com*. These are the learning outcomes I'm dealing with in this article:

- All About Genres: Exploring, Researching, and Analyzing Genres;
- Cultures and Communities: Culturally Responsive and Ethical Representations in Writing
- Cultural-historical activity theory: CHATting about Literate Activity (and Other Terms and Concepts).

Don't get too worked up if the ISU CHAT terms looks strange to you; it is still strange to me even though I have been working with them for some time now. In addition to using CHAT, I shall be tackling the following three

learning outcomes[2] (see Callout 1) of the Writing Program that involve exploring genres, thinking about literate activity, and exploring CHAT as a tool for understanding texts in the world.

By the time we are through with the discussion, you might even become an advocate for CHAT, for sure, employing it in your everyday interactions, even when you are ordering chicken nuggets at Chick-fil-A in Normal, Illinois.

Is a Poster a Genre?

The first question I want to ask is whether it makes sense to say "posters" are a genre? What is a genre? Before entering the Writing Program at Illinois State University (ISU), I had always thought of the term genre regarding types of music (gospel, hi-life, hip hop, reggae, etc.) or types of books (drama, prose, fiction, non-fiction, comic, etc.). But now I know that genre is beyond just the categorization of text or music. My original definition of genre was based on my **antecedent knowledge**, which is basically the knowledge that one already possesses on a topic before encountering and reacting to a new situation or new knowledge. Your antecedent knowledge on any subject is important, no matter how little or insignificant you think it is. It serves as a guide or a springboard towards the acquisition of new knowledge, so don't you ever undermine it! So, if genre is not what I thought it was, then what is it? According to Carolyn Miller, genre is a "typified rhetorical action based in recurrent situations" (Genre as social action, 1984, p.157). Really? It is strange, isn't it? I will explain this definition in the subsequent paragraph.

Figure 4: Example of a poster at a global climate change strike in Bavaria, Germany. (Unsplash. Markus Spiske/Public domain)

Let's analyze this scenario: Universities often have events and resources that are specifically for students. In order to keep these resources for students alone, they need to find a way to decide who is from the school and who is an imposter. How would you contribute to solving this problem? Instinctively, I get the feeling that you would probably suggest that these

2. "Objectives" or "goals" in ordinary terms. The Writing Program has nine learning outcomes *http://isuwriting.com/learning-outcomes/*

folks demand the ID card of everyone who claims to be a student. That's right! The ID card would serve as a good identification tool. Now, linking it to our definition of a genre, the ID card now is the **typified response** to this recurring situation (identification problem). Then again, how would they distinguish fake ID cards from genuine ones? Every ID card has some recognizable features and standard conventions that most people can identify. Most ID cards have a photo/picture, the name of the bearer/holder, identification number, institution or organization which issues the card, barcodes, etc. Even though not all ID cards have all these conventions, most of them share these traits. These features or characteristics are what we call **genre conventions**. All genres are defined by conventions or features, which is why we can distinguish an ID card from a resume, or a memorandum from an essay.

Now that we have established our definition of genre, how do we justify that a poster used in a protest march qualifies as a genre? What recurring situation is it responding to? What are the features or conventions of a poster? When protestors embark on a march, they seek to either create awareness of an existing issue or provide remedial measures to address a challenge. How do they communicate any of these intentions? Do they go from door to door, room to room, person to person, whispering into people's ears what they have in mind? Definitely not! So now, the **recurring situation** is how to make their message readily available to everybody. How about if they write it on a poster or placard and carry it along as they protest or demonstrate? Will people be able to get their message without them shouting at the top of their voices or moving from door to door? Certainly! Then, of course, a poster is a genre because in such open spaces where protests are done, it's one of the most common typified responses to the recurring situation (information dissemination). If a poster is a genre, then it should have some conventions or features that distinguish it from an ID card or any other thing, which leads to our next step.

CHATing with Posters!

The use of posters and placards has become such an integral part of protest marches that it is hardly common to find a protest that doesn't use them. It has become so conventional that the absence of posters in any march would be strange. But how are posters made? Are there any standard conventions guiding how they are produced? This brings to mind the first term of CHAT that I would like to talk about: **production**. Production deals with the means through which a text is created. This includes both tools (say, using

a computer to produce a text vs. using a cell phone to produce a text) and practices (for example, the physical practices for using a computer vs. using a cell phone have some similarities, but also many differences) (ISU Writing Program). What tools does one need to produce a poster? Well, it depends on the type of poster one wants to create. The creativity in designing posters allows for **multimodal composition**, which is when a composition uses more than one mode of communication to achieve its intended purpose Multimodal composition can include any combination of visual, audio, gestural, spatial, or alphabetic means of creating meaning. Each of these can be found at a protest, but visual and alphabetic modes are most common on protest posters. In addition, these artifacts are material compositions, in that they are created using all kind of materials, such as paper, cardboard, cloth, paint, markers, and wood.

Figure 5: Group of protesters during a women's march with signboards.

Figure 6: An example of protesters using multimodal signs/posters during a march in London, England. (Unsplash. Yeo Khee/Public domain)

These examples illustrate that the genre of protest posters can be produced in multiple modes. We see a combination of words (linguistic mode) and visuals (visual mode), each of which help communicate the message effectively. One would need different tools to produce each of the posters in the pictures. Figures 3 and 6 are examples of posters with typed, boldfaced inscriptions. In the **production** of this type of poster, one needs texts or a computer with a word processor, a printer which prints in black and red ink, a large sheet of paper, plywood, and a wooden handle. The maker of the poster determines which font type and size of the writings to use, whether it should be upper or lower cases, whether it should be bold or italicized, and whether it should be printed on an A4, A3, or A2 paper size. Figures 2 and 4, on the other hand, have inscriptions that are not typed; they are handwritten/drawn. The tools needed to produce these posters are colored markers and a piece of plywood or cardboard. The maker of the poster determines the kinds of colors to use, the drawings to use, whether the language should be formal or informal, etc. The question is: what accounts for the dynamics in the choice of whether the poster should be printed or handwritten? Is it to show simplicity or sophistication? Some people might think that when posters are handwritten, it tells of the passion and intimate connection the bearer has with the message on the poster. Another school of thought might argue that it shows simplicity and validates the message being communicated. It is less expensive and easy to generate. On the other hand, a typed inscription on a poster also may arguably indicate seriousness or professionalism, especially when the protestors are elites or important people in society. It is quick to generate and sometimes more durable.

All these dynamics show the multifaceted conventions of posters used in protests. It shows the multimodal composition feature of posters. A single poster can be comprised of a picture, written texts, and visual arts. When language intercourses with arts, a tremendous impact is made. The presence of each of these modes creates its own effect on the poster and elicits diverse responses or reactions from people who view it. Some people are moved more by visual modes than linguistic modes while others prefer a combination. Regardless of the choices one makes about the poster—whether typed, handwritten, drawn, or painted—the writings or message should be clear to readers or passersby. However, depending on the audience and situation, "clarity" might require the use of a wide range of different materials, visuals, languages, or stylistic choices.

After determining the tools for producing the poster, another term of CHAT that is worth mentioning is **distribution**. Distribution refers to the means through which a text is shared or disseminated to different people and places. It involves the consideration of where texts go and who might

take them up. It also considers the tools and methods that can be used to distribute text, and how distribution can sometimes move beyond the original purposes intended by the author(s). When you think about distribution, think about how you would get a message across to different people. Would you send it via mail, phone, public address system, notice board, or face-to-face? During protests, people get to see posters primarily because they are either participants of the protest or they are passersby. Protestors sometimes share mini-posters, stickers, brochures, t-shirts, wristbands, handouts, written papers, etc. so that passersby can have time to read their messages to get more information. Some people decorate their vehicles, bags, books, etc. with posters and stickers from protests as a means of distribution. At other times, people get to see the posters only when they are captured on video or photos and uploaded to social media platforms. All these are avenues of distributing the text/poster to a wide range of audiences.

In "Just CHATting," Dr. Joyce Walker explains that when people engage with texts/posters, they are also (consciously and unconsciously) engaged in the practice of representing and transforming different kinds of social and cultural practices. To consider these issues, the CHAT terms, reception, representation and socialization are useful, and I've paraphrased Dr. Walker's definitions from her article below:

- **Reception** is not just who will read the text (in our case the posters). It also takes into account the ways people might use or repurpose a text. Reception is how the audience, whether an intended or unintended audience, reacts and responds to an activity. Their reception can influence the distribution, which is how the piece is taken up and shared with others.
- **Representation** (one of the most important ISU CHAT terms) highlights issues related to the way that the people who produce a text conceptualize and plan it (how they think about it, how they talk about it), as well as all the activities and materials that help to shape how people do this.
- **Socialization** involves both reception and representation and describes how interactions between people can affect the way a text is produced, digested, understood, and used in the world.

These concepts can help us to ask questions about protest posters (as a genre) and help people communicate with one another. We might ask questions such as the following:

- Do all protest posters have a "call to action"?
- How do people interact with posters during protest marches?

- What discussions (if any) do these posters make people have? Do passersby of the protest have positive or negative impressions of its relevance and how they might contribute?
- What kinds of ongoing change or discussion might these posters encourage? What kind of "life" might they have beyond the protest event (such as when a photograph of a poster is reported in the news or shared on a social media site?

Before people embark on a protest, they think or plan about their purpose or theme, their target audience, the routes to use, the kind of posters to use, the writings or paintings to use in the posters, and other considerations (representation). One example of how protesters conceptualize their posters to try to make them more effective texts includes another ISU Writing Program concept: **Translingualism.** In certain situations, poster content can be written in multiple languages within one protest march in order to reach diverse people with multiple language backgrounds. Decisions that the author of a protest sign might need to make include the languages that should be used (English, French, Akan, etc.), whether to make the message more formal or informal, whether to use slang or pop-culture references, the use of humor, and a whole range of other choices. Authors of a protest poster might think about: *For whom an I writing? How much jargon should I use? Should I use civil or uncivil language? Are there restrictions to who can access it? Is there a standardized format of poster I should use? Should it be online, printed, or handwritten? Does our choice of theme, messages, or posters represent the diversity of protestors or passersby? Which neighborhood would serve our purpose better?* Some neighborhoods have zero tolerance for vulgarity or inappropriate language, so definitely posters that show explicit vulgarity might not be a good choice for such a neighborhood. At the planning stage, all these can be considered.

Have you ever seen a post on Facebook or any social media platform, liked it, and forwarded it to friends because you found it relevant to be shared? Your reaction or response to such posts shows how the contents of the post resonate with you (reception). Sometimes, it is not only about the content, but the conciseness and purposefulness of the post that appeal to us most. Some protests require people to sign petitions to show their support or contribute money if it is a funding protest, etc. Sometimes, onlookers cheer protestors on; other times they hoot or boo at them to show their disagreement. People's reception to posters can be based on features of the genre, such as how purposeful and informational it is, how clear the message is, how organized and concise it is, the politeness of the contents, the rich display and design, etc. It can also be based on the antecedent knowledge a viewer/reader brings to the situation. Reception can be both positive and negative.

There are also physical, biological forces that exist beyond the boundaries of any text we are producing (Walker). This constitutes **ecology**, which is another ISU CHAT term I want to talk about. Bad weather can thwart the plans of protestors. Rain can destroy the posters that protestors have made for a protest. Paper accessibility, non-availability of funds for printing, dysfunctional printers, road blocks, language barriers, court orders and injunctions, overwhelming or underwhelming turnout of protestors, and other natural phenomena can ruin protests. In situations where protests are unauthorized, security services can meddle in the activities of protestors. In many regions where peaceful protests have turned into violent ones, police have sprayed tear gas and water cannons on protestors, sometimes injuring many. These physical, biological, and environmental forces are part of the ecology of the protest activity system.

The last ISU CHAT term I want to discuss in relation to the creation of posters for protest marches is activity. **Activity** is a term that encompasses the actual practices that people engage in as they create a text (writing, drawing, walking across the hall to ask someone else what they think, surveying, getting peer review, etc.), and it tends to interrelate and overlap with all of the other concepts that ISU's Writing Program uses to talk about CHAT. Activity describes the process of how genres are produced, and it involves everything that goes into creating or using writing in any form. To consider how activity is part of the genre of protest posters, we might consider the activities a protestor engages in. We can think about gathering information, soliciting funding, planning a date, time, and venue for the protest, brainstorming a theme, hashtag or message for the protest, navigating through the kinds of posters to use, designing and printing posters, providing ambulances, mobilizing protestors from different locations, securing authorization to protest from authorities, and engaging the media to cover the protest. All these are activities within the activity system.

How Much Do You Love CHAT Now? Should I Set a Date for Your Nuptials?

We use CHAT to help us think about and study the complex genres that we encounter in the world. In addition to providing a way to think through the range of activities, genres and choices related to any literate activity, we can use it to think about how systems of activity are created and adapted using the genres, and tools people use to engage in those activities. We might use CHAT to help us create an effective protest poster or organize a demonstration. But we might also use it to help us understand how the genres used by activists might need to evolve or change to meet new environments and goals.

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List of Figures

Figure 1. Wikimedia Commons image. Retrieved May 12, 2020. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Civil_rights_parade_at_the_1964_RNC.jpg

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Figure 4. Unsplash image. Retrieved May 13, 2020. https://unsplash.com/photos/tyfI3RGqL7Y

Figure 5. Shutterstock image. (License Joyce R. Walker). Retrieved May 12, 2020. https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/group-protesters-enjoying-during-womens-march-1233210877

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Cajun Come to Town: On Cajun French, Translation, and Civic Engagement

Emily Fontenot

In this article, Emily Fontenot explores translingualism through her Cajun heritage and her work as a fiction writer. She explains the decisions she has to make when it comes to language and the importance of those decisions.

"Let me tell you something," I said, getting to the point of one of my many long-winded stories at an Easter barbeque at my cousin's house.

My dad stopped me. He told me I said that too often to not know how to say it in Cajun French. "Les mingans kick-shaw," he told me. I repeated it back to him and typed it into my phone.

I've been doing this all my life. Many a memory is sprinkled with instructions on how to say things in my family's language. Some of these phrases are really easy to pick up because I have my training in Parisian French and some of the words and structures are similar. Like the phrase I learned on an early 2000s Christmas morning. My dad was the one who always made us wait. We weren't allowed to start opening presents until he had taken his morning shower and shaved—at least a half-hour ordeal—and had fixed his cup of coffee. When he was finally out of the bathroom, we sat waiting for him to fix his coffee. He crossed the living room at a casual pace and paused halfway to his chair, taking a luxurious sip of his coffee amongst the chorus of our "DAD!"s. He looked at me, winked, and said, "Mmm, c'est bon café." Always the eager learner, I asked, "Good coffee?" He smiled

and said yes. We did our ritual of parroting the phrase to one another, this time with me getting the dirty looks from my siblings. But the desire to open presents waned ever so slightly as the words sat like sugar on my lips.

I still feel this way when learning new phrases. Unfortunately, I don't know many. I definitely don't have a working vocabulary of Cajun French, and there's no simple way for me to gain one. There's no Rosetta Stone for Cajun French. No Google Translate. I can't even just text my dad for phrases. Cajun French is an oral language; it has "no formal structure, no written tradition and no textbook. It is so improvised, it varies from parish to parish" (Nossiter). "Parish"—an old French word—is our word for "county." Louisiana has no counties, only parishes. My dad has no formal training in Cajun or even Parisian French, so he has no way to know how to spell anything he wants to say in French. Every time I've texted him to ask how to say something, he calls me minutes later saying, "I don't know how to spell it so I have to just say it to you." This is the major problem among the dwindling of Cajun French speakers. As an oral language with no set grammar rules, there's really no way to formalize it, which makes the language incredibly difficult to teach or document. And in many cases, Cajun people are poorly educated; my dad, for instance, is the sixth of seven children and the first to graduate high school. On top of not having the formal structure of the language, few have the training to teach a language, which in itself is an arduous task.

On Language Difference

You may have heard the term **translingualism** floated by your instructor (if not, then get ready!). I find translingualism easiest to understand when broken down. "Trans" means "across," and I like to think of it as a crossing of borders or movement between spaces. "Lingual" means "language." The Writing Program website (isuwriting.com) has resources on translingualism, if you'd like to explore it a bit more. In light of that, I like to think of translingualism as a crossing of borders through language, or even a crossing of language boundaries. The great thing about this term is that everyone is translingual in some way, shape, or form.

Don't believe me? You might be thinking in the binary of monolingual versus multilingual, which is not the same thing as being translingual. Monolingual means you only know one language. Multilingual means you know more than one language. But translingual encompasses more than both of those because, even if you "only" know English, I can guarantee you, you know multiple Englishes. For example, the language you use when

you tweet is probably different from the language you use when you write papers in an English class. That's because you have this awesome skill called **code-switching**. Different life situations require different codes. An easy example of this is the "customer service" voice. Saying cheerily and most likely in a higher pitched voice, "Hello! How are you today?" is a particular intonation of speaking that is meant to make us sound more pleasant and ready to be of service, which is recognizable as a customer service rep or the customer. If you've ever worked in a customer service role, you've probably said goodbye or wished someone a nice day in a very chipper tone, then turned to a coworker to say, "Can this shift just end already?" That's an example of switching codes, which has to do with things like class, agency, positionality, and comfort level. You can also see this happen in the difference between how you talk to your friends versus how you talk to your parents.

On Translation

As I've said earlier, Cajun French is not a typical written language with grammar rules or a working dictionary. (There are people trying to put together dictionaries, but the dictionaries are very sparse and are still being formed. However, the Louisiana State University Department of French Studies does have a Cajun French-English glossary that you can find online.) This makes learning Cajun French difficult for a lot of reasons, but I also want to take some time to talk about the difficulties it presents for translation. For one, there's no dictionary that I can pull from to translate on even a simple, decontextualized language level. I also can't leave you without translation, even if I was following the style of writing that includes untranslated words on purpose, because there's no simple Google search that will give you a basic understanding of the words I'm using—and that's even if I managed to spell it in a way that other Cajuns spelling out the words would agree with. More than that, the words I use and how I use and understand them are distinctly shaped in part by how I came to understand them in relation to my **discourse community**, which is made up by people who said these words around me. Cajun French is incredibly reliant on its discourse community and its shared understandings of words and meanings as well as the grammar that goes along with using them. So, when I translate words and phrases from Cajun French to English in this article, I'll be giving translations the way I learned to do with people outside of my community: I'll be telling stories to explain words and phrases I use.

For example, there's a word we use very frequently in my house that people as close as Baton Rouge, about two hours away, don't know: thra-ka

(I did warn you that I was spelling phonetically, right?) The pronunciation is more important to me than how weird it looks on paper. The way I usually explain what this word means is by saying, "You know when you were a kid and you were at the store with your mom and y'all were checking out and you saw some chips or coke and you asked your mom if you could have some? And she undoubtedly said no? That there was food at home or you're not really hungry, or that's what they put it by the counter for? My mom would have just said, 'No. That's just a thra-ka.' That's what that word means." Granted, I could have said something like "it's a want that you don't need," but I don't feel like that covers it. I also don't feel like that definition helps in understanding to the point that you could take and use it. Besides, if I had another word to describe what thra-ka meant, I wouldn't be using thra-ka. I use it because it's the best word I have for a particular feeling, want, or desire.

Situatedness

There is a time and a place for everything, though, and often my Cajun French does not belong in the time and space of my academic writing. Part of this is because the majority of what I know in Cajun French is pejorative, demeaning, or a straight-up cuss word. So, there's that. However, another big part of it is my audience and the **affect** that I want to draw out. Before I get into what affect is and how it relates to my writing and Cajunness, I want to pause and say that though I do believe that there is a time and a place for everything, I am not saying that denying those rules are bad. Subverting expectations of genres, ideas, and mode are all incredibly affective ways of bringing a topic or problem to the surface. I am just saying that I don't think me using Cajun French in academic writing is doing subversive work; it would mostly be strange and out-of-place, and this all has to do with the affect you're going for in your writing. Affect theory is academic talk for feelings and emotions. In my academic (and some other) writing that I want to have a welcoming affect—or community-based affect—I don't want to use a language that excludes others and is hard to translate for yourself. Instead, I want to write in ways that welcome everyone and situates all readers as part of the conversation.

This is different from what I sometimes strive to bring out in my fiction. I'm currently writing a speculative fiction novel that is set in South Louisiana and Central California. The family that I focus on in Louisiana is Cajun. For that reason alone, it makes sense that I use Cajun language and slang in the novel—at least when I'm writing from that family's perspective, right? But there are deeper reasons for it as well. It has to do with affect and what I'm

going to call situatedness. Have you ever purchased a really cheap product—like a face mask from the Dollar Tree—that had writing and instructions on it, but they were all in another language? Well, if you're like me, you always double-check the instructions just to make sure you're not about to burn your face off or anything. But if those directions are in a language you don't understand, there's a moment of puzzlement. You pause for a second and maybe giggle anxiously. That would be an example of an affective response to the single language—more specifically, a single language that you have no knowledge of. Your discomfort is the intentional or unintentional **affect** of the product.

That discomfort is exactly the affect that writers like me and many others implement in our work. It's not a discomfort to the extreme; it's not meant to encourage readers to put the text down and walk away from it, but it is meant to draw their attention. Because part of what monolingual speakers get comfortable with—especially in the U.S. and especially when your one language is English—is having the language around them be accessible to them. On an average day, you may not notice how much English writing you encounter, but you most likely notice when a language other than English is presented to you. To go back to my face mask: I had to stop and consider how anxious I would feel all the time if the only words written on packages were written in languages I didn't know. That's something that I took for granted until I was presented with a product and instructions that I couldn't understand.

Discomfort situates you, the reader, within the text. I'll give an example from the novel I'm writing: The Louisiana family is the Richards. Now, for those of you not from South Louisiana, you may have read that family name as Richard, like the first name; but where I'm from, if Richard is your last name, it's pronounced like Ree-shard. There's a moment in the text where a woman from California contacts them. The first time she asks whether this was the Richard's house, no one corrects her. But after she asks if Mrs. Richard is there, David, the husband, answers, "Well, it's Ree-shard, but yes." This is a moment of situating. If, like me, you read the name as Ree-shard on the first read-through, then you are situated with the Richards; that is, you are positioned and allied with the South in the text. If, however, you read the family name as Richard until David corrected it, then you are positioned and allied with the West within the text.

On the surface, it seems like this is a way to have people choose teams and antagonize others, but what I think it does in many texts—and what I'm trying to do in my text—is have readers acknowledge that position and situatedness and then evaluate it. For instance, in my novel, I go in and out

of many character's perspectives, both Southern and Western, so every reader gets the chance to be in the mind of the other. However, how you're situated doesn't get to change. What I think this encourages is a shift from the relatability factor. If all you're looking for in a text is what you relate to, then you're missing a whole wealth of experience. I think it's extremely important for readers to experience being situated in a text in a position on the periphery. What this means is that usually, as readers, we see ourselves—or try to—in the main character or whoever's perspective we're reading for. That's great because then we read things that we don't necessarily relate to firsthand but that we can empathize with. But there is something to be said of reading something and knowing that your situatedness in the text is outside of the main story and yet still seeing the value in just experiencing another perspective and position.

On Civic Engagement

Besides situating readers in the text, there's something else really important that writers—including myself—accomplish by featuring Cajun French: we document the existence of this language. Remember how I said that Cajun French is an oral language and therefore really hard to teach? That's a major problem Cajuns have been facing since the 1920s, when Cajun French was banned from use (Nossiter). Children were punished when they used it in school, sometimes so severely that there were children who went to the bathroom on themselves because they did not know how to ask to go the restroom in English and teachers wouldn't allow them to go until they could. This did a couple of things. For one, it reduced the use of the language. Most of these children were native Cajun French speakers though, so they at least still knew the language. However, when those children grew up, they were traumatized and had been taught to fear the consequences of using their native language, so many of them did not teach their children Cajun French. My great-grandparents spoke no English, but my grandfather—whose first language was Cajun French—was forced to learn English in school. When my dad and his siblings were growing up, they learned Cajun French only by listening. Their first language was English. In their house, and many others, Cajun French was only spoken by adults in whispers during gossip or conversations that they didn't want children to overhear.

My dad and his siblings were lucky that it was spoken enough for them to learn it by the time they were adults. But with each generation, the language has been used less. Now, my generation barely knows Cajun French. Most

of my older cousins and my oldest brother know a good bit—they're pretty much fluent—but the younger among us know hardly any.

Because of this historical and generational degradation of the language, Cajun French is considered a quickly dying language—a death that is sped up by the lack of a written component. Oral languages can only last as long as the language is still spoken, and the only way people can learn the language is if there are speakers around to teach it.

This makes me so sad. The Cajun French language is one of the only things Cajuns still have of their heritage after a fraught history. This is why I jump at the chance to learn any phrases my family is willing to offer me. When I still lived at home, I made a deal with my aunt that she could only text me in Cajun French since she's the brave soul who goes for phonetic spelling without a care in the world. I would try to text her often, as long as my dad was around to help me translate. I learned a bit that way.

And I hoard the bits of Cajun French that I know. This is why it's so important for me to use the language in my fiction. If I cannot speak the language fluently and pass it on to others, the least I can do is document its existence in text so there is some record that it—and we—exist. At least if I do that, the language doesn't disappear. We Cajuns don't lose our memory of it.

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My Semiotic Junk Drawer: Literate Practices, Remediation, and Maybe Even a Little Magic

Joyce R. Walker, Associate Professor, Illinois State University

In this article, Joyce R. Walker shares her thoughts about the idea of a "toolkit" for writing. She advocates changing our metaphors in order to better describe what really happens when we write. Instead of thinking about building a tidy, narrowly focused writing toolkit, she wants to convince you to consider what skills and knowledge might be hiding in the complex space of your writing junk drawer.

I was once explaining to some friends how I pack when I travel. I said something like, "I've realized it's a good idea to bring a little of everything" (meaning various kinds of painkillers, band-aids, sewing thread, Shout™ wipes for cleaning stains, etc.). I rattled off a long list and finished with something like, "I've just realized I'm happier if I make sure to keep the things I might need with me." I felt like this was a smart way of articulating why being prepared when I travel mattered to me. But my friend responded to my enthusiasm over the supreme importance of the well-stocked travel kit with a slightly exasperated look, commenting, "They call them purses, Joyce, and they had them before you were wise."

I remember what struck me about that exchange. I thought, "but I'm not talking about an *everyday purse*, I'm talking about *traveling*!"

You see, when I'm near my home, I never carry a large purse. I hate having to lug a lot of stuff around, so it really hadn't occurred to me to think of the activity of carefully packing a savvy travel kit as connected to the pointless (in my mind) activity of lugging a giant, heavy purse around, full of useless stuff I could just keep at home. In my picture of the world, a

small purse (or no purse) meant being light on your feet and adventurous (yes, I'm so brave that I'll risk taking the bus to work without an emergency safety pin). But somehow, I just hadn't connected the cavalier understanding of "it'll all work out" that I have when I'm in my local environment to my opposite confidence in the idea that, being far from home in a hotel room without access to a drugstore, I must prepare for every eventuality.

Joyce's Epiphany: It Matters how We Imagine our Literacies

Using concepts from the ISU Writing Program, I might describe this sense of "opposite confidences" as an intuitive understanding that different literate activities require different kinds of literacies (and different tools to support those literacies). In my *travel* literacies, my access to resources was different, and so my negotiation of the tools I needed to have close at hand was also different. It's interesting, though, that I failed to consider that other people might understand the idea of travel differently and so might see carrying a large, well-stocked purse as a kind of (local) savvy travel skill as well. This also seems to fit with how difficult it can be for us, as writers, to imagine that someone else's collection of key literacy tools might be very different from our own.

In this article, I want to explore the idea that our metaphors for understanding how we organize and access our tools (for example, what goes in a "purse" versus what goes in a "travel kit") can have a really powerful impact on how we understand the environment in which we use them (traveling to distant places devoid of a CVS pharmacy vs. taking the bus to work). And although I've started this story with purses and travel kits, my goal is to move to a different set of metaphorical containers—toolkits and junk drawers. I argue that this kind of metaphor might help us to better imagine how we organize and use various resources when we write. Metaphors matter. The pictures we make in our minds to describe our worlds matter. My goal is to consider both the ways we use *semiotic resources* when we act as writers in the world and to examine the ways that our perceptions about those resources (not just how we might use them, but how we might

Callout 1: Semiotic Resources

According to semiotics scholar Theo Van Leeuwen (2004), "Semiotic resources are the actions, materials and artifacts we use for communicative purposes, whether produced physiologically—for example, with our vocal apparatus, the muscles we use to make facial express and gestures—or technologically—for example, with pen and ink, or computer hardware and software—together with the ways in which these resources can be organized" (p. 3).

imagine, value, and represent them to others) can shape our actual practice in interesting ways.

The ISU Writing Program uses the concept of **writing research identity** to describe the complex blend of knowledge, emotion, memory, and intention that shapes who we are (and what we can do) as writers in the world. The Writing Program explores how the metaphors we use to understand our literate activity shape our identity as writers, arguing that our metaphors need to reflect, as much as possible—a more flexible understanding of our resources. After all, when we use metaphors that make writing seem all tidy, organized, and one-size-fits-all, we risk turning ourselves into writers who can't adapt very well to new writing environments.

The Semiotic Toolkit

Let's start with toolkits. The idea of a "writer's toolkit" is a popular one. It's easy to find web pages, books, textbooks, infographics, videos, and a whole range of other resources that present the "toolkit" as a useful metaphor for helping writers to think about the tools they need. You may have even heard this idea in some writing class you've had.

Toolkits, as defined by the online version of the *Oxford Dictionary*, are "A set of tools, especially one kept in a bag or box and used for a particular purpose." The dictionary also defines a toolkit as "a personal set of resources, abilities, or skills." The metaphor of a writing toolkit (or a writer's toolkit) fits right in with this second definition; but what happens when we start to think a bit more carefully, and critically, about a toolkit as a way to store and organize our tools?

Because several of my family members are carpenters, when I try to conjure up the image of a toolkit, the idea of a carpenter's toolbox or bag is what first occurs to me. Notice that in this image, the toolkit is very organized (see Figure 1). If you are familiar with tools of this kind, you might even be able to clearly identify all of these tools and what they're used for. However, while I love how the image of a toolkit can help us to think about the tools and resources we use for writing, I have a problem with the uniformity and neatness of this image.

Figure 1: A very organized toolkit.

Callout 2: Literate Activity

Literate activity, as Paul Prior (1998) explains it, conceives of writing as multimodal, situated, mediated, and dispersed. It understands writing to be located not only within the tasks of doing and reading and writing but also a part of our lived experience, which is saturated with textuality (p. 138). In other words, writing is more than just the texts we produce; It is embedded in all the communicative activities we engage in as humans and in the everyday resources we use to engage in those activities.

For example, this toolkit is limited by the way it's prefabricated—both in that someone else has chosen which tools I (theoretically) will need and because there isn't room for me to add new or different tools. As a visual metaphor for writing resources, this toolkit is problematic. First, in the real and messy world, writing tools don't stay the same; they transform as they move through different *literate activities*. Second, as each person uses a particular writing tool or resource in a particular environment, all of the elements of that system—the person, skill, knowledge, tool, or activity—can transform, sometimes in unexpected ways.

A Hammer Mostly Hammers, but Writing Tools Transform

Let's unpack this idea that writing tools and knowledge *transform*. As Phillip Pullman (2007) writes, "The intentions of a tool are what it does. A hammer intends to strike, a vise intends to hold fast, a lever intends to lift. They are what it is made for" (p. 681). If our writing tools were like the tidy toolkit pictured above, then our writer's toolkit would contain tools that are mostly used for very specific things, such as a hammer for hammering nails. But while a hammer can be used to strike other things besides nails, a hammer should probably not be used to hammer in a screw because that wouldn't work very well. In addition, people might use hammers for other kinds of activities beyond just hammering. As a friend of mine pointed out when he read this article, a hammer could also be used to pry things—or even as a tool for measuring when one doesn't have a tape measure. My point is that writing tools are quite a bit more flexible than a hammer, and they are made up of not just material tools—like a pen or computer—but our knowledge and practices as well.

Let's start with a basic example. Emojis are a literacy tool that transforms—not just in the way we use them but also in how we understand how they can (or should, or might) be used. And the way an emoji is used isn't just about *where* it's used (i.e., in this article versus in a text message), but also about the writer's intentions. Are they using it ironically, supportively, expressively? An emoji is also shaped by the way a particular reader might understand its meaning and how they understand the intentions of the writer in choosing it (see Callout 3). Like a hammer, the basic function of an

emoji might be understood as a linguistic tool that people use to add visual or emotional content to their messages. However, the interpretation of emojis (how they actually work in a particular setting) can vary quite a bit.

Callout 3: Emoji Conflict

A University of Minnesota research study, cited in a 2016 article on the online news source, *The Daily Dot*, found "a wide range of sentiment misinterpretation across platforms (because different platforms display emojis differently), as well as quite a bit of variation in the ways different readers interpret emojis, even when using the same platform" (Larson).

This takes us back to the idea of semiotic resources and how they might fit with the visualization of a toolkit. Van Leeuwen (2004; see Callout 1) says that semiotic resources are "actions, materials and artifacts" (p. 5). They aren't just physical tools such as a hammer, although they can be. They can also be things we do (for example, our body language when we speak), materials we might make things out of, and actual tools (pens, paper, computers) that we might use. Our interest (as writers) in these resources isn't just that they exist; we also need to think about how we use them and how these uses can transform over time with different users and in different spaces.

By the way, the concept of flexible semiotic resources fits right in with the ISU cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) terms. You may already have learned about CHAT in this issue, but if you haven't, you can check out other articles in this issue, as well as resources on the *isuwriting.com* website). The idea behind the seven key terms that ISU uses to investigate literate activity (production, ecology, representation, activity, reception, distribution, socialization) is not that they provide a really specific, orderly (or organized) way to plan or execute a particular writing task; instead, these terms are meant to be used flexibly to help us investigate what's going on in a particular text or writing situation or to help us think about what we might do when we're struggling with a new genre in a new setting.

So, to recap, semiotic resources are all the things we might *use*, *do*, or *make* when we communicate in the world (through alphabetic writing, images, sounds, body language, etc.). My argument is that visualizing these resources tucked away tidily into an orderly toolkit—with a place for everything and a specific use for each tool—might not really help us represent what goes on when we write.

From Toolkit to Junk Drawer: Messy Spaces for Messy Processes

In the real world, I'm guessing that most carpenters don't work from toolkits that look much like the first image I presented. To investigate this, I asked

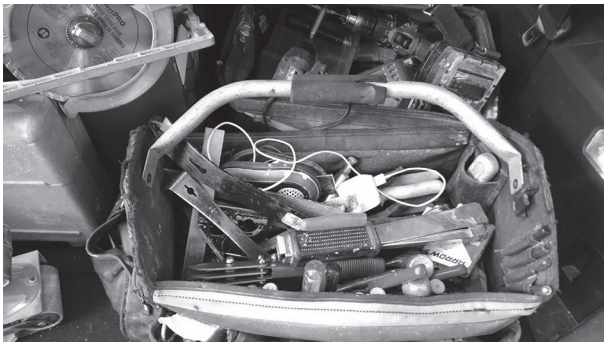

Figure 2. A tool bag.

Figure 3. A tool truck.

my brother and his partner (who are both carpenters), to send me photos of their toolboxes. My brother's partner sent me a picture of her tool bag (see Figure 2). As you can see, it's not nearly as orderly as the perfect toolkit in the first picture. But wait—there's more! My brother actually sent me a photograph of the entire back of his pickup truck, which was bursting with random artifacts from his current work site—not all of which are even recognizable as tools (see Figure 3). However, even though these toolkits are messy, they still contain (for the most part) everyday resources (actual tools and materials) that are used in the execution of carpentry and construction activities. In some cases, there might be scraps or leftovers—objects that are not necessary or might be reused for different kinds of projects, like a scrap piece of word or a leftover box of washers. These "messier" (or we could call them "more complicated") pictures do a bit better job of representing the complexity and sometimes random nature of the resources we make use of when we write (especially when we're writing in new settings or genres). Still, I think the metaphor of the **junk drawer** is actually a better visualization of our everyday literate activity.

Can you picture a junk drawer that you might have in your home, apartment, or dorm room? My own memory goes straight to a drawer in the kitchen in the house I grew up in: it was in a green, metal cabinet that we used to keep all kinds of leftover bits. Yes, it held kitchen stuff such as twist ties or a box of toothpicks, but there were also all kinds of strange artifacts in that drawer that you wouldn't necessarily connect with a kitchen: string, old PEZ™ dispensers, rubber bands, paper clips, pens, notepads, odd keys, etc. The way I understand the concept of the junk drawer is that most people have one somewhere—maybe a drawer in their kitchen, office, workshop, or even in the trunk of their car (if they spend a lot of time in their car). A junk drawer could be a drawer, but it could also be a whole cabinet of random

things, or a box, or storage cube. Whatever. The usefulness of the junk drawer isn't what, exactly, might be in it; instead, it's based on purposes—that is how users might intend to use these items (in ISU CHAT terms, that might be understood to be its **representation**). That's because when one is creating a junk drawer (not that we do it deliberately, necessarily—they sometimes seem to create themselves), different choices and uses will shape its contents. The **production** of a junk drawer includes things like:

- Where is it located?
- Did it start out being a "catch-all" space on purpose, or did it just evolve?
- What kinds of activities typically happen in the spaces surrounding the junk drawer? (Kitchen stuff happens in kitchens, but an office junk drawer would be shaped by different kinds of activities.)
- Do the people who use the junk drawer like to keep their spaces really organized, or are they comfortable with a lot of clutter?
- How big is it (that is, what kind of room is provided for the storage of junk-drawer type objects)?

All of these elements will have an impact on what goes into the junk drawer, what people pull out of it, and even how they imagine using various artifacts for different purposes. That is, if I'm looking in my kitchen junk drawer for a twist tie and can't find one, but I do find the leftover rubber band that was used to hold together the stems of a flower bouquet I bought last week, I might choose to close my chip bag with a rubber band. This would kind of be *off genre*, but would probably still work. Using items in a junk drawer includes a kind of convergence—a coming together of tasks, locations, tools, and intentions.

I understand junk drawers to be spaces that tend to "grow up" around a set of practices. They evolve in response to our needs. Unlike a tidy toolkit metaphor, they are shaped by us and by the environment they are in, and they can also shape (sometimes in interesting ways) how people can (or might) use their contents. For me, this is a lot more like the way I understand my writing resources. What I have available to me as a writer in any particular environment, is shaped by where I am and the texts I've produced or used in the past (and even by how successful I perceive those texts to have been), as well as by the literate activities I can imagine participating in in the future. My writing is shaped by the tools I know how to use as well as whether those tools are available to me. And (I think this is the coolest part) I can combine and recombine my tools, knowledge, and experiences to do different things depending on what I can imagine and who I want to be (and

sometimes what I think I might be able to get away with). Adding graphics to a five-paragraph essay? Why not? Using emojis in a business memo? Maybe yes, maybe no. Even something as simple as a contraction (changing a formal-sounding "you did not" to a more casual "you didn't" or the even more casual, "Oh no you di-ent") can change the meaning of a text in an important way, making it less formal in tone but also potentially changing the reader's experience significantly. Using the metaphor of the junk drawer to visualize the container from which I draw these choices is useful, because I don't think we're always completely aware (or even aware at all) of how we take up and use our semiotic resources or how all of this helps to shape our overall writing identities. Rather than gazing at a tidy, organized toolkit and thinking solemnly, "Let's see, what's the right tool for the job?," I think we often tend to just "use the tools at hand." Sometimes that might be a problem (remember the hammering screws example), but sometimes it's just how we get the job done.

At this point in my article, I think it might be helpful to take a look at some actual junk drawers. We don't all use the same kinds of tools in the same ways, of course, because we all have different experiences as writers, so I asked some of my Facebook friends to share photos of their junk drawers. And they did. In fact, they found it really entertaining and immediately started posting about how interesting it was that everyone's junk drawers were so different and making jokes about the organization (mostly disorganization) of these spaces.

Exploring Junk Drawer Diversity

I'll admit I found the images pretty fascinating (I also realize this makes me kind of weird). I kept noticing things like the combination of different artifacts. Some had mostly kitchen items or office-type items, but some included a huge range of random stuff.

One person, who didn't contribute a photo, said, "I am too OCD to have any junk drawers in my place :-/," while someone else (who also didn't post an actual photo—perhaps fortunately) quipped, "I call that my house."

As I looked through all the photos (I collected thirty of them in a single afternoon), I realized that I really did think that—as a metaphor for a writer's practice—the junk drawer came closer to describing what goes on in a person's mind when they write. I also think that it reflects the messy ways that we sometimes make use of our semiotic resources and how these resources can work to shape our writing identities. In many writing situations,

The Diversity of Junk Drawers: A Visual

A Kitchen Junk Drawer

Figure 4: The person who posted this one wrote, "I could just take a picture of my desk! But I won't."

A Musician's Junk Drawer

Figures 6 and 7 (left to right): These next photos are contributed by a musician, and I thought it was interesting that he posted multiple pictures of different drawers in his house and studio and they all ended up having some music-related artifacts in them. This is a perfect example of how our everyday lives and identities shape the resources we might have available for our literate practices.

Random Tools

Figure 5: Another person wrote this description of her contribution: "The drawer with stuff I use every day and a bunch of broken/unidentifiable objects that still spark joy." She later posted that in looking at the picture she'd posted she noticed a lost item she'd been searching for but hadn't realized she'd put in the drawer.

Many Scissors

Figure 8: For some reason, I was really entertained by the fact that this junk drawer contained many, many pairs of scissors.

we don't really take the time to do a ton of research into a genre or explore possible techniques for presenting information or persuading people. We just use the tools at hand. In the case of the junk drawer that contained multiple scissors, for example, I'd be in good shape if I needed to cut off a tag from a new dress, or make a paper snowflake (not sure why I'd do this, but I could). However, I can also think of situations where I might open this drawer and

find a pair of scissors to be a less-than-optimum tool—*but I'd probably still use it*. For example:

- If I'm a lefty (which I am), I might not like using right-handed scissors for some jobs, but if I just need to cut off a clothing tag, I'm unlikely to insist on the left-handed scissors.
- If I were trying to open my new big-screen TV (which came in a large, heavy-duty cardboard box), I might find it difficult to get through all of the different types of bindings and packaging materials using only a scissors. But would I stop to get a more appropriate tool, like maybe a box cutter? Knowing me, probably not.
- And what if all of these scissors have been used for cutting paper a lot? They might no longer be sharp enough to cut some other things, like fabric, which requires a sharp scissors. In this case, if I chose to use the tools at hand, I'd be unsuccessful. In fact, the tool might ruin my project by cutting poorly or not at all.
- And as reviewers of this article noted, there are lots of other activities one might use a pair of scissors for that don't include cutting. My favorite example was "scraping a bit of paint off of the countertop."

The Writing Junk Drawer in Action

If I were to illustrate this idea of "the writing junk drawer"—a hodgepodge of collected knowledge, tools, and practices, used in the moment by writers who are busy or perhaps somewhat limited in the range of resources in their junk drawer—I might use the example of needing to create an infographic. If I needed to create an infographic, here are some things that I might think about as I began to rummage in my writing junk drawer:

- I can't draw, so I'll have to figure that out because I know infographics contain visuals.
- There are software programs for making infographics (although you have to pay for some of them).
- I can find web sites that teach me about tips for creating infographics.
- I know infographics need to be concise, so I have to make sure my information is concise and very specific.
- I know numbers and comparisons are often used to make "visual proofs" in infographics.

- My infographic will be printed, but I can't afford to print them in color, so I'll need to keep it in black and white.
- I know I'm not good at proofreading, so I'll need to find someone to help me with that.
- The intended audience for my infographic will, as I compose, exert a big influence on my writing (for good or ill) as I try to imagine how they'll respond to what I've done.

As I thought about the task, I'd also be (metaphorically) pawing through the materials in my junk drawer. This process wouldn't be like opening up a tidy toolkit and carefully choosing specific tools or pieces of information. Instead, I would probably find all kinds of random bits of knowledge, including things like how to search online for information I might need but also a lot of stuff about writing good paragraphs, thesis statements, and sentences. Not everything in the drawer would be useful for my task, but I don't necessarily need to pull everything out of the drawer and organize all of it. I just need to pull out the things I think might be useful, and sometimes I need to realize that what I need just isn't in there. This would mean I'd have to go out and acquire a new skill/tool/resource (like purchasing an infographic-making app). For a more complicated task, I might need to start by pulling out all the things I think I need and organizing them, but for some kinds of tasks I might just grab the first thing I see that *might* work and use that. The junk drawer is not a space that promises that everything will be OK if I just follow the rules and use *this* tool; it's a space where I have to sort, and rummage, and sometimes not find what I need.

The Potentially Practical Takeaway: Junk Drawers as a Visualization of Literate Practice

I envision (as I write this) that a reader might ask (supposing that any of my readers are still with me at this point in my article),

WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT THIS?

They might think, "OK, so, junk drawers. Got it. But how does this help me get writing done?" For those of you who are still valiantly reading along, I will now attempt to *Buzzfeed*-ify the junk drawer metaphor into a handy listicle of tips for writing in the world.

Five Junk Drawer Takeaways You Really Should Remember

1. **It's Where You're at**: The stuff that's in your writing junk drawer will depend on location and experience. Just like a junk drawer located in an office versus one in a kitchen, a writing junk drawer that a person creates mostly in a school setting will have different stuff in it than one you developed through posting on social media.

   Takeaway: There are probably useful items hidden in your writing junk drawer from lots of different kinds of writing and reading experiences. Dig a little.

2. **Sometimes It's Just a Hammer**: In some situations, you can quickly find the tool you need—usually because the task is simple and/or really familiar to you. It's sort of like needing to hammer a nail and opening the drawer and finding a hammer. Bang. Bang. Done. It's great when it works like that.

   Takeaway: It's OK to just use the tool at hand, if you feel sure that it will serve your purposes. It doesn't always have to be about CHAT research and complicated analysis.

3. **Improv Sometimes Tanks Big Time**: In some situations, you really need to go more carefully through the drawer and figure out if you can find the tools you need (or decide maybe you need to go out and buy a hammer). But because time is short, or the stakes are low, you just wing it. Like hammering in a nail using the flat end of a pipe wrench or something. But if you choose to wing it, and it doesn't work out, sometimes you just have to say, "OK. That didn't work—what tools do I really need to do this right?"

   Takeaway: When you improvise with the writing resources you happen to have on hand, sometimes it doesn't work very well. Be ready to revise your plan and learn new skills when needed.

4. **Marie Kondo It**: Sometimes you might find things in your writing junk drawer that really don't have any purpose. Old bits of useless knowledge like, "never, never use I in an academic paper." I equate this to finding those little bits of hardware from the time you put that IKEA shelf together and had leftovers, and you thought, "I might still use this." Nope.

   Takeaway: Sometimes it's a good idea to clean out your writing junk drawer and throw away pieces of knowledge (or maybe old fears or anxieties about writing) that are just going to get in your way.

5. **Writing Junk Drawers Can Be Mamazing**: Sometimes just looking through your writing junk drawer can surprise you. You might find odd bits and pieces of old knowledge and old texts that can spark something new and interesting. You might think of ways to recombine old skills with new ones or use your knowledge in a new way.

   Takeaway: Writing junk drawers can sometimes be a combination of magical and amazing. *Mamazing*!

A Final Note

When thinking about the junk drawer metaphor for my own writing practice and experience, I think my main takeaway is that "the right tool for the job" concept might be a great choice when trying to hammer a nail or create a resume. In these situations, I might be able to quickly find what I need and use it. And yes, sometimes I definitely need to pull out all the tools that might be useful, and then organize my tools for the task—it's not always a good idea to have your resources all jumbled and disorganized. I get that. (That's kind of what ISU's CHAT terms are good for—they can help you think about all the possible semiotic resources that might be important.) I mean, when you are trying to accomplish a complicated task, like, say, building a house, you can't start by going, "Let's just look in the junk drawer and see what we can find. Oh look, a stapler! That will be useful!"

But when I think about my personal writing identity—the complexity of the things I know, the tools I've used and the weird, backwards ways that I've learned to do certain things—these are practices that could never be represented by the tidy toolkit with everything in its place. Writing is so changeable, so context dependent, so downright mysterious sometimes that it can be impossible to imagine what semiotic resources I might need or might need to invent or repurpose. It can also be difficult to imagine how tools might transform as I use them in different settings. So the act of looking in the junk drawer does include a sense of magic in that when we open it, we can imagine not only tools that it might contain but also the pathways of action those tools might become part of—versions of texts we haven't even thought about writing yet. The writing junk drawer is a treasure trove of possibility, potentiality loose in time.

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SoundCloud as a Genre: Looking Beyond the Music

Madeleine Renken

In this article, Madeleine Renken examines the genre of music streaming service SoundCloud through the lens of cultural-historical activity theory.

There are so many ways to listen to music today. We have vinyl records, tapes, CDs, and digital downloads from online stores such as Amazon Music, Google Play, and iTunes (at least for now). However, the most prevalent method is streaming. The possibilities for streaming are endless with choices like Deezer, Pandora, Apple Music, Spotify, and much more, but SoundCloud has been one of the most influential services, from the start of its existence to the present.

According to its website, SoundCloud is "the world's largest open audio platform, powered by a connected community of creators, listeners and curators on the pulse of what's new, now and next in culture" (*Soundcloud.com)*. Creators can compose music in a separate computer program and upload it to the website to share with their followers via feeds. This kind of social media component may result in an artist's popularity so they can kickstart their professional careers. Many musicians started out by making music on SoundCloud and have grown their fanbase almost purely on the social streaming platform due to the ease of sharing. Altogether an effective platform for audial creators, SoundCloud easily stands as a prime individual genre in the literary world.

In order to better examine SoundCloud as a standalone genre, I conferred with an actual SoundCloud artist. Lachlan McArthur-Self (also known as Candidate) specializes in electronic music production, and I had the opportunity to interview him to see what the process looks like from start to finish and how his work is taken up on the Internet.

Why SoundCloud, and How Do I Begin My Music Career?

Why are streaming services like SoundCloud a great option? Simply put, they're a quicker way to spread your music (more on that later). Getting record labels to notice you is nearly impossible with so many musicians flooding the market, so sending in recordings is not the most effective way to get noticed, anymore. With SoundCloud, you can literally show the world who you are with the click of a button. And, with so many aspects to SoundCloud's platform, there is much to explore within its genre! Through this lens, we can link SoundCloud's attributes to the literary world. To better explain the basics of music production and consumption processes, I will break them down using the ISU Writing Program's CHAT terms.

But wait, what is CHAT? CHAT refers to cultural-historical activity theory with which we can study real-life examples of genres from around the world. However, these don't have to be literary examples; in fact, almost anything can be a genre. The Illinois State University Writing Program uses a specific set of terms, based on CHAT theory, to explore different literacies and literate activity in more complex ways. I'm going to be using these terms to help explain the music production process, using SoundCloud, in more detail.

To begin, **production** (the means or ways in which a text is produced) is probably the most difficult and time-consuming element of the whole process. This involves writing the lyrics and subsequently creating the musical sounds, either with physical instruments or with compositional software, called a DAW (Digital Audio Workspace). Within this part of the process, though, we must consider **multimedia composing**. The term multimedia is often used to describe the different kinds of tools and materials that people use when they compose. For some artists, lyrics can be written down while on the move through a note taking app, while others choose pen and paper as a preferred medium. Obviously, any one of these systems is effective as long as you have a method for keeping track of the lyrics. As for his lyric-writing process, Lachlan says, "I constantly keep records and notes on my phones of either voice memos of me singing brief ideas I have or really small snippets of lyrics—just like, two lines or something. Then I'll try to come back to

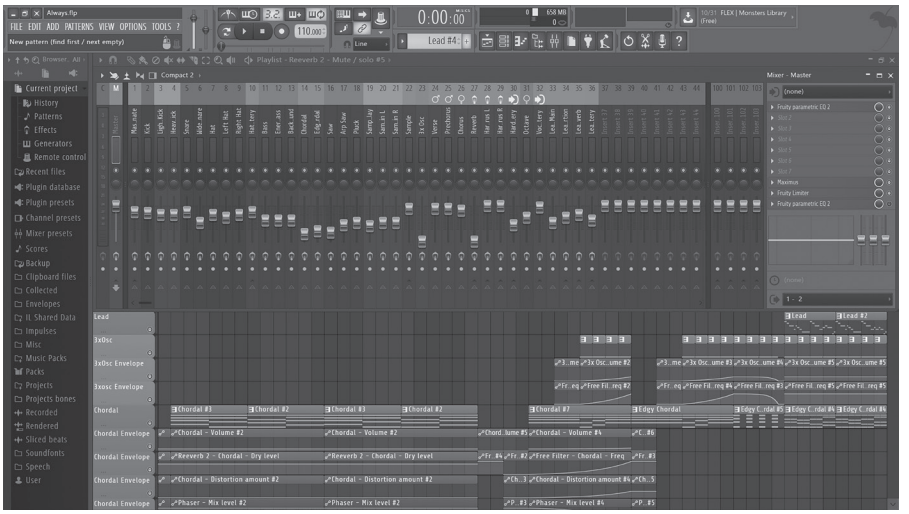

Figure 1: Example of a Digital Audio Workspace, FL Studio.

them later or fuse some together." Lachlan then goes on to say that even though he uses the Notes app on his phone for lyrics because it's convenient, he still prefers pen and paper for writing poetry and thought flow.

Another form of media that these artists work with is (obviously) the audio file as they continue to add to and manipulate it. The file is saved on the computer while the writer is working in the DAW (Figure 1), so they are able to constantly make edits to the song. Once those changes are finalized, the song is uploaded to SoundCloud.

Rap-resenting Ourselves as Artists

Another factor to consider is **representation**, which deals with the ways a text or genre is understood and planned, especially involving how an author deals with this understanding (including the audience and purpose for a text) when composing. How will you attract new followers while engaging your current ones? The answer: branding. On SoundCloud profiles, there is an area where artists upload a photo that best represents who they are as an artist and what type of content they produce. Some artists upload a photo of themselves, and others opt for a symbol or logo instead. There is also a header section (Figure 2 below) for the moment users open that particular artist's page, which is another opportunity to upload a photo. This area is typically where a logo or symbol would go to establish their identity. Lachlan explains his approach to representation:

> "When I post stuff on my SoundCloud, I try and make it a fully produced song. I've put a lot of thought into all the lyrics, and I

> want it to mean something, so don't produce just anything and throw it up on there . . . All the logos and album art I do on my profile picture and stuff like that, I try to have that same vibe of . . . [being] professional, serious, [showing] stuff that I've put time and work into."

Now, all of this information about composition and branding is great, but how do you go about getting that out there into the world? Enter **distribution**, which deals with how texts are dispersed and taken up. In SoundCloud, distribution is carried out through hitting that "upload" button, which sends the song out to music feeds throughout the platform. After this, the song can be accessed anytime online thanks to the cloud hosting service. (Get it, SoundCLOUD? . . . Ha, sorry.)

Now that you've got that next hit uploaded to SoundCloud, it's time to make a name for yourself! And there's no better way of understanding how that happens than with **socialization**, which helps us understand how others interact with the activity. Much like Facebook and Twitter SoundCloud contains a social media component; you can "like," repost, and comment on artists' songs to show support and/or share constructive criticism for that particular piece. You can also support the artist by "following" them to hear more of their work while continuing to give additional feedback. In general, having these features as assessments for projects can be helpful in one's musical growth as a creator.

This feedback also goes hand-in-hand with **reception**, which refers to how the audience takes up a text—not just by reading it (or in this case, listening to it), but also how they might use or repurpose it in ways the author might not have expected. For instance, someone might like a song so much that they create a remix or two of that song and upload it to SoundCloud as well (with a nod to the original artist, of course). An individual could also use the song in a YouTube video they captured to make their content even more interesting to their audience, which is a great example of **trajectory**. With trajectory, we can see what texts do and how they move around the world as they get produced, distributed, and repurposed.

Figure 2: Screenshot of Lachlan's SoundCloud Profile Picture and Header.

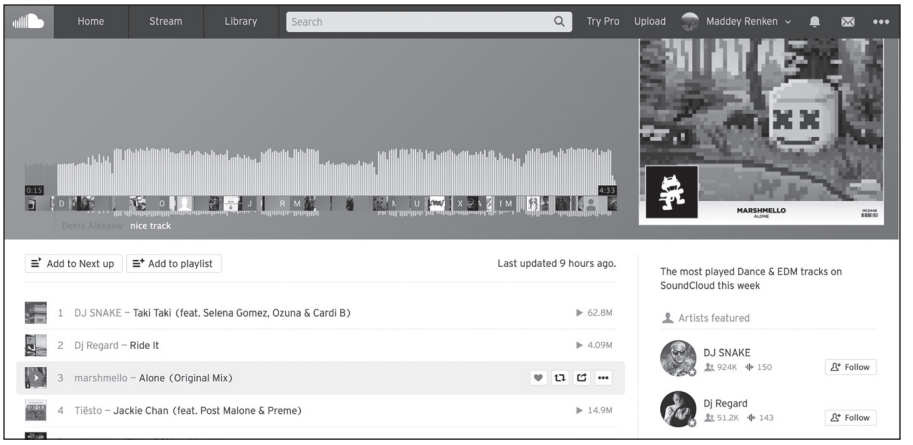

Figure 3: This is a screenshot of SoundCloud's playback interface. One can easily select where they want to go to in the song and view comments in this window.

Different Modes in Composing (Not Just for Musical Scales)

Now that we've delved into the basics of becoming a SoundCloud artist, let's discuss the components of **multimodal composition** that are involved with the streaming service. Multimodal composing refers to all the modes that humans use to communicate (ISU Writing Program). We examined all the different tools, materials, and spaces used to create a text. We will now be extending this to how the text interacts with human perception through our different senses.

Sound is clearly fundamental to SoundCloud, which means the platform is **aural** in nature. With that, a good number of artists are either singing or rapping in their songs, so in addition to being aural, SoundCloud is also **oral** (**spoken**) because the composition is literally produced by the mouth. It is **alphabetic**, too, in that it uses letters from the alphabetic system (ABCs) for artists' names, biographies, songs, and album names, and playlist titles (as shown in Figure 4). With its viewing profiles, playlists, playback bar, and interface, SoundCloud is also considerably **visual** as images capture the listener's interest and make the website altogether more user-friendly.

Finally, besides being visual, SoundCloud is inherently **symbolic**. One of the symbols commonly used is the "like" symbol in Figure 3, where listeners can let the artist and other listeners know whether they enjoyed the song and want to listen to it again. This like symbol is represented in the shape of a heart next to the song title. Other symbols include a play button in the shape of a triangle (also next to the song title), which reveals how many times a song has been played, and arrows in a circular formation

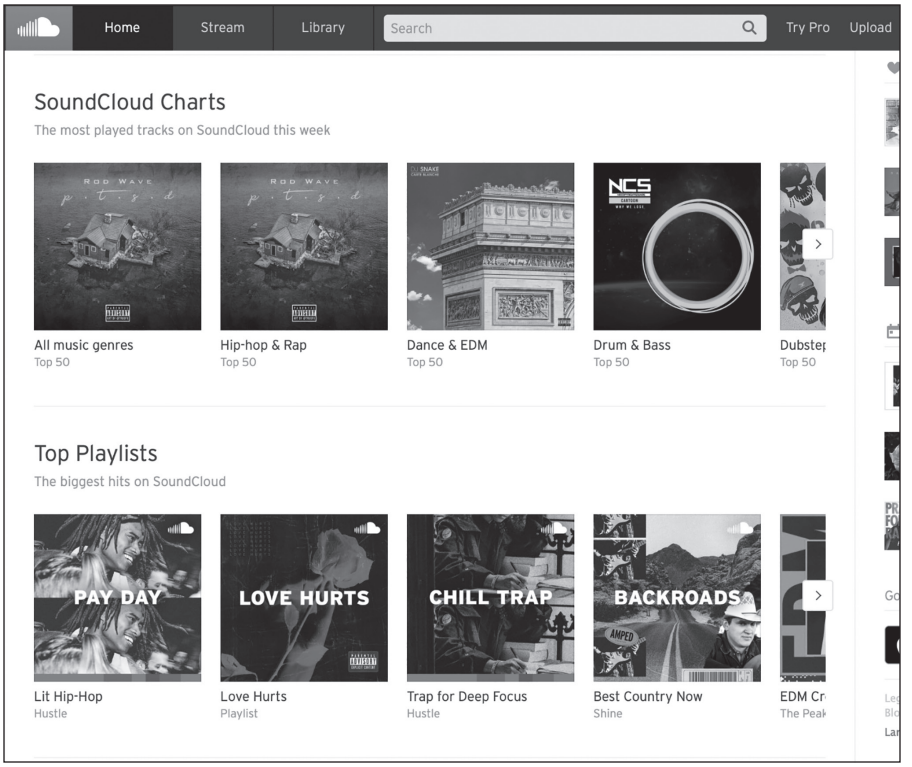

Figure 4: This screenshot shows a wide selection of playlists to choose from on the SoundCloud homepage.

denoting the repost action, which allows listeners to repost that song to their own followers' feeds. All-in-all, SoundCloud is a certainly symbolic genre and utilizes all modes to further its potential.

In Summary

This CHAT-based analysis allows you to better see the complexity of how the genre of SoundCloud works. Who knows, you might even use this article as a starting point to go and produce a song for your new SoundCloud account! Overall, SoundCloud is a great service for musical artists to start sharing their music with others. With this intuitive social interface, virtually anyone can easily record, upload, and distribute while discovering some talented artists from around the world. There is one last piece of advice in Lachlan's words for those who may doubt their writing abilities:

> "I think more people should create stuff just 'cause they like to . . . I think that's healthy and part of what makes life unique and cool. Making art adds meaning to it. It doesn't have to be good.

> If you want to make something, just go for it, regardless of how professional you think it is. I mean, being bad at something is the first step towards becoming at something. . . If you want to make something, don't make other people's perceptions or your own inhibitions and your own insecurities hold you back from doing that."

I learned so much from interviewing Lachlan—from the process of starting out as an artist to learning how to properly exemplify that artistic identity on this platform; but perhaps the most valuable lesson was his last quote. What matters is not being the best but creating in the first place. Now, go out and create!

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When Writing Becomes High Stakes: A Grassroots Literate Activity Interview

Laurel Krapivkin and Randy Hasper

In this interview, Laurel Krapivkin interviews her father, Randy Hasper, about his time writing for the *San Diego Reader*. Specifically, Laurel asks Randy about his writing practices and the genres he became familiar with while working for the *Reader*. After, Laurel reflects on the interview and her own experiences with the places her father wrote about.

LAUREL: Hey, Randy, how are you doing?

RANDY: Laurel, I'm good.

LAUREL: Good, well thanks for agreeing to let me interview you. So, just go ahead and introduce yourself. Maybe say what you do. And we'll go on from there.

RANDY: Yeah, I'm Randy Hasper, and I'm a teacher and a writer. I understand we're going to talk about an article I wrote for the *San Diego Reader*.

LAUREL: Yes, I'm interested in hearing more about the specific kind of literate activities that you engaged in surrounding your publication of the article for the *Reader*. So, just tell us about the article in a nutshell, and then tell us about the *Reader* as a publication.

RANDY: Okay, so the *San Diego Reader* is a local San Diego magazine that comes out weekly and features articles on the history and culture of San Diego as well as other items of interest. I published an article called "The

Last Developer Gets the Park," which is about the Sweetwater salt marsh, in the city of Chula Vista, just south of San Diego. The salt marsh has been damaged by development, and there's one little tiny piece of marsh left in the San Diego Bay. I wrote the article about the need to protect that bit of marsh as the rest of the waterfront gets developed along San Diego Bay.

LAUREL: Great, so what genre would you say was produced—like, what genre was that article? I mean, obviously it was a *Reader* article . . .

RANDY: Yeah, a feature article in the *Reader*. I'd say it was an exposé, expository writing, and research writing. I was definitely arguing for a specific point of view.

LAUREL: I'm interested in hearing about some of the physical tools that you used as you were writing the article. What did you use those physical tools for?

RANDY: OK. One is transportation; I drove to the marsh to walk as a researcher and also to interview businesses down there. I used a computer to do research, and I used pen-and-paper to record interview information.

LAUREL: Can you talk a little bit, too, about what specific tool you'd say was most powerful in your activity and why?

RANDY: Yes—without a doubt the computer. I needed to research the history of the bayfront, the Sweetwater salt marsh, writings from a biologist at San Diego State named Joyce Zedler, what the government had decided about the area, the coastal commission—it's a National Wildlife Refuge and I had to research things about that, about zoning laws, about a power plant that is sitting right on the bay there that was run by a local power company. So, by far, the computer was my access to all kinds of valuable factual information that helped me write the article.

LAUREL: So obviously you did quite a lot of research to write the piece. Did you know going into the article that you needed to complete the research before you began it, or did different needs for research evolve as you went through that writing?

RANDY: It definitely evolved. My interest in the area started by just walking the salt marsh, looking at the egrets, ducks, crabs, and all the fun creatures that were down there. And that interest evolved into, like . . . *Well, I wonder about the history of this area.* So I just did personal fun research on Gunpowder Point. There's a gunpowder plant out there built in World War I—just fascinating stuff! There are remnants of that as well as the nature interpretive center that eventually got located on the bay there. So, I just researched out

of my own interest for a while. And then suddenly, I thought, *sheesh, this is worth an article*. I'm a writer, so why don't I do a piece on the salt marsh, the coming development, and the power plant that needs to be torn down? I just felt the marsh had this history of being damaged by industrial use and extremely undervalued, so I actually got up to my eyeballs in technical information. It got to be more than I bargained for. That was the one hard part. So I decided I needed to keep writing.

LAUREL: Would you say that the part of the activity that was tangled, troublesome, difficult, or negative was that it started as something you loved and then it became sort of a chore?

RANDY: Yeah—and writing gets that way, you know; it's a recursive process, where you're going back over it again and again. And once I got the idea that I could submit it for publication to the *Reader*, then I realized that it was going to be a feature article and needed to be factual and correct. We're talking about impact on businesses, the government, and local citizens. People are going to read this. So once I realized that it had an audience with some expertise, then it became more difficult because—like: ahhh, I got to get this all right. It's a little tedious at the end of the process, but still, I was passionate enough about it that I just pushed through that phase because that's what writing is, it's hard work.

LAUREL: So when received the news that the *Reader* had accepted it, you worked with an editor. Who had the most control over the writing activity, or maybe the editing of the article? And why do you think so?

RANDY: I was surprised that they picked it up. I sent the query in and a couple of weeks later, pretty quickly, I got a response that they wanted to publish it as a feature article. I was kind of blown away. Mom and I were traveling in Europe and I was like, "Oh sheesh, I got to get back to these people." So they did a fact check with some people who worked with the *Reader*, and then they sent me a draft with some correction, but they weren't really corrections of fact. I was really happy that I had gotten the facts right. It was more just grammatical stuff, spelling, punctuation, so they didn't really alter the article at all. I've had other editors that, you know, eat your stuff up—make it the size they want or change it because they want to put their perspective in or something. But in this case, I felt like I was in control and they really respected my research and my point of view.

LAUREL: Describe the primary goals of writing this article and whether or not you think they were achieved.

RANDY: So, one of my goals was just personal. I have a fascination with the Sweetwater salt marsh and its development, and I felt like it had been

neglected. So in a sense, I feel like I found my voice, and it went out to San Diego, and there were responses to the article—online writers writing in and some disagreeing, some agreeing. Because I was trying to balance the points of view of business and environmentalists.

LAUREL: And those were comments online?

RANDY: Comments online came back, and it was kind of rewarding to see that people read it—not as many comments as I wanted, but people responded, and that was satisfying to me. The fact that it just went out there to San Diego as a feature article in a magazine a lot of people read—that was satisfying. I hoped for a political consequence. I hoped that the San Diego City Council or the mayor or something would pick it up and they would go, "As we develop a master plan for Chula Vista, we're going to really take into account some of the things this article argues for—for example, not doing what San Diego did to their bayfront." Just putting a bunch of rock walls up, put daikondra and palm trees, making it look like some pseudo-Hawaii—you know. My point was: let's have walking paths that go along the edge of the marsh and natural plants there—and keep the egrets in the mudflats. People don't realize the mudflats are beautiful, but they are. So, you know, fish the shopping carts out of the mudflats and leave them be. Have people walk there, ride bikes along, and don't alter the natural landscape. But I don't really know that this happened. Chula Vista developed a massive masterplan and then, just this year (which is a number of years after the article was published), they initiated development of the Bayfront and they did take down the power plant, which I had argued for (it was a massive, horrible, ugly industrial structure), but I don't know that the article caused them to take it down. Now, they are developing a giant retail space, convention center, condos, hotel rooms, restaurants, shopping, as well as bike paths and walking paths—and I think it's going to be beautiful. They're honoring the marsh, and they're staying away from creating a buffer between the marsh and the development. But I don't know that my article actually influenced them, and I don't know in the end whether they'll really get it right. In other words, I don't know that they'll really honor the national wildlife refuge there by preserving what you might call the transition zone between nature and civilization. Can we get that transition zone right where you are respectful of the ecology but you let people have access to it? That remains to be seen. I think the buildout will take time and is going to cost billions of dollars over the next twenty years. And I'm not confident that they'll get it all right. So in that sense, I don't know that I really had any impact on the decisions that were made.

LAUREL: Did you learn anything from writing the article? And then, this may be kind of a strange question, but if the answer is yes, how do you know that you learned that?

RANDY: Well, I learned that I love to write about things I'm interested in: nature and ecology. I think though it was a little bit of a downer to me too and maybe suppress me a little bit to realize that when you want to have a voice and say something, you can get printed and still it doesn't necessarily mean that you will influence things. The print media has power, but it doesn't have as much power as sometimes we want it to. Literature is ephemeral—particularly articles that get published in journals like that, and it just passes off the scene. Voices need to be heard, but, unfortunately, they don't always have a lasting impact. And maybe it's a little disillusioning to see you can do a lot of research, you could write a good article, it could get some press, but it could maybe not make an immediate difference in the world. I haven't given up on trying to make a difference in people's lives and communities. But if the article had more impact, I think it would've inspired me to do more like it. Yeah. I'm still writing. I haven't given up on that, and I still have a voice.

LAUREL: The last question I have for you is: was there any knowledge or were there any skills you gained through this activity that could be useful in some other kind of writing or literate activity? Not necessarily writing another article but, you know, writing in a different genre?

RANDY: Yeah, I think so. I think the article had an artistic voice. And I was able to blend factual content with my own narrative. I talked about kayaking on the bay with my wife—seeing turtles there and watching the egrets—and I felt like that blend of my own experience, my passion and voice gave artistic expression to the article. It was well written—factual,yes, but also interesting. I felt blending that with scientific factual information was possible and they kind of came together in a way that I really liked. And I think that we can cross and mix genres sometimes. You can write about something factual and yet it can be artistic.

LAUREL: Yeah, the hybridity of genres. If I think about it, around that time is when you started your own blog. Or maybe you had it going before, but you definitely have embraced the more artistic style of writing in your blogging. I wonder if the article was in some ways a catalyst or if you transferred those skills over to your blog.

RANDY: Well, that's true. I developed three blogs in the couple years after that, which I still keep active. Those are very creative artistic blogs writing soliloquies and proverbs and interesting life perspectives and comments and essays. I've actually moved more towards trying to express my own voice and

give artistic expression to my passions. I haven't really taken up the technical side of the writing. In fact, I published some other articles on leadership, that were more technical, and I'm not very satisfied with them. I'm way more happy with my blog. I don't really want to write how-to stuff, and I don't really want to write expository things for newspapers and magazines. It just doesn't drive me. But artistic expression of the same ideals like valuing nature or art, yeah. That's way more interesting to me and I'm more passionate about that than doing technical stuff. That is interesting, I haven't thought about that, but yeah. I've moved toward the more personal artistic creative side of myself.

LAUREL: Yeah, the more narrative-centered voice. Well, thank you so much for answering my questions and sharing about your article. I really appreciate it!

RANDY: You're welcome, Laurel. It was a pleasure to talk to you.

Reflection – Laurel Krapivkin

My dad's article about the San Diego South Bay marshlands came out in 2010 in *The San Diego Reader*, a well-distributed local publication. When I moved to Illinois from California last year and was Marie-Kondo-ing my belongings, I came across one of the many copies I had tucked away between some books on my shelf. In a packing frenzy, I was on a mission to only save items that brought me joy in hopes of saving room in our moving van that would take us 2000 miles away from home. The article made the cut.

Home is a powerful anchor, and my family has called San Diego home for the past forty or so years. My parents met in the city, and it was the only place I had ever lived before moving myself, my spouse, a cat, and a houseplant to Illinois for graduate school. I cannot imagine my parents living anywhere but the sun-soaked city of San Diego, the beaches and mountains equidistant from their house in the suburbs of Chula Vista, just seven miles north of the Mexico/U.S. border.

Ever since I was little, my dad has had a fascination with the Sweetwater salt marsh, a splotch of wetlands running along the 805 freeway. He used to tell us fictional bedtime stories he imagined about the flora and fauna that lived there—Musica and Melodia, the two baby mockingbirds that nested in the trees above the marsh, Professors Cabbage White and Swallowtail, leading their classes of young butterflies in field studies, the milkweed plants that decided they wanted to fly—and did. We regularly visited the Nature Center off E Street, an interpretive center committed to the preservation

of marsh animals like the elusive light-footed clapper rails. Each visit, we tickled the stingrays and paid our respects to the mouse-in-the-bread-house. I marveled that my dad could name every butterfly species in the cases. He was our eco-tour guide, and his love of the marsh, and all of nature, was contagious.

It makes sense, then, years after we were grown and out of the house, that my dad decided to write an investigative article on the development of the San Diego Bayfront—a territory battle between conservationists and developers with his beloved marsh caught in the middle. My dad is a "words person"; he has a graduate degree in English and has written and published articles since before I can remember. But this was a project that asked him to put on a journalist hat to interview, research and fact-check, and to juggle statements from both the developers and the marsh-lovers. When the *Reader* accepted it for publication, it was an affirmation of his love of both nature and words, coming together in public print.

This year, nine years after the article was published, I chose to interview my dad about his writing process for the *Reader* article. He talked about the sorts of activities that he engaged while working on the piece—driving to the marsh and walking among the egrets and ducks and crabs, interviewing developers, taking notes on his laptop, and then sorting through the information to try and craft it into something publishable.

But the part that stuck with me most from our conversation was when my dad talked about how this project that started out from something he loved doing—walking the salt marsh—became tedious once he realized that it needed to be factual and correct because it had the potential to actually impact policy around the development of the bayfront. Local business, the government, and local citizens (with voting rights) were going to read this. Once he realized he had an audience with some expertise, it put this pressure on him to "get it right." The stakes were higher. This was now about more than egrets and crabs; this was about people's jobs, taxes, big money, and ethics.

What I love most about the interview—and the article—is that clearly my dad didn't stop writing when it became high stakes, when the *Reader* accepted his proposal and he had to actually write the thing. It became a labor of love, because his initial motivation—his love for and fascination with the mockingbirds, butterflies, and Light-Footed Clapper Rails—was powerful enough to keep him going. And I love this because it affirms something about the writing process that I can never seem to remember when I sit down to writer's block: that writing is complicated and hard. Sometimes you set out to write something you think will be simple (egrets! crabs!) and then it

morphs into something more complex, more high-stakes (developers! billions of dollars!).

But the interview also shows that motivations matter. Writing is already hard, so why write about stuff that doesn't matter to you? That sounds obvious, but it's a good reminder to me—as a writer, and especially as a teacher of composition. I know my students have more momentum in their writing projects when they get to choose what they write about, whether that's transistors, nail art, or their favorite vloggers.

The interview also allowed me to interact with my dad in a new was. We met as two writers talking about writing rather than our usual routine—me calling him up to ask about how to change my car filters, or the everyday language of our family talk ("How's mom? How's the cat?"). I've inherited my dad's love of language— and nature too. It was nice to be reminded, me sitting in my house in Illinois, 2000 miles away from home—of the similarities that still bind us together.

Further Reading

Link to Randy's article: https://www.sandiegoreader.com/news/2010/dec/15/cover-chula-vista-power-plant-green/#

Link to updates on the South Bay bayfront: https://www.portofsandiego.org/projects/chula-vista-bayfront

Laurel Krapivkin is a third year PhD student in Children's Literature at ISU. In her free time, she loves to cook with her spouse, cuddle her cat, and hike with her dog.

Randy Hasper is recently retired and spends his days enjoying the San Diego sun, working in his yard, and writing on his blog.

Thank You for Your Submission:
A *Grassroots* Literate Activity Interview between the Interns of the *GWRJ*

Eleanor Stamer and Sara Koziol

For this *Grassroots* literacy interview, Eleanor Stamer had the opportunity to interview her fellow *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* intern Sara Koziol, who provided valuable insight into how she has grown while working with the journal. Sara was also able to shed some light on what runs through our heads as we go through the reviewing and editing process. Hopefully this can demystify the process for folks!

ELEANOR: So, Sara, in your two years as an intern for the Writing Program, you've probably seen many different genres used or examined in the journal. What were some of them and have they changed over time?

SARA: Well, when looking at the genres of the articles themselves, I found that they either fell into the expository writing that discusses Writing Program concepts, in some way, or an interview. While accessibility, in both language and content, is a major goal of the articles in the journal, I tend to like the interviews a bit more because they're reader-friendly and you can get real-world insight into specific literate activities from the person you're interviewing.

But looking at the genres discussed within the articles, I've seen a lot of people discussing technology, social media, tattoos, billboards, flyers, and so on. As time went on, I noticed that authors started to write about more outside-of-the-box topics. In other words, conceptualizing seemingly random topics as genres was fascinating to me, and it helped even me—the reviewer—realize that literate activity is truly all around us in the world. One article looked at holiday decorations as a genre, and I found it fascinating

because it was a different way of thinking about something I see around me every winter. I've also started seeing more articles addressing social concepts like how machismo and how that functions in society. There was even one article that argued that dreams are a genre. I loved that one—it was so memorable. I've definitely seen the genres evolve into ones that are less expected and haven't been discussed as often.

As an intern for the Grassroots Journal, I encountered different genres during the review process itself—genres I was unfamiliar with prior to this internship. For instance, the first step to reviewing an article is to conduct an initial assessment. This is where I read the article for the first time, before anyone else does, and I identify basic information about the article, such as the topic, the length, the tone, etc. This is just a surface-level review where I make general comments. The next step in the review process is to write a review letter. This is the point at which two reviewers (which sometimes includes me) get deeper with their feedback, identify major areas of improvement, and make suggestions to the author. Then, the next step is for the editor (who, when I worked for the Writing Program, was the incredible Rebecca Lorenzo) to write an editor letter, which combines the feedback given by both reviewers into one letter that she sends to the author. These genres—initial assessments, review letters, and editor letters—were very unfamiliar to me upon entering the Writing Program. But now, two years later, they are just three more genres I have familiarized myself with and have added to my toolbelt! The skills I have obtained by working with these genres are transferrable to other genres I have (and will) come across in life, if that makes sense.

ELEANOR: On that note, has this job required any literacies you didn't have before?

SARA: Yes and no. While being a history major does require some different literacies than being a writing intern, the two do overlap and help each other. Training to be an intern made me look at my own writing much more closely, and I became much more critical of it. So, any time I would do historical writing, I would then look at is as though I was editing someone else's work. I would read through my work and give myself a general overview of what my work was trying to achieve and determine how successfully it was doing that—this is essentially what an initial assessment is for! When doing an initial assessment for an article, my aim is to determine how well it is fitting the genre of a *grassroots* article and take stock of the writing research the author is conducting. This helps the reviewers write review letters because they get an overview of what's working in the article and what might need some attention, especially in terms of the article's content.

Interestingly, I found I became a better editor and reviewer as I wrote more and more historical research papers and the like. And being an intern helped me hone in on the details, as the *GWRJ* team tends to do later in the review process with revision assessments, while keeping the big picture in mind—as I was trained to do with review letters. In history we tend to be much more focused on the big picture and have minimum worry about small finite details. With this internship, though, I was able to work on my copyediting skills since articles slated for publication go through that as well, and it made me focus on the details a bit more. So, I don't think any literacies were new to me; rather, they were preexisting ones that I further developed through this internship. I also learned to embrace the fact that I am reviewing the work of my peers and those older than me. I guess I could say that this job required me to have more confidence in the feedback I give.

ELEANOR: I definitely understand that confidence. Along with that growing confidence in your abilities, are you finding yourself using any skills from the job in your writing or your student teaching?

SARA: I am constantly giving students feedback, which is something I did all the time in initial assessments and review letters or assessments. The job has combined my specialized knowledge of history with the confidence I've gained in giving feedback, and so now I know what I'm looking for in terms of content and I know how to present changes to my students. When I first started reviewing for the Journal, I felt as though I wasn't "qualified" to be giving feedback to many of our authors who are graduate students. Yet, over time, I noticed that I was giving good feedback. So I grew more confident in that ability. Now, I'm able to help my students organize their ideas and show them how to implement big picture thinking while also looking at the details.

ELEANOR: Are you more aware of how you may be using some of the Writing Program concepts?

SARA: I know that I am using Writing Program concepts, but I don't always realize it, if that makes sense. Antecedent knowledge is the first thing that comes to mind of when it comes to how I work with my students. I usually refer to it as background knowledge when I'm working with them. It's like scaffolding—building on that antecedent knowledge so that they can "uptake" new information. See? More Writing Program terms! I like using different genres in my teaching, too. We usually refer to them as "text sets," so using different kinds of texts to convey the knowledge in different ways. This could be through music, photographs, films, video clips, field trips, and of course articles, text passages, and books. All of those texts show different parts of the time period and add to the overall understanding as well as appeal to different kinds of learning.

ELEANOR: That's great! It's wonderful to see the Writing Program concepts out in action, even if we don't always realize they're there. But, have you found your rhetoric changing as you've now had the opportunity to read through others' work?

SARA: In terms of my own writing, it does vary across genres. But I have been told that I have a very distinct voice no matter what writing it is. Typically, I try to be formal, but I add a human element to it. Subconsciously, I want my personality to show through and I suppose set my writing apart from other more "clinical" writing. I think that's part of what I liked about working with the journal: we aim to maintain an author's voice while helping author's better address Writing Program concepts in ways that may be helpful to other writer researchers.

Regarding how I give feedback, my rhetoric has changed in that my students are very different from the authors that write for the Journal. With both, I am very upfront about what they need to do to improve their writing, but with my students, I see them in person and I never want to discourage them or make them feel as though I'm reprimanding them. So, I might add an exclamation mark or smiley face to show them that what they are doing is good and to also let them know that I only give feedback to help them improve their skills. Reviewing for the journal is a bit different because I am reviewing people I don't know, I'm behind a keyboard, and I don't typically meet with the author to give further feedback (though the *GWRJ* is available for that!). So, while I am upfront and encouraging, I try to be as constructive as I can and this goal sometimes leaves less room for compliments—though I make sure to tell each author what's working in their article! I try to review in a way that doesn't discourage authors because submitting to the Journal is wonderful, but I certainly have a different rhetoric with authors (who are mostly college students) versus my students who are still in high school. In both cases, though, I try to be clear with my feedback to ensure that my suggestion gets across and makes sense. But I also try to make sure that the writer feels encouraged to revise and keep writing.

ELEANOR: You've had the very unique perspective of being both author and reviewer, so what advice would you give to someone who is writing an article?

SARA: The first thing I would say is: make sure that you understand the concepts, and go out of your way to genuinely learn them. Before you write a single word, you need to have a basic understanding of Writing Program concepts and understand what the program is about. That understanding can even help you find a topic if you're struggling to come up with one, and of course it helps when you already have a topic in mind. There have been

so many times where authors will use terms incorrectly because they don't fully understand, or they'll miss out on an opportunity to use a concept that they just don't know exists, or they'll discuss a term without knowing that it is a Writing Program concept. So, I recommend making a CHAT map, which is a graphic organizer used to sort your ideas in relation to CHAT. Start small and move forward, taking it one step at a time. I've read articles where I can tell that the author rushed through without putting much thought into the organization of the article. We can tell when there's thought behind an article, and usually those articles go hand-in-hand with the ones where the author is clearly very passionate about the topic. So, pick a topic that you love and have an interest in. Read through as many examples as you can, as most people learn best by example.

When I wrote my article, I looked through a lot of the articles that had been published. My ENG 101 professor Dr. Joyce Walker had us read through examples and write reviews for past articles, so I became well-aware of what content the journal puts out and what features—or conventions—*GWRJ* articles typically have. Knowing these things about the journal helped when I became an intern, too, and made me a better reviewer. So really, put in the time, put in the effort, and love what you write about. And *that* will give you the best article.

Eleanor Stamer (left) is a Publishing Major at Illinois State University. When she's not in class, you can find her scrolling through TikTok, binge-watching shows on Netflix, or having debates about Harry Potter theories.

Sara Koziol (right) graduated from Illinois State in May 2020 with her Bachelor of Arts in History-Social Sciences Education. Sara spent two years as an associate intern for the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* and looks back on her time at ISU with fondness. She will forever miss her fellow Writing Program team members and thanks them for their continual support and encouragement. Sara hopes to integrate Writing Program concepts into her future social studies classroom to teach students the significance of literate activity in the world around us.

Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*

GWRJ Editors

Our Mission Statement

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

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

General Information

Submissions

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

Queries and Drafts

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

Honoraria

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

Style and Tone

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. Whenever possible, articles should make use of published research about writing practices, but the research should be incorporated into the text in a relevant and accessible way so that readers who are not used to reading scholarly research can still benefit from the references.

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

Media, Mode, and Copyright Issues

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

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

Researching for *Grassroots*

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

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

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

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

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

Investigating Genres

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

Personal Explorations of Literate Practice

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

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

Composing Practices

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

Literate Activity in the Wild

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

where all kinds of literate acts are happening. We want to see researchers "unpacking" what is actually happening when people try to compose particular kinds of texts in particular situations. We are also interested in research that looks at the ways that textual production is interactive—how it involves all kinds of interactions between different people and different objects, tools, and other entities over time. This kind of research can involve the interactions of people and genres as well as different cultural norms and practices.

Case Studies of Individual Literate Practices

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

Linguistics Writing Research

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

Global or Intercultural Literate Practices

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

The Researcher's Process

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

Step One

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

Step Two

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

Step Three

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

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

Step Four

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

Step Five

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

Step Six

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

Step Seven

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

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

Step Eight

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

Step Nine

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

Step Ten

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

Questions?

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

Works Cited

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