

GRASSROOTS WRITING RESEARCH JOURNAL

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From the Editors

One of the goals for last year's inaugural edition was to present the work of writers as they actually learn how to do writing research and compose in new writing situations. This year we've moved even further in this direction as we've begun a bi-annual publication schedule and renamed our text the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*. This new title reflects our aspirations—to present writing research by different authors and in a wide range of different topics, forms, and media. Other changes we've made include placing abstracts before each article, making it easier to browse through the volume, and moving the author bios to the end of each text. Purchasing this volume also gives you access to the articles published in last year's edition, which can be accessed through the Writing Program website.

Throughout these changes, we continued to solicit and encourage authors to share not only what they've learned about writing, but *how* they learned it. Thus, in this volume, we've brought together a diverse collection of articles that all enact some form of writing research from a variety of authors.

Articles in this Volume

Jordana Hall in “Reading as a Writer of Genres” discusses how the formal, visual elements of a piece of writing often indicate how the text should be read. She uses the examples of a flier and a book's front matter to demonstrate the connection between generic features and the activity of reading.

Karoline Kniss in “Writing Lines: Blurring the Boundaries between Visual and Written Genres” uses her own experience with creating political cartoons to analyze the genre; she includes one of her own cartoons commenting on the No Child Left Behind legislation to illustrate features of this genre.

Amy Hicks in “Scroll-Point-and-Click Composition?: The Generic Complexities of Playlists” thinks through how we go about composing playlists through interviews with people about how and why they create their playlists.

“How To: Write a Letter to an Elected Official” is a collaboratively written article by **John Wons, Kelly Boyce, Sara Civitello, Laken Onderisin, Blake Rosensteel**; in this article, they discuss the genre of a letter to an elected official, pointing out the salient features. They also include two sample letters that show how they used these conventions.

Meghann Meussen in “Taking the High Road: Why Learning to Write Isn’t Easy and What We Can Do About It” focuses on one type of school essay that she learned to write quite well in and how that genre compared to essays—seminar papers and journal articles—she wrote in graduate school.

Elizabeth Williams in “Don’t Be Quiet: Talk as a Tool for Improved Writing” takes a more general approach to writing studies and discusses how talking about writing is an important part of the composing process.

Rachel Parish in “Turning Speeches into Scholarship: Trajectory through Composition” interviews her friend Angie about her experience composing an After Dinner Speech to illustrate how a non-school type of writing can also translate into academic types of writing.

Shailen Mishra in “A Bit about Genre and Transferring of Skills” uses his experience with writing a restaurant review to discuss why it is important to look at each writing situation separately and to consider which skills can transfer from one genre to another—and which can’t.

Jamison Lee in “Genre Studies, Grice, and Burlesque” discusses how Gricean maxims of quality, relevance, quantity, and matter apply to genre studies. Specifically, he suggests that breaking or playing with these maxims often result in humor.

Hilary Selznick in “Researching One in Six Million” addresses how she went about researching her grandmother, a Holocaust survivor. She discusses how the usual research methods like Google and library searches were not useful for this project, so she employed primary research methods.

Haley Stouffer in “How I Lrned 2 Txt: An Adventure in Genre” explores how different technologies influenced how she composed text messages; as her access to technology changed, like the type of phone she had, so did the ways she understood the texting genre.

Susana Rodriguez in “Researching, or How I Fell In Love With Post-It Notes” discusses various strategies she uses when writing papers for school such as finding a comfortable place to work, highlighting important words or quotes, and marking important finds with sticky notes.

Kevin Snodgrass in “Memorial of the 5 Paragraph Essay” reflects on his experience with the five paragraph essay and traces how his writing in this form altered as he encountered different strategies.

Scott Sands in “We Meet Again? How a Playwright’s Knowledge of an Antecedent Genre Made Learning Screenwriting Possible (But Difficult)” presents a play with a strong intertextual connection to Pankaj Challa’s article entitled “Real World Writing: Meet the Screenplay” published in volume 1. In addition, Sands’ play, “In-Venting,” addresses how writers work in an unfamiliar genre.

Reading as a Writer of Genres

Jordana Hall

This article approaches reading from a more active perspective. Jordana argues that reading is a two-part structure that readers often take for granted. It consists of an automatic process of looking and analyzing, *seeing and understanding*. As readers, people recognize generic frameworks based on formal, visual elements that facilitate this automatic process and tell us *how* to read. Jordana takes two generic examples, one short and one long, and describes an active reading process. She suggests that active reading, or identifying generic features and frameworks as strategies for writing, provides a model for how readers might learn to write more effectively in a situation.

When Amy Devit, Anis Bawarshi, and Mary Jo Reiff study genre, they explain that our knowledge of genre provides a “mental framework for how to read [that genre]” (48). But reading is a two-part structure that we often take for granted. It consists of both looking and analyzing, *seeing and understanding*. The generic framework that we recognize is based on formal, visual elements that tell us how to read.

Let’s try breaking down the framework, or *structure*, of a familiar genre to see how it impacts our reading of it. Take this flyer that advertises Coffee Klatches for the Writing Program at ISU for example, and as we proceed, try to keep one thing in mind: the generic/social context of fliers, how people expect to read them or expect them to “work,” is as a quick and easy read.

You can also think of this as the visual format or layout of a genre.



Right away, I can tell a couple of things just by *looking* at this flyer. First, it's meant to be informative because it's mainly made up of words. The only picture is a small clip art picture of a steaming cup. Since it is the only visual on the page though, my eye is immediately drawn to it. It's probably for this reason that it is placed in such close proximity to what acts as a heading or title for the document. It gives the graphic context so we assume it's coffee in the cup at the same time as it draws our eye to the main point of the text.

Proximity acts as a visual cue for readers. We know how to read the picture in context with whatever it appears next to. Just as we know this comment should be read when the line that links it to the text appears and in context with the word or phrase it highlights.

**The Good Day Archive
And Coffee Klatches
Beginning Wednesday, October 13th in the Writing
Program Space @ Stevenson 133**

So when we see a text, whatever draws our immediate attention acts as the introduction or the beginning.

We can assume these lines are the most important since they are the largest and draw the eye's immediate attention. You might also note that there is a hierarchy of importance. The first two centered lines are slightly bigger than the second pair. This is a visual cue to let us know which is slightly more important while balancing out the aesthetic aspects of the text. All the text in the same font at the same size would be too congested, take too long to read. We might just choose not to look at it at all. The contrast in size and shape of the text makes it more appealing. So instead, we stop and take a look. It functions in two ways, then: 1) a visual cue telling us how to read the text, and 2) a design technique to make us want to look more closely by offering visual contrast.

Basically, the font says "Hey, Look at me!"

We need contrast or the eye starts to read everything in exactly the same way, maybe even skipping things the author/designer really wanted us to know were important.

The design of this flyer places the What, When, and Where in the most visible place. So the main topic, or purpose, for the flyer is immediately obvious. I might not see another line, but I would still know everything

necessary to accomplish the designer’s purpose: meeting for a good day archive and coffee klatch at a specified time and location. There, we have a text that uses visual format to guide the eye for a quick and easy read. Aha! This flyer adheres to the main category of fliers as a quick and easy read. Way to go flyer-designer... Success!

So first I observed all of the elements. Then I broke it down in order to read it. We all know that a flyer with information about what, when, and where something takes place is put out to try to get us to come to that place and event, but analyzing the emphasis placed upon those parts of a flyer as a visual introduction helps us read that purpose more clearly and more immediately. The visual format or framework told us *how* to read it.

There’s more to our flyer than just the visual introduction though. This is followed with a larger block of text that gives us more details about the first coffee klatch and what the good day archive is, a sort of body for our “text.” Again, certain parts are bolded to give emphasis, so I know that I should read those parts closely. But I understand as a reader of fliers that it is only necessary to read this section of the flyer if I am interested in learning more about what was introduced earlier.

If I am interested though, there are other visual cues that tell me how to read the remaining parts of the flyer as well. The bulleted points, for instance. I know when I see those bullets that something is about to be listed. It’s another visual cue that tells me *how* to read what follows. Something that we see in other genres as well.

And the flyer concludes with a note. “For more information.” This is a textual cue of sorts. I know when I see this that I will typically see an email address or a phone number. I also know that this contact will be able to tell me about what is in the flyer. This is a common closing device in flyers since they function as those quick and easy sources of information. The contact is there for anything more the reader may need to know, like can I bring kids with me? For that sort of comprehensive information about the event, we’ll have to look outside of the text. So we should really consider the note and contact info as the conclusion of the flyer. There won’t be any more parts to look at; no other pages floating around that have been misplaced since multiple page flyers aren’t *quick* or *easy* for anybody!

What this final cue tells us more generally as readers though, is that cues for how to read something may be textual as often as visual elements of design. Sometimes it may be both. Novels or even textbooks are a good example of this. The positioning or placement of the words on the page let you know exactly what you are reading and how you should approach the

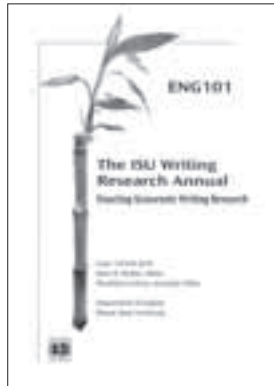
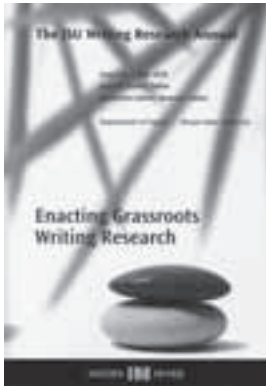
It’s helpful to think of this as simply the middle of the text. The part that the eye cannot take in at a glance, and that precedes the end of the conclusion.

Just think of this as the very last thing we see. For informative flyers it will often be contact information for event organizers

As in the case of our Big, Bolded Title since the font acts as a type of artistic design as well.

reading process. So we can use the same reading strategies to our advantage when reading books, and this gives you a more authorly or writerly perspective on what goes into the construction of a book.

Let's take the *Illinois State University (ISU) Writing Research Annual* as an example. Below are the first three pages of the Annual.



It's important when learning about genres to familiarize ourselves with the terminology specific to those genres so we can think and talk about them in smart and effective ways.

Typically when we read books, we read the cover and perhaps the back cover for structural reasons, meaning we know when we look in those two places we find what the book is about. The cover will have the title, and the back cover will have either a short summary of the book, or *blurb*, or quotes from critics praising the book for some specific reason that tells us a little about the book as well. The design of the cover gives us important information about what's inside the book, then.

For example, two main titles appear on the *ISU Annual* as we can see by the size and boldness of the fonts. The first title is “The ISU Writing Research Annual” at the top of the cover. Already we know this book is about writing, research, and that it is published yearly since it is an *Annual*. But this title is slightly smaller than the next main title “Enacting Grassroots Writing Research,” which is almost twice the size of the other *and* centered. This suggests that the content within is focused more on this aspect. If we weren't sure about that, we only have to look at the picture on the cover to reinforce this assessment. At first glance, we recognize two rocks stacked on top of each other. These are very clear, but there is another picture that is out of focus in the background, large green sprigs of some kind? This is confusing if we don't have the rocks and the title (Enacting Grassroots) to help us recognize what the out-of-focus picture actually is—grass. Get it, *GRASS*roots. Well that's clever. Just like the picture from the coffee klatch flier provides context for the text, the text provides context for the picture on the cover of the *ISU Annual*. So the cover uses compositional design techniques, a blend of text and visual image in a very conscious, writerly manner.

So someone designed the *Annual*. We can sometimes forget this in our hurry to get at what is inside a book. We often think of books as having only authors, for example, those enlightened geniuses that naturally write and create to teach and/or entertain us. But books are usually put together and published by people other than the authors that write them. Carefully observing the structure or format of a book reminds us of this so we can think of the process that goes into actually producing a book. The cover of the *Annual* credits Joyce Walker (editor) and Brooklynn Lehner (associate editor) for designing the *Annual*. The authors that appear in the *Annual* only make up one small part in the process of writing that book. And Joyce Walker and Brooklynn Lehner are only one more step in that overall process as we see by looking at the front matter.

After the title page above, you see the copyright page. How often do you, as a reader of books, look at the copyright page? Probably not often, which is why the text is *visually* unappealing. It's small and close together, hard to read. The information is purely technical in nature, but as a writer and researcher the copyright page includes important information. For example, academic citation of a book in the works cited section of a research paper requires a date of publication. You find this on the copyright page. Also, if the title page doesn't have the necessary publication information required for academic citation, then you will be able to find it on the copyright page.

Publishers are the last step in the process of writing a book since they arrange for advertising and marketing aspects of the book as well as its physical production. If you want to write a book, knowing where to find the publication information of a book also becomes important. Reading the types of books a publishing company puts out can give you an idea, as an author, where to send your work. Not to mention the copyright page gives the physical mailing address and often the website of the publishing company as well. Authors may read the front matter of a book far more closely than other parts of a book because they need to do so in order to get their own work published. And recognizing the structural aspects of the book genre, having a mental framework for how books work, allows them to do so.

So readers have an innate understanding of what and how they are supposed to read a genre based on their purpose. Are you reading as a reader or writer of genres, for example. As writers of genres, we can either use this innate understanding or we can undermine it to make a point. More importantly, understanding the *automatic responses* of people to genres as *mental frameworks* can help us choose the most effective genre to write in for each individual writing situation. Genre gives us a whole new way to look at audience and purpose based not only on what people read *but how!*

This is essentially what editors do.

The front matter of a book can be any number of pages but includes everything right up until the first chapter of a book. The title and copyright pages, tables of contents, prologues, and forwards all make up the front matter of books.

Another structural or formatting element of the genre of books!

The place of publication and the publisher's name can usually be found on the title page, but not always.

We do it all the time with textbooks when we use things like glossaries, indexes, and tables of contents to flip to the place in the book we want to read.

Works Cited

Bawarshi, Anis, Amy Devitt, and Mary Jo Reiff. *Scenes of Writing: Strategies for Composing with Genres*. New York: Pearson & Longman, 2004. Print.



Jordana Hall completed an M.A. with a focus in children's literature in 2009 from Texas A&M University Commerce. She is currently pursuing publication as the illustrator of a mixed medium poetry/prose adolescent novel co-authored by Dr. Susan Stewart and Dr. Kathryn Jacobs of Texas A&M University Commerce.

Writing Lines: Blurring the Boundaries between Visual and Written Genres

Karoline Kniss

In this article, Karoline Kniss explores her process for creating political cartoons using a framework she developed through her experiences as an artist and student of genres studies. She focuses on a cartoon she created criticizing the No Child Left Behind Act and examines how the model she created for drawing cartoons is also useful for other kinds of creative activity.

Introduction

My formal training in political cartoons comes from high school art classes where my cartoons were carefully analyzed and critiqued by my instructor—over and over again. “Draw this smaller. Think of your colors. Design, design, design!” were all reinforced religiously. So, I drew and redrew, followed general and somewhat unspecific standards that were sometimes taught and sometimes learned through error, and used my creative skills to produce the best work I could. After four years of drafting and redrafting, I found that art was still my strong suit, favorite past-time, and personal release from the world, even if it meant I had a teacher yelling at me.

So, when I’m feeling antsy, bored, and somewhat controversial, I like to draw political cartoons. I consider it a stress reliever and a way to get my mind off things; it’s like exercise but with a little more thought and creativity. Practicing in my sketchbook has helped me develop and detail my own routine for creating cartoons, and thanks to my English 101 class, I’ve learned the logistics of looking into a genre and finding what standards are needed to make an example of it. During class, I developed a process while

thoroughly examining a few genres that I now use to help me work in all types of genres. Because of this work, I'm confident that I can use my creative skills to produce excellent work, and I want to share my experience with you.

I want to start by showing you my process for making my cartoons. The basics of this process are choosing and developing a form, finding an audience, picking a specific topic, and planning the purpose I want to accomplish in my work. Obviously, form (political cartoon) was easy for me to choose because I know the genre well. For audience, I chose my age group because I know how we think, act, and feel about most stuff. Topic was another easy choice for me because I have always felt very strongly about the No Child Left Behind Act. My purpose was to show my feelings about NCLB as a creative release from built-up political and educational stress.

Form: Why a Cartoon?

The good thing about art is that there are lots of different types you can work in. Based on your particular taste, the message you're trying to convey, and how you want the piece to look, you can choose the medium that works for you. While I do consider myself an artist, I'm still not great in all areas. The material I struggle with most is watercolor. For some reason, I have a hard time getting my technique perfected. Watercolor begins with accurate drawing where your hand can't smudge the work, and since I was taught to write by a lefty, I always rest my right hand on the paper and drag it across my work. And once I finish the initial sketch, using watercolors is very demanding because I have to constantly change water, clean brushes, and keep puddles off of the paper to prevent muddy colors.

Unlike watercolor, cartooning lets me make use of my strengths; I can use my lack of precision to my advantage. Recognizing who a person is based on a few key features of their face, body, etc. is all that is required for a cartoon to work, and for the rest of the details, I can get away with less because cartoons are expected to be simple. The simplicity of this form makes it easier for me to jot down the image in my head without worrying about more difficult and time consuming technicalities that come with other forms of art. While some genres require you to make a mini-model of your work, cartooning is essentially just a sketch.

Audience: Who's Going to Care about This?

My age group was as easy audience for me to pick because I'm a part of it and I understand how we work. Also, I figured that since I didn't keep up with politics, there had to be a good portion of my audience that didn't either. Adults pay attention to the news and new legislation more than college students do, but it's still important that college students think about these things. Political cartoons are a good method for getting young adults to think about current news because summarizing the effects of an important piece of legislation into a hilarious cartoon is more appealing and comprehensible than the politics section of a CNN news broadcast.

Young adults are one of the age groups that politicians need the most support from. If we believe in them, politicians have the chance of capturing our votes for their entire careers. If not, well, they lose out on some critical votes as well as influence on the next generation. Yet, a majority of us don't vote because we don't *believe in* what our country is doing, don't *understand* what our country is doing, and don't *feel* that our votes or participation in the government will influence a decision. Nevertheless, we are a powerful age group, and one of the main goals of my cartooning is helping young people understand their importance in politics. Young adults will become the new America, and we have the ability to learn from the mistakes of today and, hopefully, create a better tomorrow.

Topic and Purpose: Why NCLB?

The piece of legislation that I felt would fit my audience best is the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. NCLB doesn't just affect schools and faculty, but students as well. For example, all students have to deal with long, boring, and often pointless preparation for standardized tests, the standardized tests themselves, and the effects that come from not reaching the mandated goals on those tests, whether it's their own fault or simply the poor education their school provides.

NCLB is one of the laws that has impacted me the most (a.k.a., frustrated me the most) so far in my life. It was designed and enacted under George W. Bush's presidency to get all children in America to 100% proficiency in reading and math by 2014. The problem with NCLB is that it has proven *impossible* to get every child proficient in reading and math in that time frame. Besides that problem, the bill also cuts funding to schools who don't meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), an improvement in standardized test scores each year. My school district had met AYP every year since the law was enacted, but

last year our ACT scores decreased slightly and my district lost funding as a result. My school district is not the only one having problems; many school districts across the nation are facing similar issues. When funding is decreased as a result of these test scores, schools are forced to give less money to or completely remove useful services, extracurricular programs such as art and music, and other educational resources for students.

Through my cartoon, I wanted to show how the NCLB Act has not improved our nation's schools and has not reached most of its goals, even under the Obama Administration. Only some improvements have been made on overall test scores, schools are losing funding, and 100% proficiency won't be attainable by 2014. So, why is this law still in effect?

Model: How Do I Know What a Good Cartoon Is?

After I had decided all of this, I had a pretty good idea for my cartoon, but I also did a bit of artistic research to help myself out. I've listed some of the URL's that I used as reference at the end of the article. I first looked at more recent examples of Barack Obama and NCLB to help me get a feel for representations of Obama and how other artists like to depict him. I also looked at older cartoons that were produced during the Bush administration, which helped me understand how people thought of Bush and NCLB. Once I had the art references I needed, I sat down and drew it.

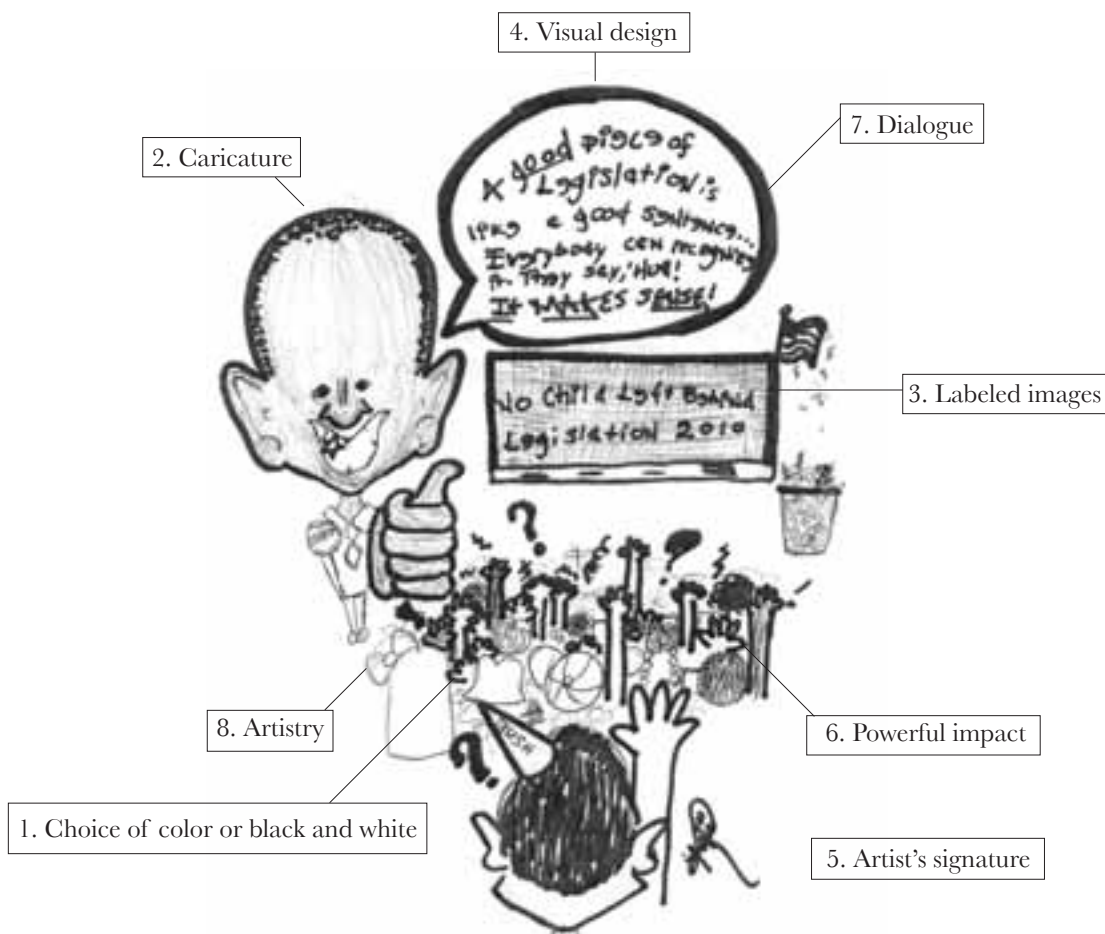
My cartoon is a good example of the genre of political cartoons, but to prove to you I know my stuff I've made a list of standards that are necessary to create a successful cartoon and then pointed them out in my finished cartoon.

- 1.) *Choice of color or black and white:* Color allows more details to be shown and is more pleasing and noticeable for viewers but requires more technical skill. I chose black and white because it is less time consuming.
- 2.) *Caricatures:* Caricatures exaggerate certain traits to make a joke or get a point across. This helped me create a bit of humor (cartoons are meant to be somewhat funny) as well as to emphasize the important points I was trying to make. My Obama caricature consists of a shining smile, happy attitude, and reassurance of well-being because of the thumbs up. This emphasizes that Obama doesn't seem too worried about the problem that NCLB is creating. George Bush is caricatured as a "dunce," someone who doesn't quite understand what's going on. His large ears, caricatured by many artists, suggest that he has a personality like "Dumbo," the elephant who has a reputation of being the odd man out or not fully aware. I drew him that way because I

wanted to make the point that Bush wasn't aware of the improvements (or lack thereof) that resulted from NCLB.

- 3.) *Labeled images*: Labels clarify possibly confusing or unrecognizable visuals and set up the setting for the cartoon. I used the Obama Pin as a label to be sure my audience would know who the drawing was supposed to represent, and I put “No Child Left Behind” on the chalkboard to make sure my audience knew what Obama was discussing.
- 4.) *Visual design*: I am a big fan of visual irony in political cartoons because it adds to the hilarity of the cartoon and creates a shock that can help get your audience's attention. The words “spoken” by Obama were a quote of his I found (used out of context, but effective for my cartoon). The quote is ironic because the No Child Left Behind Act is not making sense to everyone in the classroom (Finnegan 27). I chose the scrawling, almost illegible font because I wanted to show that, hey, even Obama is “left behind” by the government's educational legislation. Bush's dunce cap and raised hand emphasized that he wasn't exactly wise in some of his decisions, *ahem* NCLB. The children with their hands raised demonstrate my view that kids are confused about Obama's words, his actual opinion on the NCLB legislation, and his continuing support for a piece of legislation that isn't working. It could also point out that test scores aren't improving as dramatically as hoped under NCLB and that no one (parents, teachers, Congress) understands or sees progress from the NCLB legislation. Point being: why should we have children, faculty, and schools suffer from a law that hasn't been proved beneficial?
- 5.) *Artist's signature*: All political cartoon artists sign their work to show who deserves credit for the work and as a way to prove they did the work.
- 6.) *Powerful impact*: The purpose of a political cartoon is to emphasize an interesting view of a problem, the need for change in a law or other aspect of public policy, or the artist's opinion of some issue. I feel that my cartoon, through what I included and how I chose to draw it, does exactly that. With my opinion clearly shown through my art, the cartoon is easily understood, makes a strong impression, and the image's details help me prove my point.
- 7.) *Dialogue*: Dialogue generally explains what's happening in the cartoon. Real quotes are often used, sometimes out of context, to get a point across. Obama's quote was originally used in the *New Yorker* on May 31, 2004 in the article “The Candidate,” which discussed the early part of Obama's race against Jack Ryan for one of the Illinois Senate Seats in Congress (Finnegan 25).

- 8.) *Artistry*: Basic art concepts are needed to make a cartoon art (duh). Some of the technical terms for what I used are depth (shading, differing thicknesses of lines), perception (shading and sizing of figures), and detail (added dots, lines, and shapes used to make an object look more realistic).



Reflection: What Are the Lines We Are Writing Within?

What I hope I've shown through my creative process for political cartoons is that it makes use of some of the same processes as creating a text. While the genre you're working in may be quite different in some ways, the process that I outline here is an example that you can consider as you start your own work. As Courtney Schoolmaster stated in her article from the 2010 *Writing Research Annual*, "Follow the Breadcrumbs: Adhering to the Conventions of a Genre":

I know the steps. Well, they aren't really steps, they're conventions: loose guidelines that direct how the genre looks, sounds, acts and interacts using the elements of writing. The problem is that while most writing uses the same elements, thesis, introduction, conclusion, etc., the way in which they are used differs. (58–59)

Courtney's point holds for my own work. Like the conventions for a paper, I'm following the set of conventions I listed above that govern political cartoons. Basically, although not necessarily paper, every genre has an audience, form, purpose, and topic, as well as conventions that establish how those features should work together effectively.

Writing jargon aside, it's important that visual and written genres can do the same work in different ways. Visuals can work just as well or better than texts in many situations. For example, the comparison papers I did in high school could be summed up with a simple Venn diagram. There's no need for the extraneous information (introduction, conclusion, transitions, etc.) found in a comparative essay when the important points being compared can be summarized in diagram form. While descriptive wording can create pictures in readers' minds in a story, pictures can emphasize and make clear specific details in an analysis paper. Beyond papers and school stuff, advertising genres like fliers and posters need interesting visuals, like bright contrasting colors, to grab a viewer's attention.

Here's a thought: if a routine like mine is useful for art and writing, is it possible to use it for both? In my opinion, yes. Visuals aren't used as much as they should be. Visual learners like me find it harder to retain information in boring typed text because it's just that—*boring*. With pictures, lists, charts, and diagrams, text can be broken up, which holds a reader's attention *and* helps explain information. Sometimes visual texts just work better than written texts. Easy viewing/minimal reading genres like websites, posters, and fliers are used all of the time to display crucial information in a way that is fast and easy for the reader to understand. If this information was just typed out on the page, it would make reading inefficient and slow. Don't get stuck turning everything into a paper; think about all of the options that you have available to you.

So, how can you use all these different ideas that I've talked about? Well, I started by working in something I like doing (cartooning). Through it, I practiced and learned and worked to create a process that I've found works for all kinds of creating. Try that out yourself. Look into a genre, understand what the importance of the genre is, and create standards to work by. Do some research to help build a routine. This will not only help you with your current work; it will help you work in other genres in the future. It's funny to think

my drawing experience helped me improve my writing skills, but nonetheless, I am a better artist in both visual and text genres. The skills I developed through personal exploration have improved all of my work. So, do what I did. Just find your genre, your anything, that drives you to understand how it works and build your own foundation for creating better work.

Websites for Cartoon Examples

<http://politicalhumor.about.com/od/politicalcartoons/ig/Education-Cartoons/No-Child-Left-Behind.htm>

<http://www.scriptedspontaneity.com/2008/01/teachers-new-years-resolutions-part-2/>

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Karoline Kniss is a sophomore Insurance major at Illinois State University who would enjoy candle lit dinners and long walks along the beach, but due to her upbringing, she settles for eating in front of the TV and walking down the country roads. Her latest goal is to get a fulfilling student job at Watterson Dining Center so her parents can finally shut up about her expensive education, but is fully aware they'll complain no matter what she gets. Karoline hopes to graduate with a degree in either Insurance or International Business and a minor in Spanish in 2014.

Scroll-Point-and-Click Composition?: The Generic Complexities of Playlists

Amy Hicks

This article explores the compositional processes involved when creating playlists. While it may seem that it's as easy as scroll-point-and-click, composing in this genre requires some serious brain power. This article looks specifically at organizational methods, purposes, functions, and the emotions required to make a successful playlist. If you think it's just putting some of your favorite songs together all willy-nilly, read on.

Sitting in my favorite booth at a local coffee house, toiling away at my latest project, I look to my right and see the twenty-something at the next table with old-school headphones placed firmly over his ears. His head bobs almost imperceptibly and his foot taps in a steady rhythm. I am enthralled, amazed, and wary that he can be so into the music that is pouring through the headphones' tiny speakers and still be able to type at a consistent pace on his PC. And thumb through a book in the brief moments he stops typing. And sip his coffee. He's in the zone.

But what is he listening to that can put him in the zone? Prince's "Raspberry Beret"? Lady Gaga's "Poker Face"? The Temptations' "Ain't Too Proud To Beg"? I crane my neck to catch a note or two that may leak from his headphones until my need to preserve the appearance of sanity reigns over my desire to figure out what it is that has kicked this guy into high gear. I decide that regardless of whatever song it may be, the beat, the artist's voice, or the instrumental arrangement have propelled him to kick some serious tail as he types about a zillion words a minute. And I don't doubt that he has created a playlist specifically for his coffee house typing excursions. A playlist of songs

that gets him motivated, allows his fingers to fly effortlessly over his laptop's keyboard, and causes him to be immersed in music that, for him, says "get this homework done now."

Most of us make special playlists for different occasions and situations: The Yeah Yeah Yeahs and Spoon for working out at the gym, Bach and Schubert for studying in the library, The Black Keys and The Moaners for walking from class to class. (Heck, I'm listening to The Scissor Sisters—my go-to typing music—as I write this piece.) These playlists, no matter what type(s) of music they may be, are created with a specific purpose in mind. The songs amp you up, calm you down, or keep you moving. These songs are made for walking through the quad, running on the treadmill, and solving an equation for math class.

The songs seem to "fit" a particular occasion or activity.

But how do *we* make these songs "fit" these various situations? The genre of playlists seems so straightforward, uncomplicated, and easy to define. I think most of us would agree that a playlist is a list of songs, grouped together on some sort of device—mp3 player or iPod, computer, or CD—to serve a certain function. Simply put, you select a song, then another, and another, until you have a nice little list of tracks, created by you for your own listening pleasure. And modern technology has certainly made creating personal playlists less time-consuming. It's as easy as scroll-point-and-click.

Nevertheless, when you really think about it, maybe this genre is not as simple as it seems. The ability to sequence songs in a specific order takes thought and considerable attentiveness to the mood or the things that we wish to accomplish while listening to a playlist. For example, Laura has a "go to sleep" playlist. As opposed to the playlist that I imagine the guy at the coffee shop had that propelled him to push through taxing schoolwork, Laura's playlist is composed for a very different, yet very specific, purpose. For her playlist, she uses songs to lull her to sleep.

After talking with Laura a bit more, I learned that composing this particular playlist is full of various twists and turns. She notes, "I try to listen to songs that I don't know the lyrics to (so I can't sing along in my head and my mind isn't busy while I'm trying to fall asleep). They are peaceful songs, they especially are not 'screamo' or hard rock" (Fromme). Notice that Laura thoughtfully considers not only *how* songs can help her fall asleep, but also *what* it is exactly about these songs that produces this effect. She realizes that knowing every lyric to a song may make her mind "busy," and this will not generate a serene "go to sleep" experience for her. Also, Laura thinks critically about what genre of music is appropriate for her playlist. She identifies acoustic and indie

music as good choices and notes that “‘screamo’ or hard rock” are not suitable choices for this playlist. Laura literally composes a playlist by choosing very specific songs that will affect a certain experience she wants to have, and most interestingly, she places these tracks in a specific sequence: “Goodnight Laura” by Spoon first, ones that she doesn’t know the lyrics to next, and then some of her favorite songs that she does know the lyrics to at the end. Since she figures that she will already be asleep by the time her favorite songs are playing, Laura believes that these tracks won’t be a distraction. Put simply, it seems that there is a lot of thought put into the organization of this playlist.

Let’s take a look at another example. Brock organizes his playlists in a very interesting way—by designating them with specific categorical titles. He notes, “If I’m feeling happy or excited, I listen to my playlist titled Happy. If I need to study or relax, I play my playlist titled Relax and so long and so forth” (Harrell). Brock pays special attention to the emotion that he wishes to have or activity that he wishes to complete when choosing a playlist to listen to. This attention to mood and activity doesn’t seem too different than what most people experience when they title their playlists.

But this is where it gets more complicated: Brock spends a lot of time thinking about which song will go where and in which playlist. Instead of the simple scroll-point-and-click compositional method I discussed above, he carefully attends to how each song makes him feel before moving a track into a category. Brock describes his organizational process here:

In order for songs to be placed into the appropriate categories, I have to listen to each one a TON of times so that I can see how it makes me feel. Sometimes a song that’s supposed to be happy can make me sad and vice versa. I truly need to almost memorize the lyrics before I can ever make a final decision as to where I should put it. That’s why before I put a song in any special playlist it has to start off in the playlist titled Brock’s. Once I’ve listened to it enough times I then switch it to the appropriate category and then repeat the steps all over again for a new song. (Harrell)

Brock’s explanation clearly shows how much time, effort, and thought he puts into composing each playlist and illustrates that his organizational processes are anything but straightforward. His process involves multiple steps: listening, thinking, memorizing, moving tracks to different spots, etc. But perhaps the more important things to note are that this process makes sense for Brock and that he created these organizational strategies to benefit his composition of personal playlists.

Both Laura’s and Brock’s processes show how composing in this genre requires a certain amount of logic. They must think about the songs, the order in which to put them, and how they want to designate these lists with titles or

categories. Yet, their compositional methods are deeply rooted in the personal as well. Laura's bedtime playlist is a one-of-a-kind text—it's safe to say that no one else would compose a playlist that is identical to hers. While I'm sure lots of people have specific playlists created for the purpose of going to sleep, it's unlikely that others will think to choose the exact tracks that Laura did. Even if someone did select the same songs, would they put them in the same order? Moreover, if Laura shared her playlist with someone else, would listening to it elicit the same response for this person? *Very* unlikely. And for Brock, he has consciously established a method of organization that works for him, and the way in which he composes his playlist is a highly individualized process.

But what is perhaps even more striking about Brock's mode of organization is that his emotional state profoundly influences his ability to group his tracks under appropriate designations. He must tap into not only what he is feeling at a particular moment in time but also how his emotions could be heightened or influenced by particular songs placed into a specific, aptly titled playlist. Rational thought and emotion drive his admittedly time-consuming and even taxing mode of organization and composition. Thinking about *what* we like and *how* we feel seems to come to us naturally, and I don't know if we consciously contemplate these things very often, much less question *why* we like these things and *why* we feel certain ways. Yet, for Brock, he deliberately explores these regularly taken-for-granted sensations. And it is precisely the act of composing in this genre that compels him to do just this.

To compose successful playlists, although they seem so simple to create, actually requires us to use a good bit of brain power. We have to think about various components, whether it is song selection, genre of music, purpose of the completed playlist, what emotion we want to experience, etc., as Laura's and Brock's compositional processes have clearly evidenced.

So, is composing in this genre *really* as easy as scroll-point-and-click?

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Amy Hicks is a native Mississippian (y'all) and moved to Normal to pursue a PhD in English Studies. When she's not reading, writing, or teaching, she's probably watching reality TV and catching up on celebrity gossip.

How To: Write a Letter to an Elected Official

John Wons, Kelly Boyce,
Sara Civitello, Laken Onderisin,
Blake Rosensteel

In this collaborative article, we begin by discussing why you might want to write a letter to an elected official. Then we identify six general guidelines for writing a persuasive letter. As examples of writing in this genre, we include two letters: one for continued support for the Illinois 4-H program and the other for shutting down the tobacco industry.

So you are beginning to write a letter to one or many representatives of a community, or a certain body of people. This has to be an important representative, not a group of peers; not a group of friends; and not a relative or even a co-worker. You are writing this letter because the issue is not something you can change yourself. Therefore, you write a letter to someone with the power to make a difference. You, of course, want to change the mind of this person or group. You have an opinion to be shared, and you feel very strongly about this subject. So, “How do you do this in the most effective way?” you ask. Well, with the help of Sara’s and Natalie’s letters, we will tell you how to write the most persuasive letter to an elected official. (You can find these letters at the end of this guide.)

You would want to include things like information about the subject that makes it seem like you have researched their project. For example, in the letters from Sara and Natalie, they both knew a lot about the issues at hand, and their knowledge on the topic makes their letters so much more effective. Sara did a great job of showing her knowledge about the different cancer stages. If the official reads your letter, and you have all your facts askew, they

definitely will not take your advice into consideration. On the other hand, if you have all of the details and facts correct, they will be more likely to listen to what you have to say. In Natalie's letter, she talked about the 4-H problem and how research has shown that members of the 4-H are more likely than other youths to have the highest positive youth development trajectory.

Another thing you might want to include in the letter would be personal experiences. In Sara's letter, she gives personal experiences. She talks about how her aunt played such a big role in her life, by taking her and her sister in. She relates personal stories such as when her aunt taught her how to condition her hair or when she was excited about prom. Natalie used her personal experience in the 4-H program by talking about the ways that it has helped her to grow into the young adult she is today. Most likely, if you add personal experiences, the reader will sympathize with you and take more of what you are saying into account. Personalization is the key to persuasion. Along with giving personal stories about the topic, you want to introduce yourself. If the elected official feels closer to you and knows your name, he or she will probably look deeper into your opinion.

In addition, when writing to convey an opinion to a representative of a community, you want to use proper English. Both writers used proper English in their letters and were very effective when it comes to supporting their opinion. They both knew that the readers of their letters would be important people of the community. Since you can't meet them in person, you want to give them the best impression possible through your writing. If you know your audience, you know that these are highly educated people. They are way more likely to read a typed letter than a sloppy letter written in marker on a napkin. That's surely exaggerated, but you get the idea. Do not use slang words or swear words and try to be as professional as possible.

Try to support their opinion but show ways your idea or plan is better than theirs. When writing this letter, you really want to agree with the overall plan of the project instead of directly insulting their ideas and saying they are "wrong." Being as you have a different opinion than the representative to which you are writing, you don't want to be defensive and sharp. You want to first make sure they know that you are on-board with the new plan; you would just like to make a few changes. Natalie does this by acknowledging the budget crisis in Illinois and how there are some programs that are going to be left out in next year's budget. Both letters show concern towards the company/board member to whom they are addressing their letter.

You should also give a concrete plan for them to consider! In Sara's letter to the head of Marlboro, she suggests making the warning labels bigger and more noticeable to the eye. With phrases such as "may result in diseases,

cancers, and or many other health complications.” Natalie’s plan is simple—continue funding for the 4-H. She mentions the advantages of keeping the 4-H program in the budget. The leadership taught to thousands of 6–18 year olds involved in the program is well worth the cost.

Oops! Sara changed her mind and broke the genre rules. We feel she had a good reason; read her letter to find out what she did and why.

Get others to join. By doing this, you will have more of a word at the board level. Making petitions or getting other well-known community leaders to back your decision would be a great idea. If you think about it, if the companies see their competitors supporting it, or other well known community leaders, they would be more likely to consider and join sides with your plan. It is always worth a shot to extend your letters to others in the town; you never know what could happen.

So basically, *How To: “Write a Persuasive Letter to an Elected Official”* goes as follows:

1. Do your research—(need a legitimate reason for why you are arguing)
2. Introduce yourself—(make it personal, make it touch the city officials’ personal lives)
3. Know your audience—(address the letter formally, be polite, make it professional, and use proper grammar)
4. Give a concrete plan—(show how it will affect the community)
5. Get others to join—(get the community to support your opinion)

And finally...

6. Always tell the truth! Give your complete and honest opinion, and explain clearly and simply how you want to better the community.

Natalie’s Letter:

Dear Governor Quinn,

I am writing about the Illinois 4-H Program, which gives youth the chance to explore their interests and develop as leaders. I am asking for your continued support of the organization. For the 6 years I have been a member, I have blossomed.

With 4-H, youth can start getting involved at the age of 6! This involvement includes talking in front of the club, sharing ideas, and participating in group activities such as games and discussions. Kids also find belonging through being a part of something important. Working with others is also a skill that kids learn in 4-H. Teenagers love 4-H too, but it gives younger kids a head start in particular.

4-H members also learn to appreciate and understand what it means to serve the community and help others. A Tuft University Research study shows that 4-H youth are 3.5 times more likely to have a higher contribution trajectory than other youth. Many 4-H conferences incorporate a service project in them. The Greene County 4-H Federation raises money in various ways (such as a hot chocolate stand) to buy blankets for the elderly. This service differs from other ways of volunteering because it is a social event. Kids and teenagers get involved with friends and see the fun side of helping others and humbling themselves.

4-H taught me so much about myself. Through numerous committees and volunteer projects, I realized that I wanted to have a career doing essentially the same thing. Planning events and 4-H involvement in general led me to my current college major: Business Marketing. I found my passion in 4-H and am now pursuing it.

Keeping the 4-H program in the budget is an investment in our youth... just like college. The same Tuft Research Study mentioned above shows that in longitudinal studies, 4-H youth are 1.5 times more likely than other youth to have the highest positive youth development trajectory.

I really just want you to know how much the organization means to me and what it does for a couple hundred thousand 6–18 year olds. All I can ask is that 4-H remains a valued part of the budget in the State of Illinois.

Sincerely,
Natalie Edwards

Sara's Letter

Dear Mr. Gifford (President and Chief Executive Officer of Phillip Morris USA—the company that produces Marlboro),

I would first like to introduce myself. My name is Sara Civitello, and I'm a student at Illinois State University. The story I'm about to share with you is probably a story you hear way too often. The story is about my Aunt Kathy. She, like many of the people who smoke cigarettes (her favorite were Marlboro red—hence the reason I am writing to you), developed lung cancer at the young age of forty-nine. Her life, along with my family, was destroyed because of the effects of smoking. Please take a few minutes to read her story below.

On April 22, 2010, I got a call while I was at work. The call was from my mom; she said someone is coming to pick you up. Immediately I was confused. She knew I was at work and didn't get off until eight. It was only a little past six o'clock. The next few words she said will haunt me for the rest of my life: "Sara, Aunt Kathy is dead."

My Aunt Kathy was always a part of my life. Ever since I can remember, she's been there teaching me the basics of life. For instance, when I was four, she taught me how to condition my hair. I remember her explaining that if you left the conditioner in while you washed your body, your hair would be extremely soft. To this day I still use that technique.

I moved in with my Aunt Kathy the summer of 2009. My parents lost their house, and my sister and I had nowhere to live. Aunt Kathy took us in. That whole summer my sister, my aunt, and I fought. It was always about stupid things like whose turn it was to do the dishes or my sister and I making our bed. Now that I look back at it, I wish I just cleaned up after myself. I wish I just cleaned up after everyone.

On October 7, 2009, after going to the doctor for abdominal pain, my aunt was diagnosed with stage three lung cancer. The stages of cancer represent how much the cancer has spread. Stage one means the cancer is localized to one part of the body. Stage two means the cancer is locally advanced. Stage three, the stage my aunt had at this point in time, means the cancer is also locally advanced. And the last stage, stage four, means the cancer has metastasized, or spread to other organs or throughout the body. She had a tumor on her lung that was hitting a nerve, causing her abdominal pain. Although she had stage three cancer, my aunt and her doctor were both very optimistic that with treatment she could have a full recovery.

My aunt went to every doctor's appointment, every radiation and chemotherapy treatment, and although her body was in horrible pain, she stayed hopeful. After almost two months of treatment, my aunt returned to her doctor to see how much the tumor shrunk. What they found though was not what either of them expected; the cancer spread. It spread to her spine, neck, and rib-bones. My aunt, at this point, had stage-four cancer.

In a few short months, my aunt was unable to work. Her days consisted of sleeping or attempting to sleep—since she was in so much pain that it made it hard to do very much of anything. She could barely eat, and when she did, her throat burned from the chemotherapy. She, someone who has always had curves, was so thin that she couldn't find jeans that wouldn't fall off of her. Her face was always ghost-white, and she couldn't take a walk without becoming extremely exhausted.

One day after coming back from school, my parents told me that my aunt was in the hospital. Her entire right foot turned purple. It was dying. The reason, to this day, is unknown. My aunt was in the hospital from that point until the day she died.

My senior prom, something my aunt had been waiting for since I can remember, was a couple days after she went into the hospital. My sister and I knew seeing us in our dresses before going to prom meant a lot to her, and for that reason we and our whole group of about ten people went to the hospital in prom dresses and tuxedos to take pictures. I remember that day she seemed so happy. She had a glow about her like she did before she found out she had cancer. She was smiling and yelling at everyone like she always used to do. I remember thinking, maybe she's getting better?

Three days later she had a stroke. The stroke paralyzed the whole left side of her body. I remember going to see her in the hospital a couple hours after she had her stroke. She had to use the bathroom but was unable to walk or even sit up by herself. Her only son, Joey, had to pick her up and place a bed pan

While writing my letter and then rereading it later, I noticed an instability. The intensity of my aunt's story just didn't match this crossed-out area in which I provided alternatives. And though I realized this, I didn't go with my gut feeling to change it. In my high school English classes, we were taught to follow the rules regarding writing. And that if you didn't, you were wrong. For that reason, I thought, "I'm supposed to provide alternatives, so that's what I have to do even if it doesn't exactly fit what I'm writing about." So I did. I turned in my paper with these alternatives. To my surprise, my college English professor returned my paper with a suggestion to "break" the genre by not including alternatives and instead "stick it to him." The thing about college writing and writing in general is that there are no set rules. Genres are there to give writers a starting point. But while writing, one genre might actually turn into a new genre, such as my letter. For that reason, I write a more appropriate conclusion that you can find at the end of the letter.

under her so she could go to the bathroom. I kept thinking, this is so wrong. A son should never have to help his mother go to the bathroom. She was also unable to talk. It was as if she was an infant again. I never knew how much a stroke could do to you; I never knew how much cancer could do to you. Two days later she died. At the time she died, the cancer had spread from her lungs to her bones to her adrenal glands, her kidneys, and her liver.

Everyone I talk to says she held on to see us go to prom. They tell me that my sister and I meant the world to her and that she thought of us like her own daughters. And although we fought and sometimes I couldn't stand her, I wish there was someone in heaven telling her how much she meant to me.

My aunt smoked cigarettes for thirty-five years. She, like many other members of my family, started smoking at a very young age and because of the addictive substances (nicotine) in cigarettes, was unable to quit. I never want another family member to experience that. I wish no one ever has to experience what my aunt experienced. ~~And although the best possible solution for preventing that experience is to shut down the cigarette industry as a whole, I understand that that is unrealistic and for that reason changes need to be made.~~

~~As a business major, I understand the situation you're in. Your goals, similar to mine, are not to kill people with the products you sell, but instead, you and your co-workers are trying to competitively make profits and maintain jobs in this economic crisis. For that reason, I am not writing to you to attempt to convince you to stop producing cigarettes. Instead, I suggest making people more aware of the side-effects of smoking, so they are fully aware of what they are getting themselves into.~~

~~Cigarette labels are a way of informing consumers of the side-effects of smoking. Currently cigarette labels include warnings such as "Smoking by pregnant women may result in fetal injury, premature birth, and low birth weight" and, "Cigarette smoke contains carbon monoxide." Although there are warnings, the United States has the smallest, least prominent warnings placed on their cigarette packages. The warnings typically are in small print and have colors and fonts that closely resemble the rest of the package—integrated so they don't stand out on the package.~~

~~Instead of camouflaging warnings, you should make the warnings more noticeable. By making the warnings more noticeable, consumers would be more likely to read them. And hopefully after reading that something could harm or possibly kill you, less people will smoke. Including messages that are straightforward such as, "May result in diseases, cancers, and or many other health complications" would also be desirable. By doing so, you would be properly informing consumers of the risk of smoking, without being shady by using words that a common person wouldn't know the meaning of. As a result your company wouldn't be at blame for the side-effects of doing so.~~

~~Thank you again for taking time out of your life to read my aunt's story. I hope the suggestions I gave you will help your company improve the warnings on cigarette packages and overall improve your company.~~

Thank you again,
Sara Civitello

Sara's new ending:

My aunt smoked cigarettes for thirty-five years. She, like many other members of my family, started smoking at a very young age and because of the addictive substances (nicotine) in cigarettes, was unable to quit. I never want another family member to experience that. I wish no one would ever have to experience what my aunt experienced. And the only way to ensure that is to shut down the industry as a whole.

You're probably thinking, "Wow she's honestly asking me to quit my job, and attempt to shut down the industry that provides for my family?" It may sound like an impossible request, but think about this. What if this story wasn't about my aunt? What if this happened to someone you loved? Some one such as a close friend, a parent, or even a child? How could you live with yourself knowing that you contributed to killing someone close to you just to make a few bucks?

At Illinois State, I'm studying your field of work, business. From what I've learned, a president of a company is very valuable and could easily find a new job. One person can certainly make a difference, especially with your resources. Do the right thing and stop the killing of innocent people.



John Wons is an aspiring Public Relations major. He enjoys free writing and song writing in his spare time. He loves working out and attending ISU sporting events. He is very grateful for his family, who motivates him to do well in school while also being his biggest supporters. He wouldn't be the person he is today without the help of his friends and family members. He hopes someday to write a book.



Kelly Boyce is from the small town of Poplar Grove, Illinois. She is an undergraduate student at ISU studying Kinesiology and hopes to someday work for a university as an Athletic Trainer. After graduating from Illinois State, she plans to earn a Cosmetology degree, and pursue a part-time job as a hair stylist during her free time.



Sara Civitello is currently a sophomore at Illinois State University. Sara is studying accounting and plans to become a Certified Public Accountant (CPA). Sara was on the Dean's List her first semester at ISU, placing her in the top 10% of her class at the College of Business.



Laken Onderisin is currently a sophomore at ISU from Lockport, Illinois. She is studying to pursue a career in nursing and is a member of the Illinois State competitive cheerleading team. GO REDBIRDS!



Blake Rosensteel is from Bloomington, IL and attended Tri-Valley High School in Downs, IL. He played basketball and baseball, and for Senior Class Awards, was voted "Most likely to come up with a smart comment for everything."

Taking the High Road: Why Learning to Write Isn't Easy and What We Can Do About It

Meghann Meeusen

Meghann Meeusen recounts her struggle to master a genre she thought she understood, only to realize the complexity that comes from subtle differences in purpose, function and context from one kind of writing to another. She discovers that to become a successful writer in a challenging genre, she cannot expect to easily transfer knowledge or practice until it makes perfect, but must instead rely on a purposeful analysis of genre features and contextual factors that make every type of writing unique. Meghann describes how grappling with such concepts as high and low road transfer, genre immersion, and analysis of rhetorical context helps her to meet writing challenges that may seem insurmountable.

Writing isn't easy. Which is strange, right? I mean, we do it every day. Think about the last time you went a whole day without writing. No email. No text messaging. No shopping list scribbled on the back of a receipt. No notes for class. Can you do it? Can you think of a day when you didn't write a single word? In fact, I can't think of many things I do as regularly as writing. Brushing my teeth, I suppose. Driving my car. Making myself a cup of tea. Yet the fact of the matter is that I practice those activities so often that they have become easy. I had to learn how to boil the water for tea, and how long to let the tea bag seep in the cup so it isn't too strong or too weak. It took a while to get the hang of waiting long enough not to burn my mouth, but not so long that the tea gets cold and yucky. But now that I know how, I can make tea when I'm half asleep, and I still end up with a pretty successful cup. So if we write with the same kind of regularity as other basic activities we do every day, why isn't writing easy too?

Does Practice Make Perfect?

It took a long time for me to figure out the answer to that question. This is in part because for much of my life, writing did seem pretty easy. I can spit out an email like nobody's business. My text messages are witty and succinct. And I'm pretty good at school writing too...well, one kind of school writing, at least. After years of practice, I'm pretty savvy at writing a literary analysis paper for class. I'm sorry to say that I don't have a secret to how to do this, however. In part, I can thank my mother (who is an elementary school teacher) for reading through my papers and insisting I revise over and over and over again. I suppose that's really the key—it was repetition that cemented this genre in my mind. Class after class of writing how Hester Prynne feels about wearing that red letter A and why Lady Macbeth couldn't get that damn spot out, out, out—after writing enough of these papers, I simply caught on.

Yet, it certainly wasn't easy. What makes that kind of class paper really tricky is that teachers often don't provide a lot of instruction about it. A teacher asks students to think critically and look deeply into the literature, read a story closely and pick out details that seem meaningful. Vague, but I just gave it a try. Maybe the paper didn't always turn out so great, but the professor would appreciate that I had proofread my essay enough that it was at least pretty coherent, and he'd tell me half a dozen things that he didn't like. *"Don't use the 'to be' verb so much. Make sure your thesis is at the end of your introduction. You really shouldn't use clichés or spout broad generalizations about society that you can't prove."* Check, check, check. In the next essay, I'd follow these pretty straight forward instructions, and usually it worked. The professor would plop an "A" on my paper, and I'd pat myself on the back, grateful that I could add writing to my skill repertoire right alongside driving and making a mean cup of tea. Then I'd get to the next class, and the list would change—this professor cares a lot about using sources to back up assertions and wants me to master MLA rules. Check, check...move on. And pretty soon, by simply making an effort to follow all the collected rules that professors told me were the "most important," I could write what I was told was a pretty strong essay.

So when I graduated from college with my fancy (and relatively impractical) English major, I was pretty convinced that I was a good writer. I felt confident that I knew how to pick out an interesting detail about a novel and expound on it, pulling out the select quotes I could understand from six or eight critical articles to add credibility and back up the ideas I presented. In fact, I would even say that I believed I had mastered the literary analysis genre, and thought that this meant I was set for life. With my fabulous writing portfolio in hand, complete with essays discussing portrayals of women and the "quest for identity" in *Ella Enchanted*, *Harry Potter* and *Island of the Blue*

Dolphins, I was fairly sure that I was only one step away from publishing my ideas in academic journals. I knew I would need to develop these skills more—I mean, that’s what graduate school is for anyway, right? But I had the basics, and I was ready to go.

And I did improve. I went to graduate school and instead of writing 8-10 page papers, I was writing 20 pages. “*It should be more like the journal articles you are reading,*” I was told. Ok, deep breath, I can handle this. I’ll simply use the same skills I’ve used before—transfer what professors told me about “good writing” in class papers to this new situation. I found out later I was trying to employ what researchers call “low road transfer,”¹ which they define as “automatic triggering of well-practiced routines in circumstances where there is considerable perceptual similarity to the original learning context.” Sounds complicated, but the example helped: if you can drive a car, it will be pretty easy to learn how to drive a truck. This is exactly what I was doing...writing essays that looked a lot like the ones I had always been writing, only longer with more sources and more examples. And once again, I was rewarded with a big fat A on many of my papers...success!

So when my teachers started talking about how I should be thinking about submitting some of the work I was doing for class to academic journals, I thought the same would be true. An academic article is only an essay after all, albeit one written by someone who claims expertise on a topic and can back that up by using research effectively. This is a lot like the writing I was already doing: about the same number of pages, uses sources to back up what I have to say about literature, has a thesis statement that says something that hasn’t been said before. There were some differences of course; I noticed that articles all use a fancy title where the first part is clever and the second part informative, like “Disdain or Ignorance? Literary Theory and the Absence of Children’s Literature” or “Reading the Shards and Fragments: Holocaust Literature for Young Readers.” I can do that. Academic essays use footnotes to talk about sources too, which incidentally beefs up the works cited page. No problem there. Low road transfer, here I come...like a car and a truck, the essays I wrote for school used skills similar enough to an academic article that I thought I should be able to automatically transfer these skills to the new situation. In no time, I’ll be a published academic. Easy, right?

All Genres are Not Created Equal

No. Not easy. Somewhere between adding footnotes and writing more pages, I realized that my writing wasn’t at all like an academic article. To make matters worse, the stakes were higher. I wasn’t writing for class anymore;

I was writing to get published. Getting published means getting a job... it means that someone would pay me to study literature. Here is my dream, and suddenly, it depends on my ability to write this one specific kind of essay. Plus, as if that isn't enough pressure, there are hundreds of other students who I have to compete with...and guess what? Unlike in class, where in theory if we do what the teacher says, we'd all get As, in this new world, only the people who can produce a text in this genre the *best* are going to live their dream. Insert your choice of dismayed explicative here.

Ok, well, high stakes. Ok. Ok. That's what I say to myself when I'm stressed. I just keep repeating the word ok, over and over again...hoping that if I say it enough, things might actually *be* ok. I've always been a good writer, always have been able to take one kind of writing and make it work in a new situation. Why should this be any different?

But it is different. Every kind of writing is different. All along, I had believed that the kind of writing I was doing for class was the same kind of writing that academics do when they publish their research in journals. In fact, I thought the kind of writing I was doing for class was the same as writing I'd do in any situation. And in the case of an academic journal article, it is very close to the same. However, like my grandfather sometimes says, close only counts in horseshoes and hand-grenades. What I came to realize was that I'd mastered a genre—the literary analysis class paper. The problem is that one genre, no matter how similar, isn't the same as another genre. To make matters worse, it is those seemingly small and subtle differences that will sneak up and bite you in the...well, you know what I mean.

I sometimes think of this as genre deception. One genre hiding in sheep's clothing, pretending it is just like another genre when really, it is not. I suppose this is being a little critical. I doubt that the class essay is really trying to pass itself off as the academic article; instead, it is more like *practice* for the “real thing.” However, the problem is that when I practice, practice makes perfect and suddenly, I found myself so good at the practice, I couldn't do the real thing.

All this time, I had been relying on low road transfer, while what I really needed was high road transfer. High road transfer “depends on deliberate, mindful abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context for application to another” and requires “reflective thought in abstracting from one context and seeking connections with other.”²² This may seem confusing, but like the car and truck example, it is simpler than it sounds. High road transfer is a lot like low road transfer, except that you have to analyze the new activity instead of just assuming that one kind of driving is like another. So maybe it is more like knowing how to drive a car and being told that now you have to drive a

huge piece of farm equipment. There are some similarities, so the idea is that to figure out how to drive the tractor, you analyze what you did to drive the car and see how it might apply (or not apply) in the new situation. But you also have to study the new situation and think about what makes it a unique activity. In other words, it isn't enough to rely on my practice makes perfect mentality. You can practice driving a car until you are blue in the face, but that practice alone might not be enough to transfer this knowledge to the new situation, no matter how similar it is. Because no matter how many times you drive a car, it doesn't mean that when you find yourself in a tractor, you'll know how to plow a field.

Now granted, if you just keep trying to learn something new, you'll probably eventually get it...trial and error is a wonderful learning tool, after all. And that applies to writing as well. If you just keep trying a certain kind of writing, immerse yourself in it and practice it over and over again, chances are that eventually you'll get pretty good at it, just like I did with the literary analysis class paper. This is what researchers call *genre immersion*.³ However, although immersion in a genre is helpful, it often isn't enough. Think of immersion in a new culture; if you move to France and become a part of the society, eventually you will start picking up French mannerisms and language naturally. This, however, takes years, and even then, sometimes doesn't work.

So what do you do if you can't immerse yourself in French culture for years and years? Well, you can speed up this process by analyzing and studying French culture and what makes it unique. You can think about the times you traveled to other places, deciding which of the shifts will be helpful in this new context. Purposeful reflection on the new situation, why it is the way it is, and how you can apply or alter what you already know can help you be successful without having to rely on trial and error—and that's high road transfer.

Practice + Purpose Makes More Perfect

In the same way, although immersion in a genre of writing can really work, sometimes you need something more. By purposefully analyzing the features of the new genre and trying to figure out what makes it unique, I was able to more effectively adapt what I knew to a new situation. But to do this, I had to consider one more part of the equation...context.

To adapt my skills to meet new expectations, I had to understand why those expectations were important; essentially, I needed to know the purpose or reason behind the writing choices I was trying to mimic. For example, in the writing I did for class, I used critical sources in primarily two ways. First,

I used what scholars wrote about the texts and ideas I was studying to back up my own assertions. “*Give your assertions some credibility by quoting others who agree,*” professors had told me, and a carefully inserted quote works great to accomplish this. Secondly, after reading a book about academic writing called *They Say, I Say*,⁴ I realized that the basis of my essay should be to enter into discourse, which basically means (like the title of the book indicates), that I should consider what critics say about a topic and situate my own discussion in response.

These two uses of sources in class papers represent features of the genre of the class paper, and certainly, these features transfer to an academic article. However, what I failed to realize was that the context or purpose behind these writing choices changes in an article for publication. Instead of proving to a professor that I had done some research, I needed to prove to an entire academic community that not only am I an expert in the various topics I’m writing about, but that my argument emerges from specific understanding of what has already been established about these topics. This may seem like a small change, but it completely revolutionizes the construction of an article. My writing had to change, and to understand how, I needed first to understand *why* the new genre is constructed the way it is.

To do this, I had to reflect on the genre itself and analyze not only what makes it unique, but why those characteristics exist. Even though the genre of the class paper and the academic article are similar, their context, purpose and audience are very different. Adapting to these differences means thinking about why writers make the choices they make, and I’ve found that the fastest way to do this is through genre analysis. For me, this means looking at examples of a particular kind of writing and tracing the moves that the writer makes, then talking to writers of these kinds of texts about how and why they make these moves. If I can understand what ideologies developing over time have influenced the reasons for making these moves, I can start to see not only what I need to do in my writing, but why. Doing so helps me see that my writing isn’t just one isolated text meeting one particular expectation by one audience, but a small piece in a complex genre puzzle. This knowledge has helped me to battle the genre deception that caused me so much strife.

I wish I could say I have won this battle, that I have mastered the “scholarly journal article” genre and conquered it once and for all. I wish I could tell you that one day it finally clicked and all the pieces fell into place. In some ways, this has happened. Yet, I can’t ignore the need for genre immersion—not just for a semester or two, but over and over and over again—years of repetition and reinforcement. You can’t possibly master any genre after only a few tries, and for some genres, it takes a lifetime of work. It isn’t easy. Writing isn’t

easy. But in my life, being able to analyze a genre and its context has helped accelerate the process of figuring out and mastering new kinds of writing that seemed insurmountable challenges. Seeing the pieces of the puzzle, but also its context—the picture on the puzzle box, how many pieces there are, why they are shaped the way they are shaped—has helped me to start assembling the puzzle in a more meaningful way. This knowledge has been far more valuable than mastering savvy semicolon usage or expert quotation style. Instead, I’ve learned a lesson that I’ll take with me whenever I encounter a new kind of writing. I know that analyzing a genre in all its complexity can help me transfer what I already know into what I need to know. Low road transfer may work great in many situations, but I’ve learned that taking the high road can help me navigate the treacherous paths of writing with far greater ease.

Endnotes

1. Among others, D.N. Perkins and Gabriel Salomen discuss the ideas of high and low road transfer in their 1988 essay “Teaching for Transfer,” a concept further explored by Angela Rounsaville, Rachel Goldberg, and Anis Bawarshi in their essay, “From Incomes to Outcomes: FYW Students’ Prior Genre Knowledge, Meta-Cognition and the Question of Transfer.”
2. See #1.
3. For a comprehensive overview of genre theory and ideas of immersion, consider Anis S. Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff’s *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*, Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin’s study in *Genre Knowledge in Disciplinary Communication* and Mary Soliday’s “Mapping Classroom Genres in a Science in Society Course.”
4. Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein’s 2006 *They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter In Academic Writing*. Although this text offers a clear articulation of some of the most complicated ways that writers enter academic discourse, the way it stresses a template model can be very problematic. Simply following their templates can cause some of the problems I struggled with, for writing in a new genre is more complicated than simply following a set of rules.

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Don't Be Quiet: Talk as a Tool for Improved Writing

Elizabeth Williams

In this article, I discuss why it's important to talk about our ideas and our writing. The act of speaking makes our brain do things that writing alone or thinking silently can't accomplish, and I pull from Lev Vygotsky and Kenneth Bruffee to illustrate this. I conclude with an unfortunate example of what can happen when writers don't talk to others about their writing.

Okay, so maybe that's a little bit of an understatement. I *love* to talk.

I like to talk. And, I do it all the time whether anyone is listening or not. Grade school was difficult for me because I could not stay quiet. I needed to talk to get through the day. My teachers often admonished me for talking even when it would seem that talking should have been allowed. I particularly

I had never had a meal in my lifetime where the conversation wasn't at least as important as the food.

remember being scolded in the cafeteria during lunch time. From the very beginning of our educational experiences, we are taught that talking is not a valuable tool for learning. While I understand that teachers need to teach the "proper" classroom etiquette of listening to the teacher and respecting everybody's different needs for quiet work time, some of the restrictions on talking are not at all reasonable.

Seriously, to expect a kid like me to stay virtually silent for seven hours is really ridiculous.

What I've found in my research, and what I want to share with you, is that my eight-year old instincts about talking were right. As it turns out, talking is a vital part of the writing process. A vital part that we were all taught to ignore or suppress as children. Talking allows for actual cognitive work that can't be done silently. It allows us as writers to physically "join a conversation" with others in our field. It gives us

Okay, so this is quite a bit more complicated than I imagined it at eight, but it's pretty cool, and I'll *talk* you through it.

A complicated neuroscience word for "thinking."

the opportunity for immediate feedback, and it allows us to hear our own perspective within a larger social context.

The first thing that talking allows us to do is use parts of our brains that aren't used when just writing alone. If you have ever trained for an athletic event such as running a marathon, you know that trainers encourage you to do cross-training in order to engage and develop different groups of muscles. Talking is cross-training for writers. Lev Vygotsky says that the most significant movement in learning occurs when speech meets practical activity¹. So even though we're talking about writing and not about getting candy, his idea about being able to flex certain brain muscles by talking is still important. For us, Vygotsky's theory indicates that we actually *think* differently when we talk. We activate different parts of our brains by talking. Other scholars say that talking allows us to learn with other people. Kenneth Bruffee says, "The first steps to learning to think better are learning to converse better."² Bruffee's idea is really interesting when we think about the ways we were taught to think. Think if we expected a child who was only crawling to suddenly stand up and run a marathon. Impossible, right? To run a marathon, you have to learn to walk first. Bruffee is saying that learning to think (and write) is the marathon and conversation or learning to talk is the same as learning to walk. We have to learn to talk before we can learn to think or write. Talking builds the muscles that help us move to the next step.

I should probably tell you that Vygotsky studied the ways children and apes responded to a challenge to solve a problem or puzzle to get a piece of candy.

Forgive me because we're going to go back to the marathon example. I pretty much only run when chased, but I completely admire people who can put one foot in front of the other for 26.2 miles. And, let's be honest. Sometimes writing feels as taxing as a marathon.

Talking helps us flex the mental muscles that writing alone doesn't flex, but it also serves as a way into the field that you're interested in. I want you to imagine a cocktail party. When you come into the room, there are lots of groups of conversations going on all over the room. Some of the conversations are really lively and others are pretty calm. As the new person to the party, you are tempted to stand in the corner and just observe. However, at some point, you are going to have to join a conversation. You have to walk up to a group, listen for a minute and then introduce yourself and contribute to the group's conversation. This cocktail party is a metaphor for your discipline. The guests are all the people who have ever done research or writing within your field. However, these guests were never actually all in one room together. They lived at different times in the history of the discipline, and even if they were alive at the same time, they might never have met. However, they do have conversations. Within any field of study, people who work in that field respond to, argue

Just go with me on this one. I promise, I have a point.

I'm sorry that the metaphorical cocktail party didn't have drinks or snacks. Feel free to provide your own.

with, or build off what others have said before them.³ Most of the time this work is done in published writing and research results. In order to take part in “the conversation,” you have to know its context and you have to step up to a conversation and add your opinion or comments. While this move can be somewhat difficult in writing because you are responding to people who aren’t actively provoking you, it is much easier in person. Talking with your professor or your classmates is the first step to entering a conversation. It is an easy way to walk up to the conversation at that metaphorical cocktail party. Talking helps you take that first step into the field you are interested in.

Talking gets us into the conversation of the field, and it also allows for immediate feedback about our writing. At some point, you have turned in a paper and waited anxiously for feedback from your teacher or your reader only to wait for several weeks. Despite our fears about showing our writing to others, we all want someone to read our work and tell us what they thought. Talking about our ideas allows us to get immediate feedback. If we talk about our ideas, our audience has no choice but to respond. As you talk about ideas, the person you are talking to might counter your ideas, affirm that you are right, or give you suggestions for other ideas that might tie in. This type of immediate feedback is invaluable to writing. If we wait for a reader to read and respond to our writing, we are often on to the next project. But, talking is “in the moment.” You can mentally revise your thoughts much easier than you can revise a paper that has been “finished” for weeks. The immediate feedback of talking also allows you to respond to concerns by asking questions and getting answers.

Okay, sometimes I would rather not know what people think of my writing, but I still want to know that someone read it.

Talking is a two-way street in a way that the writing and feedback process is not. Once you have received feedback from a teacher or a reader, there is not a lot of room to ask questions about their feedback or respond to the feedback that was given to you. As an example, think of a movie review. Movie reviewers provide a lot of feedback for actors, directors, and producers. They comment on the things that were great about a movie or they comment on the things that were disastrous. But, the movie review comes too late. By the time the review is published, the movie is complete and showing in the theatre. There is nothing that actors, directors, or producers can do to change the movie. But, think if that movie critic had been allowed to come to the taping or the production of the movie. Maybe their feedback would have given the actor something else to work with to improve their performance. Or, maybe the producer would have chosen to include a scene she deleted because the reviewer said that it was critical to the plot structure. Talking about our ideas is like inviting the critic to the filming of the movie. It allows us to respond to the reader and make changes to our performance before

we produce a final product. Talking to someone about your ideas allows you to get feedback on the ideas that you have written and the ideas that you are too afraid to write. Sometimes as writers we have ideas that seem a little “out there.” Having a conversation about these ideas might encourage you to include them in your writing. But the conversation might also encourage you to ditch those ideas and focus on something different. ~~At any rate, talking is like giving yourself a trial run. You can revise without having to delete massive amounts of text that took you hours to write. The feedback is immediate and can be a really efficient use of your time.~~

You're looking for smiles and nods here.

When my friends' eyes bug out of their heads or when they look really perplexed, I know it is time to move on.

In addition to receiving immediate feedback from others, talking about your writing allows you to hear your own writing in a larger social context. If you have ever had that spontaneous moment of comic genius and thought of the perfect joke or funny comment only to finally tell it out loud and have everyone look at you like you are an alien from another planet, then you know what I'm talking about. ~~Sometimes~~ what seemed funny in my head is not funny at all, and sometimes as it leaves my mouth I know that it is offensive. Writing is like that too. You might write a whole paper, and after turning it in, realize that it was offensive. Hearing your ideas and saying them out loud in conversation helps you hear it before you write it. It allows you to realize that your audience, your readers, are real people with real feelings. Sometimes it is hard to imagine this while we're tapping away at the keyboard. But talking allows us to experience that and hear our ideas as they come out of our mouths.

Oh, come on. I know I'm not the only one who is a stand-up comedian in my head and not at all funny in the real world. Have you ever watched NBC's "Last Comic Standing"? I'm not the only one.

I'm pretty sure that Greg Sammato, managing editor of the Johns-Hopkins student paper, wishes that he had talked about the article he wrote entitled, “Local Bison Bear All at Psi Kappa Psi's Annual Lingerave.” The article, which has since been removed from the newspaper's website, claimed that “fat girls systematically befriend hot girls to get into parties.”⁴ Sammato went on to write various unflattering things about his overweight female peers. As you might guess, critics obliterated Sammato. Sammato's self-defense tactic was to claim that he wasn't a misogynistic creep but that the piece was meant to be satirical. But you see, nobody read the article as satire. Nobody. If Sammato had tried talking ~~about his writing before publishing it, he might have saved himself the grief of having to defend his ideas. I'm pretty sure that if he had run the article past at least one female friend she would have told him that it was offensive, or at least she would have hesitated~~

Personally, I like to think he is a misogynistic creep who meant to write a satire.

Granted, misogynistic creeps don't always have a lot of female friends.

to gush praise at his satire writing skills. Writing, as Sammato found out, is sometimes dangerous business.

We can substantially decrease the danger of writing our ideas for the world to see if we take time to talk about them. In conversations, you might hear yourself say, “Oh, that didn’t come out right,” or “That’s not what I meant to say.” Most of the time, these are totally self-recognized edits. In other words, you don’t necessarily need other people to tell you that it wasn’t right. Just hearing what you’ve said triggers something in your brain that lets you know that your words were a little off. Hearing your words in a larger social context helps you understand some of the implications you didn’t realize you were making. Talking about your ideas allows you to have these self-editing moments in a way that writing alone does not.

I’ll admit that talking about your ideas can often be as scary or scarier than writing about them. But, talking is a useful tool to improve your writing. So, I’ve got some tips on how to cross-train for writing and get into the conversation before you write. First, take full advantage of any in-class time to talk about your writing. Participate in peer workshops; ask questions of your teacher and your peers. But, talking about your ideas doesn’t have to be formal. Do it casually. You can talk about ideas with friends and family members who don’t know much (if anything) about your topic. Remember that you hearing your own words and activating that speech portion of your brain is the important part. You may also want to choose different audiences to talk about your ideas. For instance, conversing with a professor might give you a lot of really good feedback, but talking with a classmate might allow you to bounce ideas off each other and generate even more ideas. Additionally, sometimes talking out loud to yourself can help you achieve the same goals. Most of all, talk. Talk about your ideas. Talk about your writing.

You might want to avoid doing this in public. People will think you’re crazy. Not that I know about it from personal experience or anything.

Which is kind of funny because I just spent this entire paper writing about my talk.

Endnotes

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Turning Speeches into Scholarship: Trajectory through Composition

Rachel Parish

In many cases, college writing seems to be confined to the classroom, seen only by the teacher or fellow peers. However, English composition is capable of trajectory beyond the classroom and into the community of the writer. Through the story of a now-ISU Graduate Student, this article presents one possible way in which supposed “non-school” writing, in this case public speaking, can actually benefit the writer in both academic and public atmospheres.

Before the words can even escape the professor’s lips, you know exactly what is going to be asked. It’s Monday in English 101, and you know the instructor’s routine. Open class with a ten-minute period of writing, sometimes prompted, sometimes a “free write” period. As you type about your weekend, a familiar thought pops into your head: *Why am I writing this? Who cares what I write about? Will anyone else ever read what I write?*

As a student, there hasn’t been a single class that hasn’t sparked one of these questions. Whether journal prompts or a seminar research paper, I wonder whether these pieces will have any *trajectory* beyond the hands of the instructor grading them. If you just nodded your head involuntarily as you read this, then I’m apparently not alone.

Trajectory comes from Latin, meaning “to cross.” Ideally, composition should allow any conversation we want to “cross” over from page to person, or to multiple audiences. I must admit though, some classes have caused me to associate this term in the same category as unicorns, tooth fairies, and dragons. Trajectory in the classroom can appear, at times, a myth. We write journals, compose countless research papers, and craft thought-provoking analyses of

the texts we read in class; but, to what result? The paper is submitted for a letter grade, possibly glimpsed by a few peers during the revising process, and then shoved into either our folders, thrown into the trashcan at the end of the semester, or tossed into the hallway recycling bin immediately after we're dismissed. We dedicate numerous hours and consume enough cans of energy drinks during the writing process to pack seven landfills, but by semester's end, our papers don't give a paper cut to anyone except the instructor. It is true that sometimes journal writing has personal purposes in class, but sometimes we want to have our voices heard, or read, by more than just the individuals in the classroom.

Or, at least that's how my friend Angie felt. She competed, as did I, on Illinois State University's Forensics team from 2008 to 2010. I'm not talking about the kind of forensics that reminds you of a television program with a catchy theme song by The Who. Rather, the Forensics I am referring to here is about competition and delivering the best public speech to a vastly varied audience. Basically, whoever has the most compelling ten-minute oral presentation about whatever topic they choose wins. The categories you can compete in through Forensics vary based on your particular communication skills. Some events are theatre-based, such as Prose or Poetry, while others are based on the speaker's talent with communicating researched topics, such as Informative or Persuasion.

The first detail we should know about Angie is that her writing wasn't technically "for a grade." She was writing a speech that could be used for competition. She would memorize what she wrote and present the speech in front of a diverse audience. Since her writing was for competition in an extra-curricular activity instead of a grade, we could consider her work a piece of "non-school" writing. However, just because this was "non-school" composition, it didn't mean that it couldn't have an academic impact.

Angie decided to write what's called an "After Dinner Speech", or ADS, which is a sub-genre of Forensics designed to persuade your audience on a topic and to make them laugh. Think "*Comedian Stand-up meets Presidential Address*." The speech challenges the speaker not only to have a topic relevant to the audience, but it must be able to entertain the audience while they are persuaded. I asked Angie about the process of writing her After Dinner Speech. I was both surprised and humbled by her journey, which shows how "non-school" writing can result in "school-oriented" impact.

Angie's trajectory quest began as she pondered what her ADS theme would be for her senior—the last and most important—year of competition. Though Angie had competed in Forensics during the three previous years of undergrad, she had only competed in ADS during her sophomore year.

The topic was on “victimage,” a term she coined to describe how we crave to be pitied as victims in society. The thesis of an ADS essentially is the bread which holds the “speech sandwich” together. With this in mind, I started questioning Angie on how she began brainstorming ideas for her speech:

RACHEL: “What were you thinking about when you were choosing your ADS topic?”

ANGIE: “Since it was my senior year, I wanted a topic that would be important to me. I’ve always liked After Dinner Speeches, but a lot of ADS topics are “fluff.” They don’t carry real relevance and can be offensive. I wanted to write a speech that I was really interested in and would get my message across, but still be funny.”

What she describes as “fluff” reminds me of composing exercises done at the beginning of class seemingly never seen again. Fluff seems a more user-friendly word for one synonym: filler. Just as students may see these prompts as a clever way to take up class time, a competitor in Forensics sees a “fluffy” speech as a clever way to fill the allotted ten minutes you have to present something meaningful to your audience. In both cases, “fluff” usually is equivalent to wasted time. The difference between the two genres is that in a composition class writing isn’t always intended to have trajectory beyond the teacher’s hands. In an After Dinner Speech, trajectory is considered important. Most ADS contain relatively the same amount of humor, making judges look towards the content or topic for aid in ranking a round of competitors. When looking at the content, typically the speeches with the most trajectory or potential impact stand out and place higher than those with “fluffier” topics.



Without proper ADA standards in place, college campuses are basically giant tree trunks blocking the path. You may be able to get around, but it’s an unnecessary pain to do so.

Angie decided for her senior speech that she would write about a topic that was relevant to her but also needed to be heard: college campuses only meeting minimum requirements of the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act).

RACHEL: “Why did you think it was important to write a speech about college campuses adhering to ADA guidelines?”

ANGIE: “I think it’s something overlooked in college activism. Beyond student support services or concerns, there’s not really any activism geared towards it. By doing [my ADS] on the speech circuit, it would get to a large amount of audiences.”

Angie, having a good grasp of the Forensic genres, knew she could use the scholarly research she had studied in her undergraduate Social Work courses to support her argument. But she also knew her audience. Most of the Forensic community is comprised of college students, professors, and adults that would be available to assist disabled students on college campuses. Having competed



Our faces may be funny, but the idea of “riding” this college campus’ Evacuation Chair, closer to a rubber hammock than an actual chair, down several flights of stairs is considerably less humorous.

in Forensics at both Illinois State University and Southeastern Illinois College, she had seen how lax the enforcement of ADA standards can be across college campuses. The image at the left was taken at a Forensic Retreat attended a year prior. While the photograph was meant to be humorous, the caption certainly holds true to how serious the lack of accommodation can be for disabled students. Numerous times during the last three years of competition, Angie discovered multiple campuses failed to update their facilities to allow access for students with disabilities. For example, one college campus had elevators to access multiple floors of their

buildings, but how would a disabled student living on the upper floors quickly evacuate the building if there was a fire? The answers, or lack thereof, to this question spurred Angie to compose her speech for the improving of college campuses and disabled students’ academic experience as a whole.

And so, with a topic in mind and a pen in hand, Angie started composing the written speech she would later have to memorize and present at a Forensics tournament.

RACHEL: “What was the hardest part about writing your [ADS] speech?”

ANGIE: “How to get the humor across in a way that wasn’t offensive to the audience or to the population it was about; to do it in a way that was relevant to the topic and not just mindless humor.”

Her knowledge of the genre in which she was composing helped to focus her argument and create jokes reinforcing her content. One of her jokes, for example, takes the real life scenario of someone failing to hold the door open for a disabled student and turns it on its head:

ANGIE: “I say, ‘Don’t just walk by us with your iPods on and pretend like you didn’t notice, because beyond shaming your grandmother you’ll probably trip over something...and I will laugh at you.’”

While Angie’s speech was written with a jovial spirit, she was constantly aware her writing could be used for more than just competition. Just as we wonder if and how our work will effectively carry relevancy beyond the classroom, Angie wanted to use the time and effort she’d poured into her paper to create a piece that could benefit her grades as well. As she wrote, Angie kept in mind that the knowledge she incorporated into this “non-school” composition could in fact move into the academic community:

RACHEL: “Your major is in Social Work. When you write for class, do you think it will have impact beyond just the classroom?”

ANGIE: “I think it will have an impact on *me* beyond the classroom. I can apply what I learn, the theories and lessons, and get feedback from teachers and so on...which is important.”

Note how Angie said “an impact on *me*.” Her emphasis on what will make her a better person and student is critical because no matter what genre we engage in, no matter what kind of writing we investigate, we have to find a way to make it matter to us. Who says journal prompts can’t address something important? Free writing can be about ideas you’ve been mulling over but just haven’t written down before. And research papers? If Angie’s story has shown us anything, it’s that a paper with research doesn’t have to seem like a research paper. Angie knew there were many options she could have chosen for her ADS, but, rather than settle for a “fluffier” topic, she chose one that could combine her own personal story with scholarly research she was interested in and that could benefit her major.

This brings us back to the idea of giving “non-school” writing academic (and beyond) impact. After writing her speech, memorizing it, and competing at several tournaments with her ADS, it qualified to compete in the American Forensics Association (AFA) National Tournament at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire and the National Forensic Association (NFA) National Tournament at Ohio State University. At AFA’s national competition, she won the title of Champion in After Dinner Speaking. Angie’s speech was the highest ranking public address in ADS in the country, and she held that title going into NFA, placing overall 2nd in the nation behind a fellow teammate in the same category. Clearly, her hard work, skill, and knowledge of the genre helped her to be successful. But Angie wasn’t willing to let her writing’s impact and trajectory end there. Graduating that spring with a Bachelor’s in Social Work, Angie wanted to continue her academic career



Angie, accepting her award for winning “Champion in After Dinner Speech” at the AFA National Tournament, 2010.

and apply for Graduate School. Her application for a scholarship to help pay for tuition required her to compose an essay describing a part of the Social Work field she wanted to contribute towards and help improve. When applying for a Graduate Scholarship, she was able to refer back to the ten-minute ADS speech she had recently given.

RACHEL: “You had to propose something that would help enrich your community in the Social Work grad application. How did you connect your speech to this?”

Angie explained that in the application essay she talked about how she wanted to continue toward a Master’s in Social Work, where she would write grants and policy proposals that would help disabled students as well as other disabled individuals across the country. While researching her speech, she had learned a great deal about what was lacking not only on campus but in other facilities as well. Her “non-school” writing had inspired her to seek out ways to help those in the academic community and even beyond the school setting. Her essay was accepted by the graduate program, and Angie received an additional scholarship to help manage expenses with her degree.

ANGIE: “I advocated for better ADA guidelines and won a graduate scholarship because of it [the ADS]. Beyond that, [writing my ADS] helped me to speak up more about the issues I’m concerned about, and that’s reflected in my grad school papers. I can express what I feel in a more professional way.”

Angie’s experience with public speaking and Forensics in general has improved her ability to confidently speak in groups about what she’s passionate about and to organize her thoughts and ideas through composition in a more effective way. Here Angie achieves the goal of trajectory with “non-school” composition, which means she is able to simultaneously improve her handling of “real world” concepts and her academic writing. In saying “real world,” I am talking about genres that are not based in schoolwork, although schoolwork can and often does have “real world” implications or is created with these implications in mind.

Speeches for competition, writing in our free time, forum posts on websites, blogs, even Facebook, help improve our skills as writers in the classroom. The work we do for class can help us learn more about our chosen career fields. For Angie, the process of writing an After Dinner Speaking public address for competition enriched the work she did in school and provided the material for her successful graduate school entry essay. Angie crossed the bridge from student to Forensic competitor, back to student again. While her communication genres changed multiple times, she was still writing in all these situations, just with a different purpose.



Rachel Parish is currently working towards her Master's degree in Professional Writing and Rhetorics at Illinois State but holds an unofficial degree in Photography from NintendoU, with a Specialization in Pokemon Snap. While holding a close passion to Visual Rhetoric and Authorship, Rachel also likes to read numerous volumes of Manga (Japanese graphic novels), play old school video games on her N64, Original Nintendo, and Sega Genesis, draw cartoons involving both fictionalized and real people, and can quote the entire script of "Monty Python and the Holy Grail" as well as "Labyrinth" word for word.

A Bit about Genre and Transferring of Skills

Shailen Mishra

This article recounts the writer's experience of writing a restaurant review for the first time and the unexpected challenges he faced in the process. Starting from an assumption that writing remains same across genres, the writer finds that transferring writing skills across genres is not a straightforward process. In fact, this is where writers make the error of mixing genres.

"Writing is writing," asserted the bard.

"No, it's not!" protested his friend.

"Oh, really? Just because I am a poet you think I can't write an obituary?"

"You can. But I am sure you'll butcher it. Plain and simple.

And just for the record let me repeat that you're a good poet."

"Is that a challenge?"

"Yes, that's a challenge."

I am basically a fiction writer. I put lot of time and effort in writing stories. I guess imagination and storytelling come to me naturally. And yes, I enjoy to the utmost degree blurring the line between facts and fiction. No need to work on citation. No need to worry about a thesis statement. No need to even worry about the word limit. A story can practically (and successfully) vary between one sentence and 120,000 words. [One sentence story? Yes, a six-word fiction famously attributed to Ernest Hemingway: "For sale: baby shoes, never worn."] Ask me to turn in a 30-page story, and I think I can pull it off. Not like I won't struggle, or hit the writer's block and stare at a

blank page for hours, or browse through the dictionary and thesaurus to get that one word right. But I will follow my foolproof and time-tested formula for story writing: have a plot (always), set up the scene, use lively details, and then let the narrative have its own course. This formula had always worked for me. And believe me, I churned out quality narratives time and again, and filled pages after pages with predictable regularity almost to the point that I started to believe I could *write*. And I started to associate myself with the word “writer” more strongly than ever before. The correlation was pretty straightforward to me: I could *write* because I am a *writer*.

Time came when I was asked to write a restaurant review. This assignment was part of my Editing and Opinion Writing class. The deadline was stiff, as always. Or you could say that I walked myself to this tight deadline. And the reasons must be obvious to you by now. It’s just another piece of writing for me, right? At least that’s how I saw it, and I had even more reasons to feel confident about this assignment and procrastinate. First of all, I am a good cook (at least that’s what I have been told), which by default credits me with an eclectic and refined palate. Note the underlined word: the very sign and armor of a food critique. Second, I have dined at numerous restaurants of diverse cuisines and class, and posted my reviews of the restaurants on online yellow-pages, receiving envious amounts of “thumbs-up” next to my posts. Third, I had gone through the New York Times’ restaurant review section, and pored over the types of gourmet food, the phrases/metaphors used to describe them, and what made the cut for a classy treat and what did not. So I got my quota of reading done in the genre. If those readings have anything to offer, then it is that opinions mattered. Of course, that’s what a “review” is about; you provide judicious critique to the reader. And in this case, I had plenty of gutsy and refined opinions to offer.

My submission was last minute, but it was to my satisfaction. Did it have an exciting opening? Check. Was the writing engaging enough? Check. Was the content original enough? Sure! So I was looking forward to my teacher’s comments, actually. And I was looking for an A. But what I got instead...well, I will let my teacher’s feedback in following image speak for itself.

On a rainy night, the chilling moisture and the foggy view of the world around can be a real downer. And to escape such feeling hot and spicy foods can be real pick-me-ups. So on such a night, I and my imaginary girlfriend (who I would refer as P for the rest of this review) were searching for an Indian restaurant and the sign of Royal India tempted us to pull over.

Having ordered for ourselves an extravagant dinner, we looked around. Even on a weekday night the restaurant was near full. The rosewood finish of the interior walls were a sharp match for the rich red upholstery, the flaming chandeliers, and the linoleum floors with the Rajasthani graffiti on them. Indian kings of colonial times adorned the wooden frames in the walls in their opulent costumes, flaunting their wax-tipped mustaches. And a lattice patterned separator obscured from our view the bar in one corner, from which direction we could see the decoration of the earthen lamps which adorned the bar counter. Their tiny flames, and their earthy and camphor fragrance, along with the litting instrumental music gave the restaurant quite a unique and exquisite flair. When our waiter arrived with our complementary herbal drinks called Jal-jena, a not very wholesome looking liquid at first, a twinkle sparkled at the corners of P's eyes.

User 110310 4:21 PM
 Comment: Could this weather topic. They're still and not very helpful to the reader.

User 110310 4:10 PM
 Comment: Shailen, I have nothing against your imagination, girlfriends or even, but please don't let these accompany you in the restaurant (at least).

User 110310 4:25 PM
 Comment: It is too much description and cluttered in one place. They'll tell the reader, "Some three-out-of-four stars with your opinion to such a low, but they don't feel like a fan."

User 4/10/11 11:28 AM
 Comment: But this is not happening in reality!!!!!! It makes question about your credibility as a WRITER.

As you can see from the comments section, my teacher had a lethal mix of wit and sarcasm, but he always meant well. He had read only up to the second paragraph, and comment #4 was his last feedback. Essentially, he had given up reading after this, as his end note read: “Shailen, I don’t know what to say. This reads more like a story to me than a review. I think you got the expectations of the assignment mixed-up.”

If only I could express my momentary frustration and surprise with a subtle euphemism. If only I could make my teacher believe that it is *not* a “story,” it is a review, a review, a review...but that response was short-lived, and the surprise and disappointment too. Now that it’s been some years since I wrote it and built up some healthy distance between myself and the article, I can analyze it more objectively.

As I was rummaging through the old files recently, looking for suitable material to write an article for this book, I stumbled upon this old review. And when I read the first few paragraphs, a chuckle escaped me. I found myself saying: this is not a review; of course not; definitely not.

So, my teacher was right after all. I had got the two writing styles “mixed-up.” The review has all the elements of a story, which is the genre I am most comfortable writing. The first line is perhaps an apt description of the rainy night, and it portrays quite a vivid image of the outdoor atmosphere. But frankly, in a restaurant review why should the reader care about the weather

outside? How is that a beneficial piece of information to the reader about the restaurant?

The second shortcoming with my article is the chronological way the actions are listed. You can almost discern the pattern of an action-related scene, where one action leads to another. Let's trace the chain of action here: a) spotted the restaurant; b) pulled over the car; c) ordered the food; d) waiting led to observation of the details in the restaurant; e) complimentary drink arrived, etc. And I can assure you, such sequencing follows in the rest of the review, which would have worked perfectly in an action scene, but in a review it reads mechanical and predictable.

Now, the third issue, which my teacher had labeled, was listing all the details. I *love* details. My creative writing teachers had repeatedly reminded me: details are the flesh and blood of a scene. So I make sure to evoke an adequate amount of details to make my characters and setting come alive. In the review, I seemed to have followed the advice of my writing teachers quite faithfully. The details of the restaurant's ambience portray quite a lively scene: it seems to appeal to all the senses; visual, aural, olfactory, etc. But again, such detailing can seem contrived and "cluttered" for a review. Reviewers usually blend details with historical references, analogies, and opinions.

The final but the most unforgiving problem with my piece is the dispute surrounding my imaginary girlfriend. My teacher had asked me to banish her; well, it won't be easy, but with a heavy heart I guess I will have to do it. While writing fiction, I never even questioned the fantasy lands I ventured to: the more imaginative I can be, the better. So just like fiction, I thought I could invent a character for my review and make it humorous. That definitely did not go well with my teacher, who thought that I had subverted the conventions of the review genre by incorporating a fictitious element in my writing. When a restaurant's credibility is at stake and so is the reviewer's, there is no room for making things up out of thin air. Any reviewer's first advice to his/her protégé is: be honest with your reader. This is the fundamental convention of the review genre, which is the complete opposite of creative writing. This is a gross "mixing-up" of my understanding of the two genres. Writing does *change*, and I wish I knew that beforehand.

As far as the rest of my review is concerned, I can assure you that there were many original and palatable opinions in place. But only if my teacher could have gotten past my colossal blunder, then he would have known.

“Writing obituary is similar to writing poetry; both deal with compassion and human emotion.”

“True, but then one is prose and the other is poetry... as unlike as a duck and a rooster.”

“But at the core both need robust language and vivid imagery.”

“No. One is fact and the other is muse.”

“I’ve already started writing. Can you hear the tapping of the keys?”

“Yes, I am hearing the rhymes of an elegy.”

We all know that writing style changes. Writing a poem is not same as writing a personal essay. And the conventions and styles of an editorial are not similar to those of a research paper. But certain writing styles come to us easily. Our cognitive response sometimes favors one genre over the other. And the genre in which we do well, we tend to internalize its writing strategies and often unknowingly we apply the same strategies to tackle another genre.

Before I started writing my review I was well aware that a restaurant review is not similar to a story. Yet, unknowingly I tried to transfer the conventions of fiction writing to this review piece. And the result was disastrous. I had internalized the story writing strategies to such a degree that while tackling an unfamiliar genre I used scene-building, detailing, and chronological sequencing to convey my opinions.

Knowing myself, I am sure that I am not immune to the tendencies of transferring writing skills. So the key is knowing how far I can go with transfer and where to stop. So I have decided to prepare a set of rules for myself which will ***make me pause*** before I unknowingly transfer writing strategies from one genre to another. The following are the rules I pledge to follow before I sit down to write in an unfamiliar genre:

- A) **Knowing the genre that’s my strength:** I think this first step is an acknowledgement that no two genres are the same. If I am good at certain kinds of writing, then I must make a list of them. Of course, this list will not stay the same all my life. It’s not like I am biologically modeled to be good at only one or two genres. As I accumulate experiences in different kinds of writing under diverse writing situations, I will keep getting better at multiple genres, and the list will keep getting longer. But for now, the genres that don’t make it to the list need my special attention and a critical/analytical approach rather than a spontaneous one. The goal is that such heightened awareness will encourage me to learn the *differences*

between the familiar and the new genres quickly and proactively, rather than waiting to commit the mistake of “mix-up.”

B) **Knowing the writing skills that come to me easily:** Certain writing tasks I manage really well. For example, I am good at writing opinion essays, especially editorial style writing. I am the guy who can take a clear stance and justify it in a most cogent and persuasive articulation. So the genre of opinion writing can be easily tackled by me because I am a straightforward and rational thinker, and the knack of persuasion is second nature to me. If I were to make a list of the things that I must be doing right in editorial writing, then the list may look like the following:

Taking a stance in the essay very early on. And not being afraid or hesitant to do so.

Taking into consideration counter-arguments effectively to strengthen my argument, thus adding to the persuasiveness of the essay.

Linking one argument to the next, thus building a chain of arguments in a structural manner.

Avoiding unnecessary jargon. Writing in a literary manner, yet not wordy or pompous, so that it diminishes the mass appeal of the writing.

Summarizing the information or the news for the reader succinctly: it's the awareness that the reader might not have come across the news; so selecting a precise amount of details that cover the context of the issue is the key.

Conclusion. Yes, a strong conclusion that urges the reader to pay attention to the issue and take action.

C) **Knowing the demands of the new genre:** Here is the tricky part. If I am not careful enough here, then I will repeat my mistake of “mixing-up.” Let's say I am offered an internship at a publishing house. And my first assignment is to write a blurb for a literary fiction. I make a list of writing demands of the blurb genre: summarizing the plot, using very literary language, appearing informative about the authors' works and the book's merit, and being persuasive about the book's appeal, etc.

Certainly, there are many similarities between the editorial and the blurb genre. But I would call these similarities *pitfalls* because what appear like similarities are actually the areas where I will most likely attempt to transfer my writing skills (deliberately or instinctively). Sometimes such transfer would work and sometimes it would not, like the restaurant review. But I am not going to take chances; plus this kind of comparison will lessen the pressure on me as I learn a new kind of writing. So I am off now to play, what I call, a *pitfall game*, a game of identifying *similarities* between two writing genres that are not so similar after all.

Editorial vs. Blurb Writing

Pitfall 1) Summarization: Summary of a news report in an editorial and summary of a plot *for a blurb* are not the same. The former demands that no information be held back, whereas if I summarize the *whole* plot of the book in the blurb, then most likely I will be fired. Yes, no spoiler alerts please. I must remember that the key to a blurb summary is to know how much to summarize and which parts of the plot to summarize. Again, the logic behind such truncated summarization is to give away only enticing details in order to encourage the reader to *buy the book*.

Pitfall 2) Persuasion: Persuasiveness in an editorial demands the reader to take notice of an issue or take action, whereas the blurbs are expected to persuade the reader to buy the book. So the editor persuades to draw attention for public good, whereas the blurb writer persuades purely for the marketing purpose. Note: the audience in these two cases is completely different, and the manner of persuasion will change with it too.

Pitfall 3) Language: Jargon is not entirely a no-no in blurbs. In fact, not using jargon at all may alienate certain readers. The key is to use theoretical or academic catch phrases that do not sound too intellectual or intimidating to the average readers, but at the same time expand the market to scholarly customers. For example, by hailing the work of an author as a masterpiece in “Post-Modernism” or “Slipstream” may do this trick.

Pitfall 4) Writing style: the familiar writing style to me is the logical and rational connection of arguments. But, in a blurb such writing may turn out to be too mechanical. Opposite to an objective and rational approach, a narrative style will appeal more to the reader.

So if I don't watch out, then my writing for the blurb may turn out to be too rigid and formal.

After having invented the *pitfall game* for myself and having applied it to my writing, I make this note to myself: comparing one genre to another and listing the known *similarities* is the first step of this game. The second step is to find out the *differences within these apparent similarities* by the exercise of *doubting*.

I have to remember that the pitfall game is not foolproof. So I need not be complacent. But knowing that I have to play this game when I face a new writing genre reminds me of how writing skills are not easily transferable across genres. And this helps as far as my new writing mantra is concerned: *Writing is not the same. It changes.* And don't you worry about the duel between the poet and his friend. The latter had already hired a professional to write the obituary for his grandmother.



Shailen Mishra plans to become rich by signing a million dollar book deal on his first novel; then he will appear on *Oprah* becoming a notable mention in her book club; and then he will win the Booker Prize. After that he will retire to a lifelong adventure in traveling, writing only for leisure and pleasure: if only such a thing exists.

Genre Studies, Grice, and Burlesque

Jamison Lee

This article: (1) addresses North Carolina's drawls and frog abuses; (2) situates the Gricean maxims as a way to introduce the formal elements of genre studies; (3) explores the deliberate neglect of Gricean maxims and genre conventions in humor writing; and (4) extrapolates the importance—in all writing situations—of a keen awareness of these genre conventions.

Analyzing humor is like dissecting a frog. Few people are interested and the frog dies of it.

— E. B. White

In 1987, my family moved from Cleveland, Ohio, to Gastonia, North Carolina. We lived in this distant suburb of Charlotte for three years of my life, from first through fourth grade. I learned several things throughout those years: I learned that many words are, in the South, adorned with an extra syllable or at least pronounced quite differently from what I had been accustomed to in Ohio. (Sometimes, this was problematic on dictated spelling tests; “bell,” for instance, is not spelled “bale.”) I also learned how to roller skate; how to resist using the phrase, “y’all”; and how to dissect a frog, a free demonstration of which was provided by a young friend of mine whose identity I shall not reveal for reasons that will soon be apparent. My friend—let’s call him Peter and perhaps pronounce it, “Peta”—lived in the dusky woods near North Carolina’s southern border, so, naturally, we played outside very much during my visits. We spent our time tromping through the woods and riding his little four wheeler—this only after his dad got home, though,

because he had the ATV keys. In the evenings, we caught fireflies and made campfires. It was pastoral.

Catching and detaining fireflies, we'd shake the glass jars to make them light up more. Sometimes, we'd skip the capture and just hit them with tennis rackets—wiffle ball bats didn't work—to watch them flare up in the muggy darkness. I didn't like it when Peter took them out of the jar and squeezed them, but I never protested.

One blazing summer day, Peter showed me a frog he had caught. It was tied to a tree and had been there since late last night, he said. The color on its body was hard to identify, and its belly was beginning to rupture. I watched, horrified, as Peter dug his knee into the thin grass and excitedly explored the frog with his knife.

I hadn't yet been exposed to ethical philosophy (or genre studies), but I still felt it was wrong to dissect a living frog—especially noting in the activity's results a distinct lack of contribution toward *any* scientific end. Somehow, I wasn't able to utter a single protest as Peter's hands grew slimy and red with the gutting. And—according to E. B. White—as I felt then, so now shall you (to say nothing of the frog) as you read the rest of this essay. That is to say, hopefully, Peter became a research scientist; I, in any case, have not, and am only willing to dissect metaphorical frogs for the purposes of killing humor. I'll be gentle, I promise. And, contrary to Peter's unfortunate croaker, rest assured that *our* frog will have been sacrificed for a worthy exploration of comedy writing and genre studies.

Applying Gricean Maxims to Genre Studies

A couple years ago, I encountered a well-known component of the work of linguist H. P. Grice. Grice formulated the “cooperative principle,” including four main properties on which, he claimed, rational and productive conversation is based:

The maxims of **quality**:

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

The maxim of **relevance**:

1. Be relevant.

The maxims of **quantity**:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required.
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

The maxims of **manner**:

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief.
4. Be orderly.

(“Rules of Conversation” 274-6)

While Grice’s maxims were originally conceived to ensure the practical productivity of conversations (“Rules of Conversation” 273), they can illuminate important components of written communication as well. Applying Grice’s maxims to traditional genres and writing situations can be a helpful way to elucidate the distinct features of the genre being examined. For the sake of illustration, I’ll extrapolate that claim.

The first maxim of quality advises that you don’t “say [or write] what you believe to be false,” while the second maxim of quality advises that you should “not say [or write] that for which you lack adequate evidence.” These maxims certainly appear to prescribe an upright prudence that would be quite useful in convincing one’s audience of her integrity (buttressing her ethos). However, as we might easily observe in the case (pun!) of a public defender whose task it is to argue on behalf of clients they may not wish to advocate, when the public defender writes her closing remarks, it may be her ethical duty to vehemently claim exactly that which she believes to be false and for which she lacks adequate evidence. Given this contrary fact, we can see how complicated this can get and, hence, how important it is to be hyper-aware of the genre conventions that exist within the rhetorical situation or genre in which one is assigned to work.

The case of relevance requires only one maxim: “Be relevant.” This concept seems transparent, its function easily understood in situations of both speaking and writing. Again, however, relevance is distinctly dependent on genre. Take the subject of food as an example. It seems easy to conjure relevant food-related information: serving size; nutritional value; descriptions of taste, texture, and color; list of ingredients; origin of ingredients; nature of preparation; etc. These are all pieces of information in which a consumer may viably be interested. However, the presentation of such information (where, when, and how it appears) deserves special consideration, as all marketing strategists know. Note that, while a detailed list of ingredients is quite relevant to the nutritional label of food at a grocery store, such details generally would be viewed as superfluous and irrelevant to the description of an item on a restaurant’s menu. And while we might be interested to know that McDonald’s oatmeal contains more calories than a Snickers bar (Bittman), calories from sugar is not information that one is likely to find on a menu because we seem to have tacitly decided that menus are not the place

for such nutritional statistics (and because such ill-timed reminders would presumably damage sales at many popular restaurants).

Grice's maxims regarding quantity basically advise us to say, or write, enough but not too much. This also seems fairly clear, but what does it look like in practice? Imagine, for instance, a greeting card. How long is it? How about a how-to manual for assembling a bookshelf? What about an article in a textbook? An autobiographical essay? Various writing situations entail varying levels of complexity. Without considering our purpose, audience, and other contextual factors, it can be very difficult to decide what is enough versus what is too much. Quantity is, therefore, arguably the Gricean component that is *most* dependent on context. Of course, in most English classes, students are consistently given length requirements on writing prompts; if not, we wonder: "How long does it have to be?" (Or, if we feel very tactful, we might inquire: "How long *would you like it to be?*") However, according to our exploration of Grice's quantity maxims, we can see that quantity is entirely dependent on the genre one has chosen to work in, and one's choice of genre is likely dependent on the intentions of her writing (i.e. what she wants her writing to communicate).

There are four maxims for *manner*. However, I would argue that one could cover all four by using easily accessible formats and simple language. George Orwell demonstrates the point, translating this Bible passage (Ecclesiastes 9:11): "I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all" into obscure, ambiguous, and verbose language: "Objective considerations of contemporary phenomena compel the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account" (qtd. in Pinker 251-2). While the translated passage, with its inflated academic language, may lure an undue respect from the reader, the original is more accessible and communicates its point more concisely, due to its simpler language and syntax.

As demonstrated, it can be illuminating to use Grice's maxims as a framework for analyzing a writing situation. Considering quality, relevance, quantity, and manner can serve as a straightforward way to help one discern the specific conventions of any genre, and to help one identify how she might revise her writing in order to accommodate certain genre conventions.

Imagine a business report that uses poetic language and ambiguous metaphors, or a ghost story that takes the form of a power point presentation; it's very important to note the unlikelihood that readers will take seriously a

text which doesn't adhere to standard genre conventions. However, not all writing is meant to be taken seriously, and “[s]ometimes people violate the maxims on purpose” (“Rules of Conversation” 277). I think it will be fun and helpful to see the farce—intentional or otherwise—that can occur when genre conventions are thoroughly violated. Let's focus, then, on intentional genre violations as a way to generate comic writing.

Grice and Burlesque

One genre in which violating Gricean maxims is completely acceptable is “Burlesque” (a.k.a. “Parody”). Burlesque is “a type of comedy in which distortion and exaggeration are employed to ridicule and deflate, either through the trivialization of a lofty subject or through the glorification of a lowly or common place one. Humor results from the disparity between subject and style” (Murfin and Supryia 46). Successful writers of burlesque and parody trounce Grice's maxims, as they deliberately provide information unfit for the genre they are mocking. It is assumed that the reader's intuitive knowledge of the genre's conventions will allow her to recognize the author's playful intentions. As Isabel Ermida puts it, “[T]he proficient reader is expected to know how to solve the puzzle and enjoy the ensuing comic pleasure” (235). Here, the “proficient reader” is one who is aware of the genre's traditional conventions.

I have made a move toward parody in writing my author's bio for this textbook. And I am willing to bet that you, the proficient reader, when first encountering this bio, intuited that something was amiss. Of course, explaining the specific incongruity with much precision would have been difficult initially. In the first reading of a text, one usually achieves a basic comprehension, rather than a nuanced analysis of form or style. (Initial readings of French theorists produce only profound agitation). Reading a second time, through the Gricean lens, you may notice that, while the quality and quantity are debatably well-suited for the author bio genre, surely the relevance and manner—in large part—are not.

A more thoroughly developed example of burlesque writing is Steve Martin's “Side Effects,” which functions as a parody of the lists of side effects usually found on pharmaceutical drugs' labels. The instructions for Martin's fictional drug advise, “Take two tablets every six hours for joint pain” (55). Following this is the inordinately long and absurd list of side effects, which violates perhaps all four of Grice's maxims:

Side Effects: This drug may cause joint pain, nausea, headache, or shortness of breath. You may also experience muscle aches, rapid

heartbeat, or ringing in the ears. If you feel faint, call your doctor. Do not consume alcohol while taking this pill; likewise, avoid red meat, shellfish, and vegetables. Okay foods: flounder. Under no circumstances eat yak. Men can expect painful urination while sitting, especially if the penis is caught between the toilet seat and the bowl. Projectile vomiting is common in 30 percent of users—sorry: 50 percent.... (55)

This bizarrely robust list continues well into the next few pages, far outreaching our normal expectations of what constitutes a reasonable *quantity* of side effects on a drug's warning label. The author impugns the maxims of *quality* and *manner* with his flippant, conversational tone in correcting the statistical error, "30 percent of users—sorry: 50 percent." This faux pas causes us to question the care taken (and, hence, the truthiness) in preparing the information we're receiving in this list of side effects. Additionally, the manner (referring specifically to concision and clarity) of the previous statement is amiss. Rather than erasing the statistical error, the writer has sort of sloppily "drawn over" it; this creates unnecessary clutter in the passage and causes his meaning to be ambiguous and potentially obscure for the reader. Finally, the overall *relevance* of the author's cautionary counsel comes under suspicion, as he explains that "[m]en can expect painful urination while sitting, especially if the penis is caught between the toilet seat and the bowl." The obviousness of this penis-related detail makes it redundant and, hopefully, irrelevant to the user's circumstance.

Conclusion

It seems, then, that awareness of genre is indispensable for writers of serious *and* humorous texts. Comedy writers often deliberately breach genre parameters in order to mock the genre in which they're writing. These exaggerated subversions of genre can create texts so absurd that they aren't taken seriously. And if violating genre conventions can completely invert the reception of a text, consider the dreadful results of a writer or speaker who *accidentally* violates these conventions.

Technological innovations and pop culture references are far more welcome than they used to be in most contemporary communications situations. In fact, their prevalent presence in commercials has become so common, the genre so deeply ingrained, that we are also able to recognize parodies of it. For instance, Geico—commonly associated with its iconic talking lizard—has recently used the website, Xtranormal, to create a few car insurance commercials. (Xtranormal.com offers a template so that amateurs can create basic animated sequences.) The commercials' animation is poor,

and the voices are lifelessly digitized, causing a bizarre experience for the viewer as she encounters a deliberately clumsy approach to advertising a product that is arguably more deserving of serious treatment than many other products whose commercials employ similar techniques of parody—e.g., beer, deodorant, clothing. (If read as an example of burlesque, one can see that the clumsy, animated *style* of Geico’s Xtranormal commercials do not match the gravity of their product, or *subject*.) Given television advertising’s widespread use of humorous appeals, Geico’s parody of the genre is perhaps less than daring, particularly as the frequent use of these techniques indicates that they must succeed, somehow, in effectively persuading their target demographics. But imagine employment of Xtranormal in other presentations: law enforcement officials using Xtranormal as training supplements in police academies, or detectives using Xtranormal to recreate a crime scene. In these scenarios, such applications of multimedia fail to convey important, detailed information; additionally, they lampoon the importance of the subjects and the significance of the communicators’ goals. Perhaps these are exaggerated examples, but even smaller genre deviations can appear highly conspicuous to those who are very familiar with the given genre. Certainly, then, a writer who means to make a serious inquiry, compose a persuasive piece, or engage in any crucial writing activity should be equally, if not more, aware of her genre’s conventions.

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In rural houses of the rich and semi-famous, the American Idol girl has her grandma's picture on the piano, next to it a jar of the old woman's menstrual blood. An invasive species, a super-food, eighty Illinois autumn berries wait in a different jar and rot, growing mold. **Jamison Lee** is a doctoral student at Illinois State University.

Researching One in Six Million

Hilary Selznick

This article explores the research methods used in a book-length memoir. More specifically, I address how the research involved in writing a memoir about my grandmother's history as a Holocaust survivor differs from the research strategies I learned as an undergraduate student writing a research paper. Instead of concentrating on a controversial topic or issue, the focus in memoir writing is on the personal. I used mostly primary research methods in order to retrace my grandmother's history, including: interviews, archival research, and searching old photo albums and regulatory documents. Although secondary research, which included the searching of library databases, was useful, primary research was more necessary for my memoir. Through this process, I came to the conclusion that the genre of the research project dictates which research methods will be most effective.

It has been almost twenty years since we buried my grandmother under a large maple tree. I like to think she is happy there, returned back to the earth and to the husband she had loved, who died nearly thirty years before her.

My grandmother was a difficult woman: rough mannered, quick-tempered, and angry at life. She was overly critical. She could be mean and hurtful. My father resented her, my sister feared her, and for some unexplainable reason, I was wildly in love with her. Maybe it was because my mother often told me that I reminded her of all the good parts of my grandmother.

In my writing, my grandmother always showed up—uninvited. She found her way into the lines of my poetry, the characters of my fiction, and recently there she was again, smack in the middle of the memoir I thought I was writing about my own life. Finally, I gave in and realized that in order to tell my own story I had to first tell my grandmother's.

I began with my mother. Surely my mother could tell me all the things I wanted to know about my grandmother's history. I knew only a little: she

survived the Holocaust by somehow managing to escape a concentration camp and board an illegal ship to Russia carrying other Jewish escapees; she married a handsome Polish soldier; and gave birth to my mother after the war in the U.S. Occupied Zone of Germany. But it wasn't enough. What happened to her in between those events, and how did those events turn her into the person I would meet years later?

I called my mother and prepared to ask her a ton of questions. Next to me sat a thick pad of legal paper and a fountain pen. She answered the phone in her typical manner: "Is this my daughter who left me to live in Michigan?" she said.

"Yes, mother that's the one," I sighed. "I'm calling because I want to know more about Bubby."

"What do you want to know?" she asked. The sound of what must be pages of newspaper crackled into the phone.

"Um, what concentration camp was she in? Who helped her escape? How did she meet grandfather? What did she do in Russia? What happened to the rest of her family?" I said quickly, momentarily forgetting the importance of breathing.

"I already told you everything I know," my mother said flatly. Okay, so I might have asked her these questions before, but this time I was looking for a different answer, a better answer. "Didn't you ever ask her any questions?" I urged.

"She didn't want to talk about it," my mother said loudly into the phone. I guess she thought her words would have more meaning if she shouted them.

"I think I'm going to do some research," I said, excitement rising into my voice. I grabbed the fountain pen hard and plopped it loudly onto the pad.

"Fine," my mother replied, more newspaper rustling. "But if you ask me, it's a waste of time."

My excitement waned when I realized I had no idea how to do research on my grandmother. The only time I did research was in school and I knew that researching for a memoir had to be different. I wasn't arguing a topic or analyzing a piece of literature, instead I was trying to uncover a life and to find something that might explain the connection I felt with my grandmother.

My first instinct was to search Google. But what would I type into the search bar? My grandmother's name? Holocaust Survivors? Victims of World War II? I knew none of these searches would work. My grandmother's name was spelled various ways in many different languages and she wasn't someone famous. Holocaust Survivors was so broad of a search that it came up with approximately 870,000 hits on Google. I recently read the amazingly brilliant memoir and Holocaust studies book *The Lost: Searching for Six in Six Million*, by journalist Daniel Mendelsohn and remembered that he talked about his research process in the book.

I found *The Lost* on one of my bookshelves and took it down. I started to read my underlined notes and came across the line that said it took Mendelsohn nineteen years to research and write his book. I was immediately distressed. Nineteen years! I didn't have nineteen years! Who had time to write a book for nineteen years! I decided to read on anyway. Mendelsohn went on to explain that for most of those nineteen years the Internet wasn't invented yet, and that once it was his search went much faster. Ok, so maybe there was still hope. He said he began his research process by looking at primary sources, including: historical records, old photographs, interviews, and an extended visit to the Polish town his uncle and his uncle's children lived in before the Holocaust. Then he wrote letters, made long distance phone calls, and eventually searched the Internet. I decided to follow by example. Unfortunately, that meant another call to mom.

"Fine," my mother said distractedly, "I'll have your father go into the basement and look for grandmother's photo albums. But I have to warn you, most of the pages are torn and some of the pictures fell out of their pockets."

"Yes, mother," I replied. I heard the sound of the TV in the background and I felt exasperated that my mother was giving me only half of her attention. "Mom!" I screamed into the phone. "What about documents? Don't you have any of grandmother's papers left?"

"There is a small file box in the back bedroom," she said, "I'll get your father to look for it."

I made plans to fly to Philadelphia to see things for myself. My dad handed me the small metal file box and tears formed in my eyes as I thought about how sad it was for a whole life to be reduced to a tiny box. Inside was my grandfather's death certificate, both my grandparent's naturalization papers, a marriage license written in Polish, some financial papers, and a German identification card with a snapshot of my grandfather's face. The letters UNRRA were stamped onto the card and the word Liephem appeared at the top. My mother didn't know what the letters stood for, but she thought

Liephem was the refugee camp she was born in. I asked my father to make me photocopies of the papers so I could take them back to Michigan with me and get them translated.

Next, we looked through the old photo album. My mother emptied the contents of the plastic bag my father brought up from the basement and out fell loose black and white photographs and empty envelopes. The black felt paper stuck to the back of most of the photos in the album covering the descriptions on the backs. My mother talked me through the pictures she recognized: one was of a party where a crowd of people were smiling at the photographer. "I think this was taken at a wedding. The small bald man in the corner is your Uncle Hyman," she said as she squinted through her glasses. "He was your grandparent's sponsor and your father and I named you after him." I looked down at my great-uncle and felt a rush of emotions, mostly gratitude for the man who saved my grandparent's lives by bringing them to America and into his home.

There were plenty of photographs. I saw my grandmother in her twenties, thirties, forties. She was smiling and youthful. She looked nothing like the gray-haired woman I grew up with, the one full of anger and weakened by cancer. In most of the pictures there were posed groups of people. My grandfather gathered together with a sea of other men wearing police uniforms, women gathered around a water well, men and women around a dining room table enjoying the food in front of them. But, there were no children. I found a picture of my Bubby in a wedding gown, the handsome man with the arm around her was my grandfather looking smart in his police uniform, and a crowd of friends smiling in the background. The happy event almost made it possible to ignore the lines on the guest's faces, their thin bodies showing through their ill-fitting clothing, the loss that they never talked about.

My mother and I managed to find some pictures with dates and places on them. Most of the descriptions on the backs of the photos were written in Hebrew. I told my mother I wished I paid more attention in Hebrew school and she said so did she. Before giving the photo album back to my father, I slipped the picture of my grandmother's wedding into a yellowed envelope along with a few others where she seemed happy. I would return to these photos over and over again through the years when I felt like giving up, when the research became much harder than I ever expected.

After looking at the photos, I wasn't sure what to do next. I decided to go to the Free Library of Philadelphia downtown and look through the catalog and some databases. I took a stack of books off the shelves and sat with them for hours at a table. I looked at the annotated bibliographies at the end of articles. One lead me to the book *Waiting for Hope: Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-World War II Germany*. The book listed all of the displaced person camps including Liephem. It explained that the letters UNRRA found on my grandparents' pictures stood for the United Nation's Refugee Rehabilitation Association that oversaw the DP camps and it led me to another organization, JDR: the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee that fed and clothed the refugees in the camps. For the first time, this book gave me the opportunity to see what my grandmother's life was like all those years earlier and helped me to understand the cause of so much of her anger and suffering. My love for her grew stronger.

At times, none of the research techniques I used worked. Emails saying I am sorry but I cannot help you, calls left unreturned, the archive search at the JDR in New York City turned up empty. And I couldn't find any of my grandparents' family members on the famous Israeli Museum, Yad Vashem's Shoah Victim's Database. But then good news came. Bits of information came from unexpected places. A year after I filed my request for information about my grandparents, emails came from the Holocaust Survivors and Victims' Resource Center at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C.: nineteen documents listing my grandmother's name and fourteen for my grandfather. Among the PDFs they sent was a list of persons, including my grandparents, who were registered at Leipheim DP Camp as of April 29, 1947; a list of persons who emigrated from Bremerhaven, Germany, to New York, USA on November 14, 1949; and a list of survivors of Warsaw with my grandparents' names found through the International Tracking Services in Bad Arolsen, Germany in 1947. My hands shook every time I received an email. The excitement and relief of seeing my grandmother's name refuelled my search.

There is still so much more to do. I need to find a translator for all these documents, I still haven't found the name of the concentration camp my Bubby escaped from, and I need to find grant money to make a trip to Yad Vashem in Israel and to Warsaw to search for the place my grandmother called home. But I can't tell you how good it felt to send my mother these missing pieces of her parents' lives. And when I called her to tell her that I found the name of her grandmother, the woman she never knew she was named after, she thanked me for the first time in my life for not following her advice.



Hilary Selznick is originally from Philadelphia where she ate yummy cheesesteaks with Cheez Whiz, snacked on Amish soft-pretzels, and ran up the art museum stairs like Rocky. She had been living in Michigan for five years with her husband and two step-children and is still struggling with being a Midwesterner. For example, she never seems to locate Kalamazoo on her hand, which seems to be the main form of communication between Michiganders. Hilary recently started her PhD program in English Studies at Illinois State University in the town of Normal. This has caused much laughter in her family and leaves Hilary to question why every town she moves to makes for great T-shirt slogans. Hilary earned her MFA from Western Michigan University in creative nonfiction where she taught first-year writing for three years. Prior to Western, Hilary received a Masters in Education and taught grade school where she zippered coats and lined up girls to take them to the bathroom. She is currently working on a full-length memoir about her grandmother's history as a Holocaust survivor.

How i Lrnd 2 Txt: An Adventure in Genre

Haley Stouffer

In this article, Haley Stouffer takes a personal look at the genre of texting and the changing technologies she has used to text. She traces her experience from new technology to new technology, examining the changing problems and benefits that texting brings with it.

My First Phone, or the proof of perseverance

I remember when I was in the sixth grade and my parents announced that my constant nagging had finally paid off: they had decided I was ready for a cell phone. Before this, communication with my friends outside of school had been difficult. My friends and I would make our plans to hang out during school hours when everyone was there to hear when and where we would meet. We decided who would provide the ride, what time we were getting picked up, and where we were going all ahead of time. If the plans changed I would have to call their home phones and get stuck talking to their parents for twenty minutes before getting to them. Even then, we had to worry about a nosy sibling listening in, so we made our conversations short and to the point. If we discussed anything like school gossip or who we had a crush on, my older sister, who should have had better things to do, would be sure to overhear and tease me about it later.

After I got a cell phone, it was another story. My first cell phone was an indestructible dinosaur that didn't even have text messaging on it. I didn't mind though because it opened a lot of doors for me and because I'd never

texted before. I could call my friends whenever I wanted and was even given more freedom as long as I promised to check in every so often. My parents and I had an agreement that I could go anywhere in town or spend as long as I wanted at the mall as long as I answered my cell phone whenever they called. My cell phone gave me the opportunity to build up my parents' trust. Thanks to the shrill, obnoxious ring and lack of a vibrate feature, I never missed a call and no one else did either (especially my teachers).

Communication made a different kind of advance when I was in the seventh grade. Yahoo instant messenger became an obsession for my friends and me. I would get home after basketball practice and go straight to my computer. My Yahoo account would show me which of my friends were online, and I could update my status to let everyone know my current favorite song. If I wanted to chat with one of my friends, all I had to do was click on their name and a messaging box would pop up. It opened the doors to visual and textual, rather than verbal, communication. By typing back and forth we could have long conversations without having to speak at all. I always tried to type things almost as fast as I would be able to say them out loud so that I could keep up with multiple conversations at once. Sometimes I would have as many as 10 conversations going on, each with their own window, so speed was a necessity. This is when I first began using acronyms, abbreviations, and emoticons to shorten my messages.

My Second Phone, or how I got into texting and was consumed by it

The new ability to shorten messages was very useful as I made a jump forward in cell phone technology and bought a text messaging phone. I quickly found out that texts had a 160 character limit. At the time, typing a text required using one of two methods. The first was multi-tapping keys. This method takes seven taps just to type the word "hey." The other was a rather slow and difficult method called T9. T9, or predictive texting, was meant to make texting faster and easier than the multi-tapping of keys, but I found that it was almost more time-consuming trying to teach the T9 new words. And always proofreading everything I typed was frustrating. I usually found myself turning off the T9 setting and tapping keys (even though it was sometimes up to four taps for one letter).

Texting caught on even faster than instant messaging in my seventh grade class. Everyone thought that there would be no need to pass notes across the classroom if we all had our cell phones hidden under our desks. The only problem was that, at 15 cents a text, it was too expensive to have a conversation. But that didn't stop me. All I was concerned with was gossiping

to the girls about which boys liked us and whether we looked better in pink or blue. After three outrageous phone bills and countless lectures from my parents, I started limiting my texting to occasional messages that got the most out of the 160 characters allowed. I made sure to pack as much as I could into one text message. For example, instead of asking one question and waiting for a reply, I would ask everything at once. Most of my texts looked something like this: “want 2 go 2 the mall? wat time? go eat first?”. Limiting my characters made me focus on learning as many abbreviations, acronyms, and emoticons as possible.

Although I didn’t think about it at the time, each of these categories helped me in different ways.

- **Abbreviations** leave out vowels and often incorporate numbers that have the sound of particular syllables to save space. A good rule for an abbreviation is that it must have a close enough resemblance to the actual word that the receiver of the text comprehends your meaning. Cutting down on the letters in words is good because you use less characters and can type a message faster.
- **Acronyms**, however, do not resemble a specific word but use letters to represent commonly used phrases. In texting, acronyms are perhaps the best way to shorten a message because they allow a phrase, such as “just so you know,” to be expressed in just a few letters (jsyk). But despite how helpful they are, texting acronyms can be dangerous because they do not make sense to people who do not have a strong background in texting or instant messaging. My mother, for example, gets very confused if I send her texts that say “hbu” or “omw.” Confusion also occurs if people try to create their own acronyms that no one else has ever heard of. It’s best to stick to ones that are commonly known.
- **Emoticons** are symbols made up of punctuation, letters, and numbers to depict emotion in the context of a text message. For example, a winking face [;)] implies that you’re being flirty or joking, while a sad face [:(] suggests the opposite. This is useful to show the emotion that is often difficult to portray in text alone.

Looking back, I realize that these are all skills that I learned from using Yahoo instant messenger, and it might be more difficult for someone to understand these concepts if they had never used instant messaging. For example, I’ve been attempting to teach my mother the art of texting for years. I’ve even gone as far as to print off a list of common texting acronyms for her, but for some reason she still thinks it’s acceptable to make up her own, ignoring the

fact that no one has a clue what they mean. Without the ability to shorten her sentences, she often has to send it in multiple parts and usually gives up and calls me on the phone instead. She simply can't adjust to the change in technology and doesn't understand the genre. My new strategy is to teach her in the way that I learned. Yahoo Messenger is outdated now, but Facebook chat uses the same concept and incorporates the same techniques to shorten sentences. By starting out with some form of textual communication, I think the transition to texting will be much easier.

Things really started to change when my parents got me unlimited texting for my eighth grade graduation present. From that moment on, texting consumed my life. I started having full conversations solely through text messages; talking on the phone became a thing of the past. This also encouraged my high school boyfriend to become something of a stalker. I received a constant stream of text messages from him asking, "where r u?"; "who r u wit?"; and "wen u comin home?". This was slightly endearing at first but quickly became, well, creepy.

My Third Phone and Beyond, or how I learned to drive with no hands

Next came my driver's license, and of course my sixteen-year-old self thought that she could handle the challenge of texting while driving. Take it from me, not a good idea. I was lucky for a while, but then the full keyboard phones came out and they require two hands to operate. This left me with no hands to drive with and resulted in a totaled car and very angry parents.

On a more positive note, phones with the full QWERTY keyboards made texting even faster. Using a full keyboard came naturally to me since I had been using computers for most of my life, but it's not that way for everyone. Texting on a full keyboard is difficult for someone who never learned to type properly. The hunt and peck method that often slows people down when they type on a computer has the same effect when used in texting.

And that takes us up to today. All of these experiences have helped me realize that texting is its own unique genre. It's taken the visual communication method from instant messenger and made it even more convenient by making it mobile, but texting also has the 160 character limit which does not apply to instant messaging. That limit means texting is even more about keeping your messages short in as many ways as possible. Texting also has a slight time lag while sending a message, which means you occasionally send a lot of messages to someone without ever hearing back from them. This can be frustrating because unlike instant messenger, you can never tell if the person you are texting is "online."

Nearly all of my conversations that are not in person take place in email or texting. I've also noticed that the majority of my professional communication, such as with a professor or a boss, takes place through email now rather than speaking over the phone. Textual genres have taken over communication for me. The only people that I speak to on the phone now are people much older than me who have not adapted to textual communication. My grandma and my father, for example, do not like the change in communication and prefer to speak either in person or on the phone because they find textual technology impersonal and difficult to use. I can agree with this assessment to a certain extent because if you don't know the person that you are texting, it is often difficult to "hear" their voice and tone. I've found that if the texter is someone I know, however, I can almost hear exactly how they would say their message out loud.

Texting has become a huge part of my life in the last few years. Texts are being used by hotels to inform people when their room is ready, by pharmacies when a prescription is ready to be picked up, and by newspapers to inform people when schools are cancelled or the weather is bad. In the past these were things that would be handled by phone call, but texting has become the way our generation handles its business. I can understand this because I also choose to send texts rather than making a phone call; it saves me time and helps me to keep up with my world. While I may have started texting for fun, it's now so important to my entire life that I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have it.



Haley Stouffer is a farm-girl from La Moille, Illinois. She is currently a 19-year-old sophomore at Illinois State University, pursuing a degree in English education. She spends her spare time reading, playing basketball, and being a Lord of the Rings fanatic.

Researching, or How I Fell In Love With Post-It Notes

Susana Rodriguez

After years (oh so many, *many* years) of trying to figure out what her teachers wanted when they handed out writing assignments asking for a literary analysis, Susana Rodriguez came up with a three step process for herself to help get her from starting idea to finished paper. Starting by outlining the supplies needed for conducting research, then walking through how to read texts to come up with ideas, the article uses a metacognitive approach to explain why the writer makes the decisions they make in the process—basically writing about writing analytical papers analytically. Written in a casual, tongue-in-cheek tone, Rodriguez aims to recreate a writer's thought process in action to show how one idea leads to another, offering one method that can be customized to fit other writing needs calling for interpretation, analysis, and reflection to try and say something new: brainstorming, journal responses, reflection essays, editorial and opinion pieces, blog posts, lab reports, science projects, stand up comedy routines, and response text messages to current crushes.

I don't remember ever learning how to research in school. Hell, I don't remember ever even being *taught* how. I just know that for every writing assignment handed out by my teachers throughout middle and high school I spent a lot of time scratching my head trying to figure out 1) where to start and 2) how they all managed to take the same class on neatly typing out and printing said assignments on half-slips of paper.

When the first slip was put in my grubby little post-Phys. Ed. hands in sixth grade, I felt like my teacher had carved out a chunk of the Rosetta Stone and expected me to translate the hieroglyphics on it. I only spoke English and Spanish at the time, but even in high school when I picked up Italian the slips still made little, even less sense. I tried to rationalize with them (obviously translating was out of the question since I could only read and write in letters, not pictographs). I tried flattering them (I could try working the words on the slips into my writing and then I was for sure getting an A!). I even tried bargaining with them (if I was nice enough to them, making sure never to get them crinkly and bent in my backpack, taking them out and reading them

often, then they would totally start making nice back by letting me understand them, right?!). Zero, zilch—*nada* worked.

See, what's funny is the writing goals were always clear: write from this many to this many pages using x-amount of sources to talk about such and such topic using this, that, or the other font with only so many spaces between the lines. Oh, and it's due sometime in the near-ish future. But where to start? What to do? *How* I'm getting from point a (the assignment) to point b (the final paper)? Nowhere on those little half-slips of paper was there ever a hint or sign or hidden message to decode!

Over the years—and many, many, *many* C and B minuses—I've come up with my own strategy for writing out papers. And because this article is in this journal, I'm hoping it'll help others who don't have the time to wine and dine their own half-slips of papers throughout the semester. Good karma? Sweet revenge? I don't know. But I *do* know this is one way of writing that's worked for me, and that's as good a place to start revising and tweaking this process to customize it for different learning styles.

So *HA!* Take *that*, half-slips! You'll rue no one's writing day(s) no more!

Step 1: Load the Research Guns

Those beastly little half-slips weren't completely evil: they *did* have a topic to start getting writing ideas from. But they were usually so general that I really could write about anything and everything I wanted to and never get anywhere near finishing a good, focused paper the first time around. For example, let's say one of my professor wants me to write six double-spaced pages in Fines Blue Nomen font about Whimsy's *Pretty and The Beastie*, a popular story for youngish peoples about Pretty, an intelligent and aesthetically arresting person, who ends up cohabiting in a castle with Beastie, a formerly aesthetically arresting person turned creature-like being for having a piss poor attitude towards those they considered aesthetically inferior. See? Where in that last sentence is there any remotely definitive direction?

Obviously this means war! But I can't go into this with just my little, balled fists swinging all over the place—this calls for big guns. Big little guns, actually, in the form of strategic office supplies:

- A pen (or three)

To, of course, scribble all over book margins with. I've found that while I read I react to the story as I go: either laughing at something that happened or thinking something was a stupid idea and wanting

to put in my two cents. But if I don't write those thoughts down when I have them I don't remember them by the time I get to the end.

I don't rest my eyes in the margins so much anymore as I jot down what comes to mind as I read.

- A pack of highlighters:

As much as I talk back to a book by writing in the margins, I also find words or passages that stick out for me from the text that I don't want to respond to so much as I want to look at again because something struck a chord in me. Sometimes that chord is a sweet note like a good quote I want to go back to, or it's a turn of phrase or rhythm of a sentence that I think is pretty neat and want to note for myself. That chord can also be sharp and flat, like when I read something I think is strange or don't understand—a word, a sentence, a description, a plot hole.

Highlighting cuts my search time down too when I'm flipping through pages to find what I was looking for since the neon colors sear my already naturally deteriorating retinas.

- A semi-endless supply of post-it notes:

Ahhh, the humble post-it note! Sticky, writeable, light, and reusable, they're probably the best thing ever invented for the writer in need.² For a long time I used to fold over and dog ear pages to mark off passages I wanted to go back to, which eventually turned into sticking bookmarks and random pieces of paper to section them off, which evolved into joining those sections together with paperclips, then sticking pens and pencils inside the sectioned off groups to remember which were the most important notes. Almost anything I was reading to write about was held together with rubber bands to keep this method from falling apart at the slightest stumble.

Post-its and all the sizes and colors they come in saved me from myself. Do I just need to mark off a page? There's a little flag for that. Do I need to write something else that won't fit in the margins I've already scribbled up? There's a size for that. Do I need to section off pages in some kind of order? There are colors for that.

And because they're little slips of sticky paper, I don't have to worry about them falling out all over the place.

- A comfortable spot to work

This is probably the most important of the big little guns I arm myself with, if only because I *know* how I work. I know that I can only get any researching or writing done by blocking off a big chunk of time—usually anywhere between four hours to three quarters of

a day—to focus all my attention on a project. I’m *so* not someone who can sit down and read or write for an hour or two and then do it again the next day and the day after that in micro-slots until they’re done with their work. My brain needs to be swimming and floating and playing in open ocean, it just doesn’t do regulated laps around the pool.

I also know I can’t work at home at all because it’s too easy for me to get distracted by the simple fact that I’m at home and can go take a nap or read a book if I want to. Even better, I can’t work in absolute or only partial quiet—I *have* to have a steady stream of noise that doesn’t stop or start suddenly to focus, no matter how low or loud that sound may be. Ergo, I have a few options as to where I can get started: a main lounge area in a library, a bookstore, a coffee shop, out in a park, etc.

My decision on where to go will usually hinge on whether or not I’ve eaten before I settle down for the long haul, which is a must because I can’t think, much less see straight unless my stomach’s been taken care of first.

Now that I’m armed, I can go head to head with Whimsy’s *Pretty and the Beastie* and start knocking out some paper ideas.

Step 2: Fire without Aiming

The question now is: what do I write about—since my only strict directions are to whip up a specific number of spaced pages in a certain font. Here’s where I need to r.o.c.k. out some ideas to write my paper by reading critically, observing what’s going on, connecting what I see, and knitting it back to what other writers are saying about it.

The first part is I critically read the text I’ll be writing about. I couldn’t quite wrap my head around this the first time I was asked to do it because my default setting is to just dive into a story and read for fun. The thing is, Reading Critically isn’t a fan of cannon-balling into the pool like Reading For Fun is: it likes to put on its floaties, dip a toe in to test the temperature, then wade in slow and steady with a boogie board to keep its head above water. Reading Critically is careful, making sure every kick is full and measured to soak in every minute of an open swim session and keeping its eyes open to everything going on around them to neither paddle into or be paddled into by another swimmer. Reading Critically also takes everything into account, just as I should when I pick up *Pretty and The Beastie*. So I don’t start on the first page—I start with the book cover, summary, and anything else that comes

before the page one, taking my time to see the work as a whole and not just a story in a book. And I dive in with my own floaties and boogie board too, except mine are my research guns loaded with my pens, highlighters, post-its, and a comfy spot.

Like Reading Critically doggie paddling, I read at a slower pace so I can observe what's going on in the text. And now, armed with the power of post-its, I can start noting and cataloging my observations for future reference as I go along. I start off in my notebook by making up a symbol and color-code for my little post-it flags that I'll use to mark off different things I start looking for as I read the text and notice patterns forming. Now when I say pattern, I mean something that shows up three times or more in the text—not once (because that's a fluke) or twice (because that's a coincidence) but three or more times and there's a regularity that establishes a pattern. In the beginning I'll only look at a couple of things, like everytime that anything related to Pretty or Beastie or their romance comes up since the story's supposed to be about them and their relationship. But as I read more and see more things in the text, then I'll grow my symbol and color-code list to keep track of what I've noticed.

If I'd been reading for fun, I wouldn't notice that Whimsy's *Pretty and The Beastie* isn't about Pretty cohabiting with Beastie so much as it's about Pretty being held prisoner by the Beastie. (Here I'll draw a little heart in a circle with a line through it for "No Romance" to keep track of this throughout the text, making a note on a post-it about what was weird about this instance and sticking it on the page just under the passage I'm looking at.) Or that Pretty's so awfully smart they can walk around with their nose in a book yet no one—at least none of the people's of a masculine persuasion—notices this so much as they notice how pretty Pretty is. (I could doodle a little brain or a face with big kissy lips to follow this thought everytime I see it and be able to count up how many times these references show up by the time I finish the story. I'll also probably highlight Pretty's descriptions and see if they change or stay the same.) Or even that Pretty may or may not be losing their mind what with being in semi-solitary confinement and starting to think the castle furniture is talking back since Beastie witholds dinner when Pretty refuses to deal with their pissiness any longer. (Definitely a doodle of a moon with spirals as universal code for "loony" here.) The hell is going on in this story? (I'll scribble a big, bold **WTF?!** in the margins every time I read something that makes me feel this way.) I thought Whimsy and their multi-bajillion dollar fairy tale empire had promised me an epic love story about two people from different worlds coming together against the odds?

At that moment right back there—the one where what I thought one thing was going on but I'm seeing something completely different—is when

I start making connections. Here I bust out the five w's and a y: who, what, when, where, why, and how. First then, who's this story about? So far my reading says it's mostly about Pretty, despite the story being called *Pretty and the Beastie*. I mean, sure, we get some of Beastie's story throughout but it's either stuff that happened before or in the background of Pretty's story. Also, who's this story meant for? Young-ish peoples, according to the description, which means then not exactly very young nor very non-young but peoples of an in-between age. I can even get more specific at this point and say it's meant for young-ish peoples also of the feminine persuasion since I've noticed the story's mostly about Pretty. Now what exactly is Pretty's story? They're a person of the feminine persuasion who gets pretty much sold off to Beastie by Pretty's Father-person, seeing as Father-person broke-in and entered Beastie's castle for shelter³. Other things about Pretty include the fact that they're very smart and most of the peoples of the masculine persuasion find Pretty aesthetically arresting, chasing after Pretty for their hand in cohabitation since Pretty's of a certain age that's ready to leave their Fatherly-person's abode and start their own life. Ooooh, fancy that little nugget back there: Pretty, much like their readers, is at an in-between stage too! Now, because of this little spark, I start to entertain thoughts like how Pretty's story ties back to its readers—with both being at in-between stages—and what it might be saying to them through the story. Behold, the seed of an idea is born!

Now I'm ready to knit this little idea onto other things people before me may have thought up to help mine grow. But before I even pull up Google or the library catalog on my browser, I get all my own notes together to kick start my warm-up draft. This is where the best thing about post-its comes in, see: I don't "write" my first drafts on a page. I throw them up on my kitchen wall. I like working this way because I don't feel tied to any one way of organizing the information I have so far. If I want to switch things around it's as simple as unsticking one, or even a few post-its from the wall and resticking them wherever I want them to go! I can put one under another if the ideas are close enough to make up a paragraph or two out of them, just like I can slap one next to another if the thoughts are similar but have potential to branch out in their own directions. And the best part is that I totally avoid the tiny panic attack I have when I open up a blank Word document to write. (Also, if I play my cards right and spring for the fancy colored post-its, the whole process turns into a cheap, living art installation that I never get bored of *and* brightens up breakfast in the morning, without ever making a trip to the Art Institute!)

After the post-its on my wall start looking like they have some kind of pattern going on more so than just being stuck up all over the place, then I'll actually start knitting. With the post-its starting to make some sense I can

run searches to see what other people have said about the topics I've come up with: Pretty's prettiness, their not so romantic story, and how these two things relate to *Pretty and the Beastie's* youngish readers. As I find out what other people are saying, I repeat the same process I followed for reading *Pretty and the Beastie*, applying it to these new texts that'll help shape my work. I scribble in the margins, highlight significant parts, and post-it note the living daylight out of them. I'll rework the "draft" I have thrown up in my kitchen wall, adding to or taking away from the post-its sticking on it, until it stops looking like a bunch of little squares with some kind of pattern to them and starts to look like there's a definite pattern with groups of post-its crowded around each other and trails leading from one group to another.

Here's where I need to run and take step three before I'm in too deep.

Step 3: Walk Away from Everything

Yes. Just like that. I watch a few videos. Run some errands. Do laundry. Take a day, or weekend trip to the city. Hike. Camp. Sail. Anything that does not even so much *look* like researching or writing. I do anything and everything I can to give my brain a rest and let my thoughts stew for a while—be that a few minutes, hours, or days depending how much time I have. Once I can see there's a pattern to the post-its on my kitchen wall, I have to walk away from them before I get stuck arranging and rearranging them forever. And I'm usually tempted to stay there unsticking and resticking them because it buys me a little more time away from the blank Word document even though I'm pretty prepared to write something down at this point.

I also need to take this step because I need to get some distance from what I've got up on the wall so far. Since by now I'll have been working on the draft long enough that I don't have to think about where I put up which sticky note and what I wrote on it, it means I'm too close to the work to look at it objectively to try and make any new connections between ideas, it's time to walk. Especially because this closeness also means my eyes aren't fresh enough to see what I've got up there in new ways. So I go and do something completely different to let all the reading and noting I've done settle down.

When do I come back to it all? When I start stopping in the middle of making breakfast to write down a thought that showed up all on its own really quick before it flies away again. When I get up before my alarm clock goes off because a couple of thoughts started arguing and couldn't wait to be heard any longer. When I start waking up in the middle of the night and reaching for the pad and pencil on my nightstand to write down as much as I can

remember about a new idea that came to mind when six thoughts decided to merge. That's when it's time for me to look back up at the kitchen wall, pull out my laptop, and start writing.

These three simple steps usually get me going somewhere, although it's not a definitive somewhere yet. But by the end I have enough material read and researched behind me that I get to enjoy seeing where the writing takes me.

Endnotes

1. Not even a lowly footnote. Pits!
2. Right after spellcheck and deadline extensions!
3. Although, to be fair to the story, I'm on shaky ground calling it breaking and entering for shelter as Beastie would contest private property rights, but that's neither her nor there. *Unless*, of course, I decide to write about how characters within *Pretty and the Beastie* interpret property law, which I *could* but so far my critical reading of the story is pointing more in the direction of focusing on Pretty and their unfortunate situation.



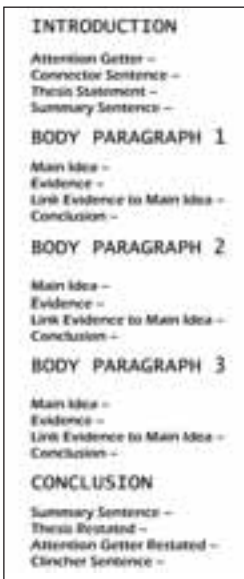
Susana holds a Master's degree in English Studies. She's an avid croquet player and ice cream cone enthusiast. When she's not staying up at all hours of the day researching or writing her latest scholarly opus for class, she enjoys curling up on her couch and reading a book until she falls asleep with it hugging her face. She spends her free time traveling on whims to new cities and exploring new places, always dreaming about where her next impromptu adventure might take her. When she grows up, she wants to sail around the world searching for the perfect cup of coffee and most decadent dessert. She hopes to retire to a yurt in the Galapagos, or join a nomad tribe in Morocco—whichever comes first.

Memorial of the 5 Paragraph Essay

Kevin Snodgrass

In this article, Kevin Snodgrass writes an obituary and memorial of the 5 paragraph essay, which died in his ENG 101 class. In his memorial, he reminisces about what he learned at an early age about writing a 5 paragraph essay and his later, more complicated encounters, including the ACTS introduction, STAG conclusion, and mel-con body paragraph.

OBITUARIES



Picture of the Deceased

The 5 paragraph essay died on September 1, 2010 at approximately 11:15 AM in English 101 class.

All services will be held in future English 101 classes ranging in date and time. All students will be required to attend and take part in the services.

The 5 paragraph essay will not be forgotten but lives on in the memories of his father brainstorming activity, mother pre-assigned topic, his brother research report, and his sister timed essay.

The 5 paragraph loved to sit around all day and write as many details as he could in each of his 3 body paragraphs, he loved to make his writing simple and traditional, and most of all he loved hanging out with the new friends he met every year in elementary school.

I remember the day like it was yesterday. It was my third grade class, and Mrs. Ortiz began Language Arts class by introducing the 5 paragraph essay to us. My first reaction was, “I like writing, so this is going to be fun.” Mrs. Ortiz began her lesson by saying, “All of you will get to know the 5 paragraph essay very well over the next few years.” It was then I knew I would have a long lasting friendship with the 5 paragraph essay. It was easy to see how the 5 paragraph essay became such good friends with so many people; the easy flowing introduction to the three body paragraphs to the conclusion, it all just made so much sense.

The first time we hung out together was when I wrote my research paper on chameleons. We had so much fun together. At first it seemed like we were playing together at the park, but the 5 paragraph essay quickly reminded me that the serious issue at hand was to get the work done. He told me to follow the steps of writing an introduction, body paragraph, body paragraph,

Currently, Walter Payton is not alive, but he will always be remembered. He was voted into the Hall of Fame in 1993, which was the first year he was eligible. His number was retired in soldier field. #34 will not be able to be worn by anyone ever again that plays on the Bears. The Walter and Connie Foundation is still alive, and they are helping children that do not have a good Christmas. Even without Walter, the foundation is still doing well because of the people that cared about Walter Payton. That is how Walter Payton influenced the people for the future.

An early photo of 5 paragraph essay, before he showed me about STAC to help conclude a paper.

body paragraph, and conclusion. He said that if I followed those guidelines I would be guaranteed a good grade. So what did I do? I followed my new best friend’s guidelines and wrote one of the funnest 5 paragraph essays ever. Nothing could stop our friendship after that essay. I thought it was going to last forever. My relationship with my best friend grew closer in sixth grade when he told me more about himself. He gave me some hints about what should be in an introduction and what should be in a conclusion. My best friend said that the introduction should have an attention getter, connector sentence, thesis statement, and a summary sentence. He helped me remember it by telling me the acronym ACTS. It was a great tool when working with my friend 5 paragraph essay. Not only did the introduction have an acronym but the conclusion did too. The acronym for the conclusion was STAC, meaning summary sentence, thesis restated, attention getter restated, and clincher sentence. These two new formats of the 5 paragraph essay were such a help to our friendship, and I used them for a long time.

When I arrived in high school with my best buddy by my side, I met one of his good friends, mel-con paragraph. Again my best friend was giving me reasons to strengthen our friendship because he knew so many cool people. When mel-con introduced himself, he told me that for each body paragraph I wrote I needed a **m**ain idea, **e**vidence for that main idea, a **l**ink

from the evidence back to the main idea, and a **conclusion** for each body paragraph in my 5 paragraph essay. Mel-con then told me that most of the time I should have more than one sentence worth of evidence and link for each paragraph because otherwise my paper wouldn't be long enough. I was stunned. "Wow!" I thought, "Now I have another great friend, and I can use this new information to write better."

Up until my senior year of high school, the 5 paragraph essay was one of my best friends, and I could rely on him for just about any writing assignment I needed to complete. But during my senior year, a new kid named creative writing came to my school. The first time we met, he said, "You will never need 5 paragraph essay when you're with me." As I found out more and more about creative, I realized that my friendship with 5 paragraph essay wasn't as cool as I had thought. I saw that as a friend creative writing had so many more cool ideas and was so much more fun to hang out with than 5 paragraph essay was. Because of this, I stopped spending so much time with 5 paragraph essay. After all, friends are supposed to be fun to hang with. As graduation approached, I had a talk with 5 paragraph essay about my going away to college at the end of the summer, and he was not too happy about it. I told him, "If you want to stay home, you're more than welcome to. But I'm leaving."

He responded, "I want to stay at home; I don't really feel like changing when we're already doing our best work here in high school."

It was only a few weeks later on the 1st of September that my best friend 5 paragraph essay walked into my English 101 classroom and dropped dead. While the autopsy report said that 5 paragraph essay had died due to a heart attack, I think it was the shock of seeing how well I was doing without him.

I will miss the 5 paragraph essay for many reasons. He was the one that first showed me some of the basic forms of writing. He was the one that told me how to *correctly* write a *proper* body paragraph. He was the one that showed me how to write an introduction and conclusion. He was the one that opened the door to bigger and better things in my future. He was the one that left room for creativity without me knowing and knew, even if he wouldn't admit it, that I would find it. I will miss you, 5 paragraph essay, for everything you have shown me and led me to, but most of all for just being a great friend. R.I.P. buddy.



Kevin Snodgrass is a 19 year old sophomore from the city of Mt. Prospect and is currently studying to be an accountant. He loves to watch *Family Guy* as often as he can. He has an obsession with movie and TV show quotes, with millions already in his head. Kevin thinks life is funnier when you make jokes all the time.

We Meet Again? How a Playwright's Knowledge of an Antecedent Genre Made Learning Screenwriting Possible (But Difficult)

Scott Sands

How does one write a play, or a screenplay? Responding to Pankaj Challa's instructional article about writing screenplays in the 2010 *Writing Research Annual*, Scott Sands' play explores, not just the features a writer has to learn in order to successfully engage with a writing task, but how writers make sense of such features when they encounter them in an unfamiliar kind of writing.

In-Venting
a play

AT RISE, PANKAJ is on the couch, typing feverishly at his computer. TONY enters

TONY

Done yet?

PANKAJ

What do you think?

TONY moves behind the couch and leans over PANKAJ's shoulder to see what he's writing

TONY

Nope.

A moment of stasis. Then, TONY walks around the couch and plops down next to PANKAJ

So what's the problem? TONY

What? PANKAJ

Why is it... TONY
gesturing at the computer

...taking so long? PANKAJ
indicating the ceiling

He's never written a screenplay before. TONY

Ah. *A moment of silence*

Isn't that why you're here? PANKAJ

Yes, Tony, that's why I'm here. TONY

Because you wrote a piece about screenwriting. PANKAJ

Mmm hmm. TONY

In the *Writing Research Annual*. PANKAJ

Yes. TONY

So help him out. Show him what to do. PANKAJ

You help him out. You've written screenplays before. TONY

Yes. PANKAJ

And you're a playwright.

TONY

Wrote one of the masterpieces of the American theatre.

PANKAJ

Two of them.

TONY

What?

PANKAJ

Technically, *Angels in America* is two plays—*Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*.

TONY

Oh. Yeah. I guess that's true.

PANKAJ returns to writing. After a moment

TONY

Pankaj?

PANKAJ

Yeah.

TONY

How do you spell “Millennium”?

PANKAJ

For crying out loud, Tony—

TONY

—because I can't remember. Or more precisely, I don't know.

PANKAJ

Oh, great. Here it comes.

TONY

You see, Pankaj, I'm not real.

PANKAJ

Tony...

TONY

Tony Kushner is real.

PANKAJ

Tony...

TONY

Heck, I probably wouldn't mind being him.

Mmm hmm. PANKAJ

But I'm not Tony Kushner. TONY

Really. PANKAJ

I'm a figment of... TONY
jerking his head toward the sky

...his imagination. PANKAJ

So am I, Tony. TONY

Really, I'm just a part of him. PANKAJ

Me too. TONY

I don't know anything he doesn't—what? PANKAJ

I said, "Me too." TONY

You too what? PANKAJ

I'm a figment of... TONY
pointing at the sky

...his imagination, too. TONY

Huh? PANKAJ

I'm not real either. We're both imaginary. TONY

Oh. PANKAJ

Yup.

Wait. TONY

What? PANKAJ

That's not entirely true. TONY

What? No. Tony— PANKAJ

He's met you. He knows you. Hell, he took a class with you. TONY

That's true. PANKAJ

Yup. TONY

Except for one thing. PANKAJ

What's that? TONY

Scott met the real Pankaj. Took a class with the actual Mr. Challa. Doesn't actually know him. In fact, usually sat on the opposite end of the seminar table from him in class, and rarely spoke to him. PANKAJ

But his office was across the hall from yours. TONY

Tony? PANKAJ

Yes? TONY

PANKAJ
at the top of his lungs
I AM NOT THE REAL PANKAJ CHALLA! I'M A FIGMENT, AN IMAGINARY CONSTRUCT. GET THAT THROUGH YOUR HEAD BEFORE MINE EXPLODES!

TONY

rubbing his head

Geez. No need to yell. Now I need an aspirin.

TONY exits into the kitchen. PANKAJ tries to write again. After writing and deleting a few lines, he gives up, picks up the remote, and switches on the TV

AARON

coming from upstairs

Jesus, what the hell is happening down here?

PANKAJ

Nothing.

AARON

Well whatever “nothing” was, it woke me up.

PANKAJ

Something should. Do all writers sleep until noon every day?

AARON

What’s your problem?

PANKAJ points angrily at the ceiling, grabs his laptop, and begins to write again.

AARON

Oh.

AARON sits on the couch. He idly picks up the remote and begins flipping through channels. TONY enters from the kitchen with a carton of orange juice)

TONY

Hey—my favorite show!

AARON

You like *The West Wing*?

TONY

Yeah! Martin Sheen kicks ass!

AARON

Isn’t he like, a hundred years old?

TONY

Why don’t you ask him?

AARON

Ask him? I've never met him.

TONY

Aaron Sorkin has never met Martin Sheen. Right.

PANKAJ angrily slams down the screen of his laptop and puts it aside.

PANKAJ

Tony.

TONY

Yeah?

PANKAJ

Are you the real Tony Kushner?

TONY

We've been through this. I'm a figment. A construct.

PANKAJ

So if you aren't the real Tony Kushner, what makes you think he's the real Aaron Sorkin?

TONY

Oh.

PANKAJ

None of us are real. We're all constructs.

AARON

So why are we here?

PANKAJ picks up the laptop.

PANKAJ

This is why we're here.

TONY

Yeah! You're writing a screenplay!

PANKAJ

We're writing a screenplay. All of us. Together.

AARON

Actually, isn't...

indicating the ceiling

...he writing a screenplay?

PANKAJ

Yes, he's writing a screenplay. And we're helping him.

AARON

Okay. But you just said that we're imaginary. And isn't it his imagination doing the imagining?

PANKAJ

Yes.

TONY

to AARON

Wait—I think I know what you're saying. If we're part of his imagination, then nobody's helping him do anything. He's doing it all by himself.

AARON

Exactly.

TONY

Uh oh.

AARON

What?

TONY

The Myth of the Individual.

PANKAJ

Not this again.

AARON

Individuality is not a myth.

TONY

That's not what I mean.

PANKAJ

rising and crossing to the kitchen

Now I need an aspirin.

PANKAJ exits into the kitchen

TONY

The Myth of the Individual is a concept I wrote about back in the '90s.

AARON

You wrote about it?

TONY

Yeah, yeah, you know what I mean.

PANKAJ

offstage

Ask him what the Myth of the Individual is. That'll be fun.

AARON

Okay, I'll bite. What exactly is the Myth of the Individual? Indiana Jones' next adventure?

TONY

Ha. The Myth of the Individual is the belief that people stand on their own, having original thoughts, accomplishing individual goals, and generally, being islands unto themselves.

AARON

So...?

TONY

So Scott isn't writing this thing himself.

AARON

He isn't?

PANKAJ

entering from the kitchen with a bottle of aspirin.

Nope. We're helping him.

AARON

But we're figments of his imagination.

TONY

We are.

AARON

So isn't he helping himself? I mean if we're not us, but we're him, and we're helping him, isn't he just...talking to himself?

TONY

Sort of.

AARON

My head hurts.

PANKAJ tosses AARON the bottle of aspirin. AARON opens it, upends the bottle over his mouth, and chews the several aspirin that make their way into his mouth

Whoa. Easy there.

TONY

Don't worry. This isn't really happening.

PANKAJ
to TONY

Where do ideas come from?

AARON
to AARON

You're kidding me.

PANKAJ

No he's not.

TONY

Just humor me.

AARON

I know you don't want me to say individual genius.

PANKAJ

He's on to you, Tony.

TONY
to PANKAJ

Shut it.

to AARON

So what do I want you to say?

AARON

I don't know.

TONY

Yes you do.

AARON
exasperated

That creativity is a collaborative process.

TONY

And is it?

AARON

What kind of a question is that?

PANKAJ

Get to the point, Tony.

TONY

Come on, Aaron. Is creativity a collaborative process?

PANKAJ

to TONY, indicating AARON

Wow. I actually think he might hit you.

AARON

No! Creativity is an individual trait! Three movies and three TV series, and I still gotta put up with this?

mockingly

Theatre is a collaborative endeavor, you can't have a play without actors and technical staff, everyone is influenced by other people...yadda yadda yadda.

picking up the laptop and opening it

At the end of the day, someone's actually gotta do the creating.

AARON begins to type furiously. After a few moments of nothing but AARON typing

PANKAJ

Hey Aaron.

AARON

barely under control

What?

PANKAJ

How did you learn to use that computer?

AARON

Oh crap, not you, too.

PANKAJ

Did you invent the computer?

AARON

What is wrong with you? No, I didn't invent the computer!

TONY

So how did you know how to use one?

AARON

I did what anybody does when they get a computer. I opened it up, messed around with it, tried to figure out what various buttons did, where to plug stuff in...

TONY

Okay. But how did you know where to start?

AARON

What?

TONY

You got a computer. You opened it up, and you didn't eat it. You didn't use it as a coaster. You didn't introduce it to your parents and then take it to a movie.

PANKAJ

He gets the point, Tony.

AARON

Actually, I have no clue what you're talking about.

TONY

Yes you do.

AARON

Wanna bet?

PANKAJ

The first time you saw a computer. The very first time. You knew without having to be told that there were certain things you should do to it...

TONY

...like plug it in...

PANKAJ

...and certain things you shouldn't do to it...

TONY

...like stick it in the freezer next to the hamburger.

PANKAJ

Tony...

TONY

What? It's true, isn't it?

AARON

Yeah, I did know that. But everybody knows that.

TONY

But how? How did you know where to start?

AARON

I just did. Without thinking about it.

PANKAJ

There's more to it than that.

AARON

I know, but...

TONY

Don't tell me that it takes an act of individual genius to operate a computer.

PANKAJ

I don't know. Just the other day, I figured out how to add page numbers in Microsoft Word. I felt pretty smart then.

AARON has picked up the laptop, and is turning it around, examining every surface carefully

TONY

to PANKAJ

Are you for real?

PANKAJ

You know I'm not.

AARON

The keyboard...

TONY

to PANKAJ

Shut up, you.

AARON

The keyboard is like a typewriter. It has all the same keys...

PANKAJ

Make me.

TONY

You asked for it.

TONY grapples with PANKAJ, and the two begin to wrestle

AARON

...and the monitor, it's...well it's a monitor. But it's a lot like a TV screen, or a window. You look at stuff through a TV screen...

TONY
to PANKAJ

Ow! No hair-pulling!

AARON

...you look at stuff through a window...

PANKAJ
to AARON

Hey, Mike Tyson—no biting!

AARON

...and you look at stuff through a monitor.

TONY

Whoa—you did not just try to pick my nose!

AARON

Guys...

PANKAJ

I give up! I give up! Lemme go!

AARON

Guys...

TONY

I win!

AARON

Guys!

TONY

Geez, what is it with you two and yelling? I'm right here.

AARON

I've figured it out.

PANKAJ

Figured what out?

AARON

How to operate a computer.

TONY

Took you that long, did it?

PANKAJ

Shut up, Tony.

to AARON

What'd you find out, Aaron?

AARON

I knew how to use a computer because I'd seen every part of it somewhere else. The keyboard isn't all that different from the typewriter my Dad used when I was a kid. The monitor is like a TV screen, or a window. What else are you going to do but look at it?

TONY

Lick it?

PANKAJ

Tony! That's gross!

TONY

What? That's what my cat does.

PANKAJ

Your cat likes to chase cars on the freeway. Does that mean you're going to run down I-55 after the next Chevy you see?

AARON

Guys!

PANKAJ

Oh. Sorry. Continue.

AARON

I'm done.

TONY

Aww, c'mon Aaron...

AARON

No, I mean my explanation is done. I figured out how to use a computer by comparing all of the parts to things I already had experience with. Sure, they weren't the same, but they weren't that different, either.

TONY

Wait a minute—are you telling me that you intuited how to use a computer?

AARON

No. Well, sort of. Computers are designed to make sense. I sort of trusted in that.

TONY

Oh crap.

PANKAJ

What?

TONY

It's only a half step from intuition to creative genius. To the Myth of the Individual.

AARON

No it isn't.

TONY

It isn't?

AARON

Design is collaborative.

PANKAJ

Really?

AARON

Yeah. People design things so that using those things make sense to someone else.

TONY

Audience awareness.

AARON

Yeah. Among other things.

PANKAJ

Hold on—how's this going to help Scott?

AARON

It already has.

PANKAJ

Um...it has?

TONY

Screenplays are designed to make sense. And so are plays.

PANKAJ

But they aren't the same thing.

AARON

No. But since Scott has written a play, he has an idea where to start.

PANKAJ

Okay.

TONY

You OK, Pankaj?

PANKAJ

Scott doesn't need me anymore.

AARON

Sure he does.

TONY

He read your example in the *Writing Research Annual*.

PANKAJ

That's it? All he has to do is read an example I wrote, and he can write a screenplay?

AARON

He knows where your office is.

PANKAJ

Oh, so he really needs the real me, is that what you're saying?

TONY

Pankaj...

PANKAJ

Don't "Pankaj" me! What the heck am I here for if Scott doesn't need me?

AARON

He does need you. He needs to write.

TONY

And read. And research.

AARON

And part of that research is talking to you.

TONY

And reading what you've written.

AARON

And writing plays.

TONY

And reading plays.

PANKAJ

And watching plays, and playing around, and talking and reading and doing, blah blah blah. I get it.

TONY

Do you?

PANKAJ

What the hell kind of question is that?

AARON

Pankaj, why are you here? I mean, what made Scott imagine you in the first place?

PANKAJ

He wanted to write a screenplay. Thought it would be easy.

TONY

And he was wrong.

PANKAJ

Well...yeah. But he saw my article in the *Annual*. And he read it.

AARON

And that got him thinking.

TONY

And here you are.

PANKAJ

Here I am.

AARON

He's trying to write a screenplay. And failing.

TONY

crossing to pick up the laptop

And each time he fails, he tries something new.

AARON

Reads another screenplay.

TONY

Reads another play. Talks to people.

AARON

Writes. Watches movies. And gets better.

PANKAJ

So he's just practicing?

AARON

No, he's trying.

And failing. TONY

And trying. AARON

And failing again. TONY

And you... AARON

TONY
handing PANKAJ the laptop
...are the questions he asks in between the trying.

This is weird. PANKAJ

Yeah. It is. AARON

But it isn't entirely unfamiliar to you. TONY

No, it's not. PANKAJ

So start there. AARON

And we'll help. TONY
PANKAJ sits down, opens the laptop, and begins to type, with AARON and TONY watching intently. Blackout.



Scott Sands is a doctoral student in English Studies at ISU with research and teaching interests in writing center work, writing and tutoring pedagogy, metacognition, creative writing, and assessment. He loves texts that call attention to themselves as artifacts, including especially the work of Charlie Kaufman and Tony Kushner. As a teacher, scholar, and person, Scott values three things above all else: confidence, persistence, and reciprocity.