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From the Editors

Sarah Hercula

The 4.2 issue of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* features twelve new articles by undergraduate and graduate students from Illinois State University and beyond. The pieces in this issue investigate composition and genre research from the perspectives of genre studies and Cultural Historical Activity Theory, which have been the foci of the *Grassroots* journal since its inception.

The issue begins with a group of "traditional" Grassroots articles—those that take a close look at a particular genre to analyze its features and how its users and audience interact with it. **Jeff Rients** kicks off the issue with his investigation of a somewhat obscure genre, the character sheet used by players of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Interestingly, his focus is on how the genre fails to meet the needs of its users in some significant ways. The next author investigates a genre familiar to most college students: margin notes. **Samuel Kamara** discusses his use of marginalia and how important the genre has become to his learning processes. The next two authors, **Kara Steiner** and **Kayla Bruce**, investigate the genres of the documentary film and the resume, respectively. While Steiner narrates her own experiences learning how to compose a documentary for a school project, Bruce helps her authors to think about resumes in terms of their past, present, and future. Lastly, **Sarah Witherspoon** of Saginaw Valley State University in Saginaw, MI takes on the genre of the scholarly academic journal, researching as a potential future writer of this genre important to her field of study.

The next two articles focus on some general topics in composition that can apply to any writing researcher. **Ashley Dolce** discusses how she was taught to follow particular formulas for writing as a high school student, formulas she quickly abandoned after discovering the amount of variation that exists between and within genres. Then, **Samantha Donovan** offers an analysis of audience and how writers of different genres might attempt to reach their target audiences.

Our next three authors take on digital genres, beginning with **David J. Marshall's** analysis of political posts on Facebook. Marshall investigates Facebook as an activity system, questioning why social media are popularly considered inappropriate forums for expressing "political" opinions. Next, **Katie Shoukry** takes her readers through her process of researching and investigating memes, including some of her favorites: Socially Awkward Penguin and Condescending

Wonka, among others. Finally, **Maddy Marchini** discusses social media policies, the genre that allows businesses and companies to navigate through the various digital genres and spaces on the Internet.

The final two articles in this issue depart from those that precede them in different ways. **Daniel P. Hummels** and **Deborah Riggert-Kieffer** take us into a dystopian narrative to showcase their research on the genre of the standardized test. Ultimately, they argue that standardized tests are high-stakes genres with the potential to define important aspects of people's lives—and that maybe they shouldn't be. Lastly, **M. Irene Taylor** and **Jeff Rients** present a dialogue in which they discuss workplaces genres from their previous professions using Cultural Historical Activity Theory as a lens to analyze features of the genres and how their various users interact with them.

We end this issue with our now standard article, "Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*." This article serves as a guide to those interested in writing for the journal or researching the journal as a genre. As we look ahead to the fifth year of publication of *Grassroots*, the editors would like to encourage potential authors to continue to explore complicated writing settings. In particular, we'd like to see articles that explore literate activities as complicated physical, intellectual, and spatial processes, where multiple people, tools, and locations are intertwined in interesting or unusual ways. We're also interested in studies that look at detailed linguistic features, especially in situations where literate activities cross cultural, geographical, or temporal boundaries. Finally, we'd like to see pieces that complicate the "boundaries" of texts we tend to see as coherent and stable, and that explore the fluidity of genres as they are adapted in different settings.

The Elf That Is You: The Failure of the Character Sheet in *Dungeons & Dragons*

Jeff Rients

Using the unusual genre of the Character Sheet in the role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons*, Rients demonstrates some of the problems that arise when a text is written by someone outside its audience. He explores the issues that arise when the creator of a text has power over the reader and a different level of investment in the activity surrounding the text. Rients connects the problems facing this obscure form of writing to other textual productions.

Part I: What the Heck is *Dungeons & Dragons*?

Before eleven million people adventured together online via *World of Warcraft* and before the *Lord of the Rings* was a billion dollar movie franchise, there was *Dungeons & Dragons*, known to its fans simply as *D&D*. First published in 1974 as a small brown box containing three poorly edited booklets, *D&D* provided the rules framework for an unlimited array of adventures and launched a new genre of hobby, the role-playing game, by spawning thousands of imitations and adaptations. The *Dungeons & Dragons* phenomena peaked in the early 1980s with three million players in the U.S.; boxed sets containing shiny, new, better-edited rulebooks in nationwide toy, book, and department store chains; and a merchandising empire that included T-shirts, tie-in novels, action figures, and a Saturday morning cartoon (Eckleberry, Mohan, and Winter 14). It was a heady time to be a fan of the game. *D&D* is now considered the domain of nerds, and maybe it always was, but in the early 1980s, even the cool kids at school would show up to some of my *D&D* games. At that time, *Star Wars* was about the only other intellectual property with star power.

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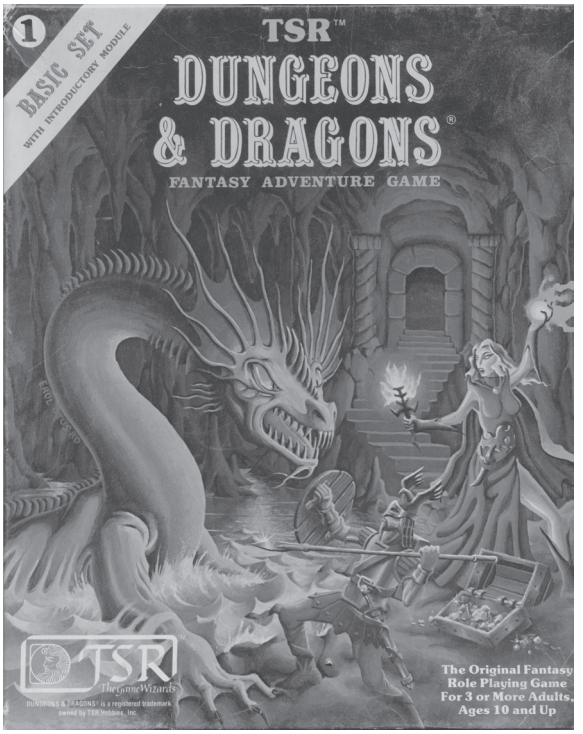


Figure 1. One of many versions of *Dungeons & Dragons*, 1981 (Moldvay, Basic Set).

What makes *D&D* different from George Lucas's tales of a galaxy far, far away is that the centerpiece of the franchise isn't the relatively passive experience of sitting down to watch a movie spectacle; rather it is in an interactive, imaginative experience. The traditional mode involves three or more people sitting around a table surrounded by papers, pencils, funny-shaped dice, and usually snacks. One person, the referee or Dungeon Master (DM), supplies the rules being used for the particular tabletop session and constructs the adventuresome situation (dropping the magic ring in the volcano, slaying the angry dragon, etc.). The referee plays all of the supporting roles in the adventure, while all the other players assume individual heroic personas: each week Arnold plays a bow-wielding elf, Betty assumes the role of a grim knight, and Charley becomes a wild-eyed holy man (Livingston 11). The people and places played by the referee pass through the game like the fast cut a film director uses to move the audience from one location to the next in the blink of an eye, but the player characters (PCs) feature in every scene of every adventure.

In order to provide structure to an infinite world of magic and wonder, the rules for *D&D* can get rather long and cumbersome. My favorite version of the game requires two booklets of sixty-four pages each, and that's considered too light and breezy by some hardcore fans. But not all those rules are needed all the time. The most recent edition of the official rules of the National Football League clocks in at over 300 pages, but not every fiddly rule in it is required to play a pickup game in the park with some friends. Similarly, individual players can show up to a *D&D* game with little or no knowledge of the rules, as the referee can explain crucial rules as they come up (Swan 18).

The relationship between a referee and the players is not altogether different from that of a teacher and his or her students. Ideally, the teacher

and the referee both have the best interests of the rest of their groups in mind, while the students and players hopefully come to the table in a spirit of good faith and cooperation. However, the social situation creates a gap between referee/teacher and players/students that can be difficult to bridge. The Character Sheet demonstrates how that gap can impact writing performed by people on either side of this power relation.

Part II: What the Heck is a Character Sheet?

Remember those papers I mentioned in front of each player at the table? The referee can have a wide selection of documents at his or her station, including the rules, but each player has one key document in front of him or her: the Character Sheet. Some players will make use of other documents as well, but the difference between sitting at the table watching as a spectator or actually going on these dice-powered adventures of the imagination is whether or not someone has a Character Sheet in front of them. Arnold might play Silvernose the Elf, and a little metal figure on the table might mark Silvernose's location in the evil sorcerer's lair, but that Character Sheet *is* Silvernose. Without Arnold's Character Sheet, Silvernose doesn't exist. Many referees keep everyone else's Character Sheets in a folder they retain between sessions because if a player loses his or her Sheet, he or she can't play until a new character is created. The information on the sheet is too detailed and diverse to be reconstructed from memory. In some ways, a Character Sheet is a little like a notebook that a student might use over the course of a semester. The information it contains is similar to everyone else's notebook in the class, but uniquely customized to the needs and interests of one particular individual. And if that notebook is lost, it won't be easy to replace, and the final exam probably isn't going to go well.

As I mentioned earlier, a player can sit down and play *D&D* with literally no knowledge of the rules whatsoever, but he or she can't play without a character or a Character Sheet. That document is a player's passport into the game. Much of what occurs in a *D&D* game happens and is gone with no records kept beyond the memories of the players, like attending a live show of a band as opposed to downloading their studio work. The Character Sheet is the one tangible, persistent object that uniquely connects the player to the game activity.

Check out Figure 2, the front page of a Character Sheet for *Lamentations of the Flame Princess*, one of the best of the *D&D*-derived games published in recent years. The Ability Scores box is located to the left, right under the

game's logo. By the numbers, my character, Donnal McDonnal, is a pretty likeable fellow with a Charisma of 15, but all of his other abilities cluster around the average range of 9 to 12. (Note all the items listed in the same box under the heading "Modifiers.") Like the abbreviations on the back of a baseball card, much of the information on this Character Sheet is baffling to the uninitiated. What does it mean that Donnal is "+1 Loyalty" or "-1 Daily Travel Distance"? Unless one is already a member of the *D&D* tribe, so to speak, the meaning of these terms can only be guessed at. That's a big problem considering that this sort of document is typically thrust in front of new players as their invitation into the game.

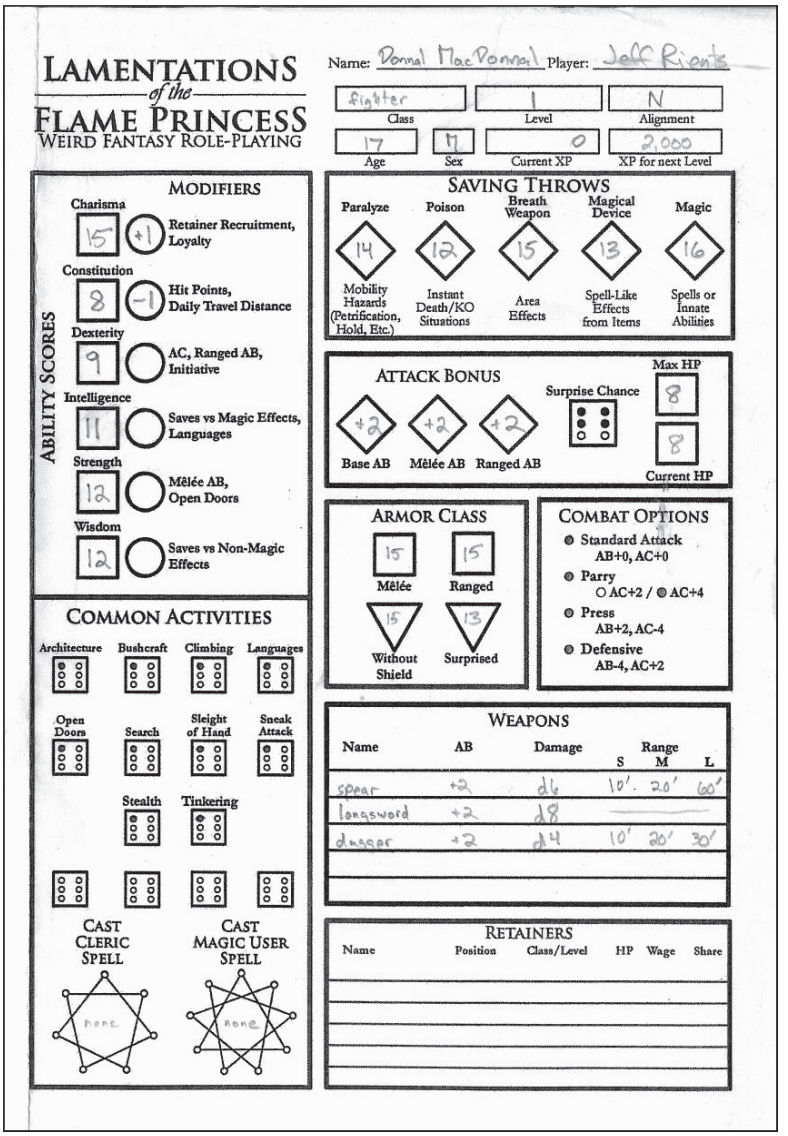


Figure 2. Pre-printed Character Sheet, 2011 (Raggi).

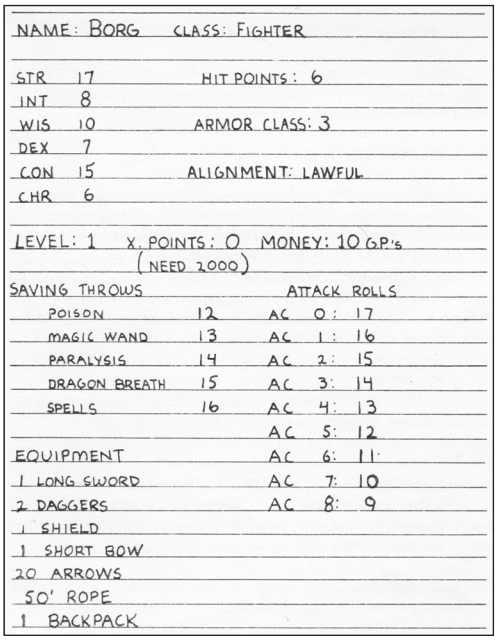
The rest of the Character Sheet similarly intimidates as much as it informs, but even a quick glance can tell you—with sections labeled "Attack Bonus," "Armor Class," "Combat Options," and "Weapons"—that *D&D* emphasizes combat. About a third of the front page is devoted to rule details for violent conflict. Looking at cues like this, a lot of players, including some veterans of the hobby, make the mistake of thinking that *D&D* is all about rushing headlong into combat with the forces of evil. Similarly, the personal possessions and treasure owned by a character often appears on the first or second page of a Character sheet, implying a focus on the acquisition of material wealth.

Part III: Why the Heck Should I Care?

You're reading this article in this journal where there's no particular reason for me to assume that you're a big *Dungeons & Dragons* nerd like me. So here's what I find interesting about the Character Sheet from a writing research perspective: it is largely a *failed* genre of writing. I've mentioned some of the reasons already. Though it is the primary document used by players, the Character Sheet is completely baffling to most new players, and the emphasis on combat abilities on the front side of the sheet sends the wrong message about *D&D*, encouraging players to see their characters as hammers and all the world as a nail. Similarly, the Character Sheet's emphasis on treasure and equipment fosters a mood of material acquisition that often better suits the boardrooms of Wall Street rather than the stuff of legends. And the use of graphic elements in pre-printed Character Sheets, as with Figure 2, may be helpful to experienced players but tends to intimidate novices; pre-printed Character Sheets look less like a fun game and more like filling out a tax return.

There are other reasons to be dissatisfied with most incarnations of the Character Sheet. With all the space devoted to combat abilities and equipment, there's very little room for detailing the things that make a character really a character. Out of the hundreds of fill-in-the-blank sheets I've seen over the years, only one had a spot for listing the character's best friend. Very few have a place for where characters are born or who their family is or the places they've visited or enemies they've made. Many, many players record this sort of information somewhere, typically in the margins of the Character Sheet or on a separate sheet of paper they keep in front of them. If players routinely record this information about their character, why isn't there room for that stuff on most Character Sheets? Information of that type goes a long way towards fleshing out a good *Dungeons & Dragons* character, in much the same way that these relationships make for a rounder character in a novel.

Following the model laid down by *D&D*, a Character Sheet for Batman would tell us about his utility belt and martial arts skills but would nowhere indicate that he fights crime because his parents were murdered by a back alley mugger—important information for understanding Batman's character. Looking at Borg the Fighter (Figure 3), it is obvious how, by the omission of social or biographical information on this early example of the Character Sheet, many young players (me included) ended up playing every character as a murderous orphan with no interests beyond killing goblins and stealing gold. Borg is little more than a collection of fighting abilities and weaponry, so we assumed the game was all about fighting.


NAME: BORG CLASS: FIGHTER

STR 17 HIT POINTS: 6
INT 8
WIS 10 ARMOR CLASS: 3
DEX 7
CON 15 ALIGNMENT: LAWFUL
CHR 6

LEVEL: 1 X. POINTS: 0 MONEY: 10 G.P.'s
(NEED 2000)

SAVING THROWS		ATTACK ROLLS	
POISON	12	AC 0:	17
MAGIC WAND	13	AC 1:	16
PARALYSIS	14	AC 2:	15
DRAGON BREATH	15	AC 3:	14
SPELLS	16	AC 4:	13
		AC 5:	12
EQUIPMENT		AC 6:	11
1 LONG SWORD		AC 7:	10
2 DAGGERS		AC 8:	9
1 SHIELD			
1 SHORT BOW			
20 ARROWS			
50' ROPE			
1 BACKPACK			

Figure 3. Early example of a handwritten Character Sheet, 1981 (Moldvay, *Basic Rulebook* B5).

Additionally, some of the space on most Character Sheets is occupied by objects that don't need to be there. Looking back at my character sheet for Donnal McDonnal (Figure 2), near the top of the right-hand side is a box labeled "Saving Throws." These are the numbers I must try to roll to ward off death by a dragon's fiery breath or a giant scorpion's poisonous stinger. When it comes time to avoid such dangers, those numbers become critical information, but that doesn't mean it needs to be on the Character Sheet. The referee has a big chart listing the Saving Throws for all character types, so I don't really need them on my Character Sheet.

Similarly, many Character Sheets allocate space for calculating Encumbrance, which basically involves tallying the weight and bulk of your armor and other gear to see how much all that stuff slows your character

down when he or she tries to run away from the monsters. In a game like *World of Warcraft*, the computer does this for the player, but in the non-computerized world of tabletop *D&D*, theoretically the game should stop while Encumbrance is recalculated every time a character picks up or drops something. But most referees rarely enforce the Encumbrance limits because it only slows down the pace of the game, so most character sheets with Encumbrance information on them waste space on a rule that's usually ignored.

However, not every player or every game-group uses fill-in-the-blank forms like I did when making Donnal McDonnal (see Figure 2). Prior to the rise of cheap laser printing and photocopying, a large number of Character Sheets were handmade, typically on college-ruled, spiral-bound paper or graph paper. Nowadays a fair number of Character Sheets are still made this way, and still others are homemade on a computer and then printed for play, while the rise of online *D&D* games—conducted via Internet text chat, Skype voice chat, Google Hangouts video chat, etc.—has led to a growth in entirely electronic character sheets. Donnal McDonnal has seen many adventures since the version pictured in Figure 2, but I now keep his character sheet solely online in a Google Drive file, because I now play that character only in online *D&D* sessions.

But even with the freedom afforded to players by starting with a blank page (or screen) to make their own character sheets, there is a tendency to make the same old mistakes. The official Character Sheets (found in the back of the rulebook for each photocopying, for sale as a pre-printed pad, or available as a PDF download on the game's official website) carry a lot of institutional weight. Everyone emulates these bad examples, so their bad practices become the default positions for constructing new examples of the genre of the Character Sheet.

Figure 4 is another front page for one of my Character Sheets, made on Google Drive but printed out for tabletop play. The large amount of handwritten additions to this character sheet show how even an experienced player trips over the genre. I can spot at least three places where a Character Sheet I made for my own use failed to meet my needs, despite the fact that I've been a *D&D* referee for over three decades. First, I didn't include a field for my character's patron deity, even though religion is important to the character concept. Secondly, I failed to allocate space for my Experience Point tally; as I have done with a zillion prior Character Sheets, I resorted to keeping a running tally in the marginal white space of the page. And third, in the bottom margin, I noted "seek the Questing Beast." Why didn't I specify a space on the sheet for quests, clues, and other plot points? Because thirty years of prior Character Sheets had taught me that such a space is not a standard element of the genre, whether it should be there or not.

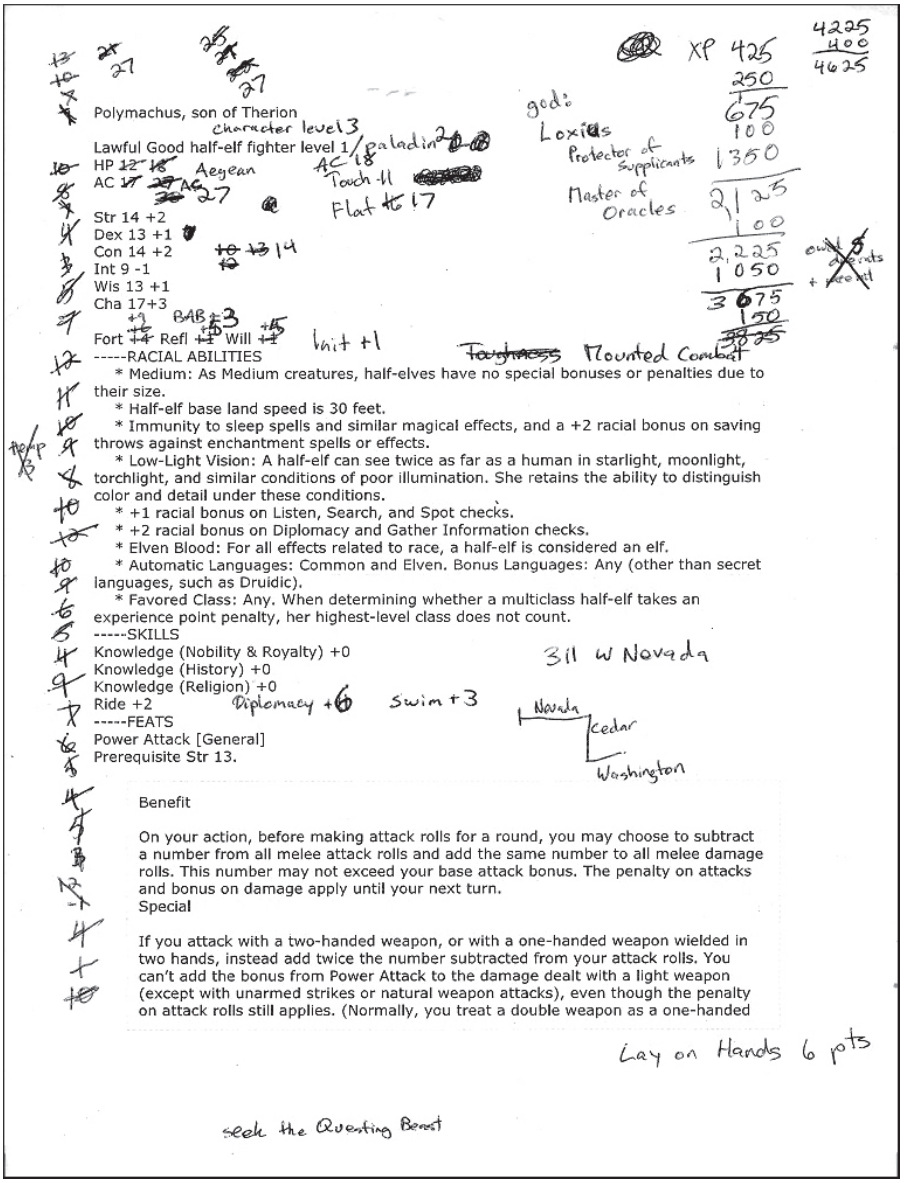


Figure 4. Online character sheet I created with handwritten additions, 2010.

Ultimately these problems are repeated over and over again because of the power relations surrounding the production and distribution of this kind of document. Character Sheets are designed for players but by referees and game designers (all of whom are referees). And while any player can become a referee and any referee is welcome to switch roles and become a player, the psychology of the "mostly player" and "mostly referee" types are quite different. Referees tend to be more deeply involved in the hobby. They buy the bulk of the products, read most of the rules, participate in most of the

online discourse, and write most of the journal articles in which they try to convince other people that this stuff is interesting. The typical referee spends at least an hour or two on preparation prior to each hour of actual play. For a lot of referees, *D&D* isn't just a game or a hobby, it's a lifestyle choice. On the other hand, players tend to take the hobby a little more in stride. They may not think about the game much at all between sessions, apart from, "Thursday we're looting the vampire lord's treasure vault. Cool." All a player really needs to do to prepare for a session of *D&D* is to show up ready to play (Swan 18).

So the referees—with their totally different and somewhat obsessive view of the game—end up designing Character Sheets filtered through their own preconceptions of what *should* be important to the players. And because the referees do most of the heavy lifting to start and maintain the game, few players object to the situation. I doubt many players ever consciously realize, "Hey, this Character Sheet doesn't fulfill my needs as a player," or that such a comment would be a legitimate criticism they can offer to the referee. This is especially true because newbies are trained to accept that the confusion caused by a Character Sheet is simply part of the game's learning curve, rather than a problem that can be addressed.

As long as referees are making Character Sheets for their players and players are emulating previous examples of the genre, the Character Sheet will never completely serve the needs of the player base that uses it. Both the slick, pre-made, fill-in-the-blank versions (like Figure 2) and the homemade Character Sheets (like Figure 3) will continue primarily to serve the referees' ideas about what is good for the players, rather than satisfying the players' actual needs. Referees, as the main experts on the game at most tables, lack the perspective necessary to make Character Sheets that are truly friendly and helpful for new players.

Similar circumstances can be found in a variety of other forms of writing. For example, a teacher preparing a hand-out for his or her students must keep in mind not only his or her own goals for the classroom, but also the capabilities and interests of the students. But on the other side of the equation, students shouldn't just let their eyes glaze over when the teacher doesn't meet them halfway. Or citizens confused by the layout of the ballots in their polling place shouldn't passively accept the situation when instead they could take up the issue with election officials. Texts like ballots tend to be designed by political insiders who don't necessarily understand or care about the needs of the common people until citizen action forces them to take such concerns into consideration. It's up to both parties to keep the lines of communication open.

The case of the Character Sheet is closer to the case of the well-intended teacher rather than the apathetic bureaucrat. The uniformity of design that haunts the genre is a lingering side-effect of the need for many blank sheets back in the days before most of us had easy access to printers and decent word processors. Players back then either purchased pads of character sheets produced by the publisher, photocopied blank sheets from the rulebook, or made their own sheet that mimicked such one-size-fits-all approaches. To improve the utility of the Character Sheet in *D&D* today, the referee and the players need to be in dialogue about this important genre. Once the players' needs are better understood, the group could have a conversation about what is important to them for each particular game and work together to build a custom sheet accordingly. Alternatively, each player could take it upon him- or herself to design Character Sheets that meet his or her needs, as not all players have the same agendas when playing the game. Some information would be common to all Character Sheets, but that doesn't mean critical information needs to be displayed in the same place or in the same way on all sheets at the table. Additionally, new types of Character Sheets could be developed specifically for new players to help them learn the game by replacing the abbreviations that pepper a typical Character Sheet with actual words and cutting anything that the referee could look up for the player. New players would need to be involved in this process, as they would be in the best position to identify where the Character Sheet is most confusing. (Or at least I think those are three ways to address this situation. As a longtime referee, I'm actually part of the problem.)

But there's a bigger point I'm trying to make here. Every text we encounter has been shaped by unknown people and invisible forces, the way decades of past *Dungeons & Dragons* play impacts what kind of Character Sheet I hand a new player. Now that I understand that fact, I can do something about it. As a referee, I can try to work with my players to better fulfill their needs, and as a player, I can speak up to other referees. That lesson applies to other texts in the world around us, especially those designed for our use by people in power. Such texts need to be dissected and examined by the end user and, if found wanting, redesigned. Just because the government hands us a form to fill out or an instructor supplies us a syllabus for the semester doesn't mean we have to passively accept it. We should investigate these texts and their histories and challenge those who make them to work with us to make them better.

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Returning to school after almost two decades in the world of banking, **Jeff Rients** now studies English literature at Illinois State University. He has been obsessed with *Dungeons & Dragons* since spotting a copy on the shelf of a toy store back in 1981.

Exploring Marginalia: The Intersection Between Reading and Cognition

Samuel Kamara

In this article, Kamara talks about how margin notes help interface between reading and understanding. Moreover, he examines the genre features of marginalia as texts that are produced from our reading of other texts.

Marginalia[1]

Sometimes the notes are ferocious,
skirmishes against the author
raging along the borders of every page
in tiny black script.
If I could just get my hands on you,
Kierkegaard, or Conor Cruise O'Brien,
they seem to say,
I would bolt the door and beat some logic into your head.

Other comments are more offhand, dismissive –
"Nonsense." "Please!" "HA!!" –
that kind of thing. . . .
—Billy Collins

When I came to the U.S. of A in 2010, I suddenly realized that my set of reading skills were quite different than what was expected of me in most of my courses. I would read the assigned readings for my classes feeling confident that I had fully "understood" those essays, but in class, I would be unable to relate what I thought I had understood during discussions. Something was, indeed, terribly wrong, either with my reading skills, or more significantly, with the fact that I was unfamiliar with the ways this new U.S. culture constructed meaning. I certainly had to re-learn how to read my textbooks and assigned essays in order for me to confidently take part in class discussions and write "acceptable" essays. I realized that reading does not only entail gleaning "facts," but also interacting and dialoguing with texts in ways that produce multiple and sometimes hidden meanings. In order to achieve this, I developed the skill of writing my thoughts and impressions of the passages I read in the margins of my textbooks and essays. I would

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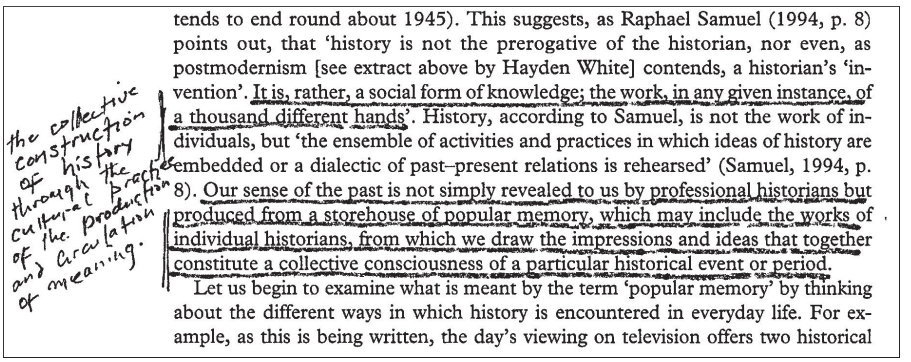
highlight important paragraphs or sentences and then write down what I thought the authors were saying or implying. Now, after having done this for a while, I also realize that these thoughts, impressions, or feelings that I sometimes write in the margins of my textbooks are actually a kind of text—a genre—that does a lot of things. Bill Collins' poem, "Marginalia," quoted above, illustrates the intriguing nature of this genre. Even though they are intensely personal texts—that is, each writer has his/her own unique way of inscribing marginalia—they do conform to broad genre requirements such as content, context, language, purpose, and audience. The example below illustrates how margin notes are generated from other texts:



tends to end round about 1945). This suggests, as Raphael Samuel (1994, p. 8) points out, that 'history is not the prerogative of the historian, nor even, as postmodernism [see extract above by Hayden White] contends, a historian's 'invention'. It is, rather, a social form of knowledge; the work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands'. History, according to Samuel, is not the work of individuals, but 'the ensemble of activities and practices in which ideas of history are embedded or a dialectic of past–present relations is rehearsed' (Samuel, 1994, p. 8). Our sense of the past is not simply revealed to us by professional historians but produced from a storehouse of popular memory, which may include the works of individual historians, from which we draw the impressions and ideas that together constitute a collective consciousness of a particular historical event or period.

Let us begin to examine what is meant by the term 'popular memory' by thinking about the different ways in which history is encountered in everyday life. For example, as this is being written, the day's viewing on television offers two historical

Figure 1. Margin notes paraphrasing the main idea of the underlined sentence.[2]

Before discussing their genre function, let us start by defining marginalia. Marginalia are scribbles, comments, and illustrations in the margins of a book or essay (see Figure 1, above, for an example). They come in many forms, such as smileys, doodles, paraphrases, comments, strokes and marks, and unintelligible letters suggestive of different emotional states. One must make a distinction here between marginalia (what is written in the margins of a text), and highlighting (underlining the passage or sentence that speaks directly to the margin notes). Most writers highlight the portion of the text that gives rise to the marginalia. In whatever forms they appear, marginalia always come as a result of our interaction with texts. They are the inscriptions on the various margins of a page—top, bottom, left, or right—that point to the fact that another reader, or other readers, have engaged with such a material before us. This then fixes the context of marginalia to an already written text. Also, because they are derived from such a written text, they do help construct the identity of the reader(s) who produces them. They allude to the state of mind of the reader while reading the text.

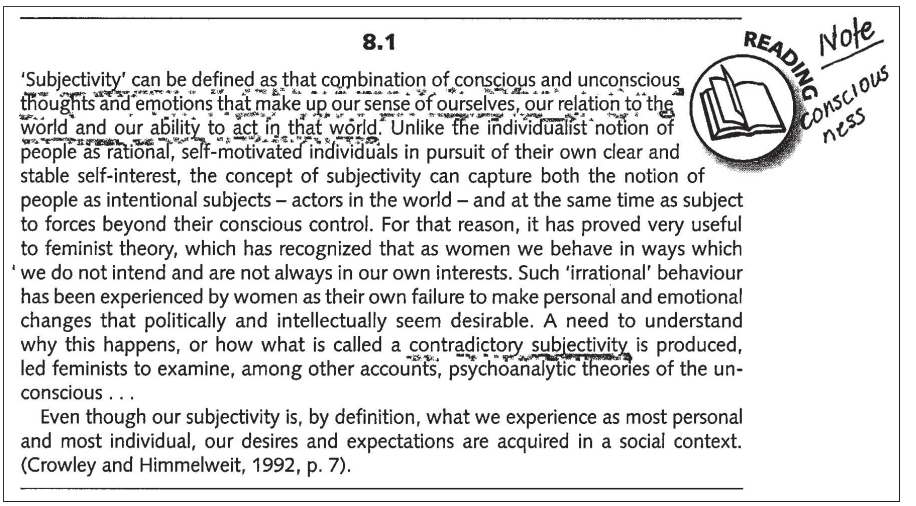
They also reinforce the reading style of close or interactive reading over skimming or reading for pleasure. Such reading styles signal the purpose of marginalia. Their purposes are interaction and cognition. The reader who produces marginalia while reading a text wants to interact with such

a text in ways that will enhance an understanding of its content. And to understand something is to also have the capacity to remember that thing. Although someone can understand and forget, memory does solidify our understanding of things. So, in this sense, we can say that, first and foremost, the audience of marginalia is the reader who produces them. His or her marginalia serve as roadmaps for tracking his or her interaction with a text and the important ideas gleaned from such an interaction. However, in cases where such marginalia are intelligible, the second or subsequent readers of a text can also be the audience. The marginalia of a previous reader can help shape the understanding of a subsequent reader or provide the basis for the forming of opinions that may be different from those of the previous reader. Otherwise, in cases where they are unintelligible, they can become texts needing mediation by subsequent readers.

Let us, then, focus for the remainder of this article on showing how marginalia serve as an interface between reading and understanding. As I have mentioned above, when we adopt certain styles of reading, such as close reading, interactive reading, or reading for meaning, we do so because we want to reach a solid understanding of the contents of the texts we are interacting with. Thus, the marginalia that come out of such close readings are reflective of the process involved in reaching that understanding. Indeed, cognition is not an act, but an outcome derived from a process. This idea is beautifully captured by Wassmann when she defines cognition as "a conclusion, which prepares itself in unconscious process and which comes to awareness only in the form of the final result."[3] In other words, for us to reach an understanding about something, we must go through the process of questioning, forming opinions, agreeing or disagreeing, and expressing frustrations with difficulties along the way. And one of the ways in which we realize all of these in reading is through marginalia. This is not to suggest that cognition cannot be reached without marginalia. We must bear in mind that cognition is not just derived from reading, but touching, smelling, tasting, and hearing, too—sometimes from a multiple use of the senses as well.

In order for us to understand how marginalia dramatize the process of cognition, let us consider those marginalia that express different emotional states in our engagements with a text. Let us recall those moments when we found certain portions of our texts difficult to understand and think of what we wrote in those moments on the margins of those texts. Those marginalia that we produced in those moments constitute part of the process of understanding those texts. They help us form opinions about whether the contents of the texts we are reading are difficult or easy. Such opinions form part of the meaning of what we are reading. At other times, such margin comments serve as roadmaps to indicate specific portions of our texts that

require a second or even a third reading. Indeed, the conclusions we reach in the end, whether we like or dislike a particular text, are highly dependent on our emotional experiences with such a text. Our emotions are our unconscious decisions and subjective opinions that we reach as we engage with a text. This is why it is possible for two different readers to read the same text and come out with two different understandings of such a text.



8.1

'Subjectivity' can be defined as that combination of conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions that make up our sense of ourselves, our relation to the world and our ability to act in that world. Unlike the individualist notion of people as rational, self-motivated individuals in pursuit of their own clear and stable self-interest, the concept of subjectivity can capture both the notion of people as intentional subjects – actors in the world – and at the same time as subject to forces beyond their conscious control. For that reason, it has proved very useful to feminist theory, which has recognized that as women we behave in ways which we do not intend and are not always in our own interests. Such 'irrational' behaviour has been experienced by women as their own failure to make personal and emotional changes that politically and intellectually seem desirable. A need to understand why this happens, or how what is called a contradictory subjectivity is produced, led feminists to examine, among other accounts, psychoanalytic theories of the unconscious . . .

Even though our subjectivity is, by definition, what we experience as most personal and most individual, our desires and expectations are acquired in a social context. (Crowley and Himmelweit, 1992, p. 7).

Figure 2. Using old knowledge to understand something new.[4]

Another way in which marginalia interface between reading and cognition is by creating a link between previous and new knowledge. The way we acquire knowledge is incremental. We keep on adding new knowledge to old knowledge. Sometimes, also, we use old knowledge to understand new knowledge. I remember reading a very dense text that was trying to explain the cultural theory concept of subjectivity (see Figure 2, above). The concept was new to me and it was the very first time I was coming across a word like that. But I had come across similar words that sounded or looked like this particular word I was finding difficulty with. These are words like subject, subjected, and subjection. I first tried to establish the links between these words I knew before and the concept of subjectivity. Such links were not readily obvious. So I read the paragraph again and realized that the concept is linked with Sigmund Freud's theory of the id, ego, and super-ego, and Jacques Lacan's idea of the ways in which language shapes our self-consciousness. Aha! Now I had gotten another word, "consciousness," which can serve as a synonym for "subjectivity." So I wrote the word "consciousness" in the margin of the paragraph that talked about subjectivity.

I had actually got my "aha moment," but then I began to wonder: how is subjectivity related to its sister words such as subject, subjected, and

subjection? I realized that the word "subjected" is the verb form of the noun "subjection." They both mean to put something or someone under the control or power of another thing. So they are one and the same words. The other word, "subject," has a meaning that is connected to subjectivity. In grammar, "subjects" are nouns or pronouns that determine the action of a sentence. "Subjects" can also refer to people who are under the control of a sovereign government). Thus, a *subject* is a person, and the suffix "ivity" turns the word into another noun that refers to the thoughts of a person or something existing in his or her mind. Conversely, we also become *subjected* to forces in society that help shape our self-consciousness. Now where is this leading us? It is leading us to the conclusion that our self-consciousness, or the way we become conscious of who we are in society, is dependent on the social forces we are subjected to and our conscious thoughts about ourselves made available to us in language. But what about our sub-conscious thoughts about ourselves? Don't they form part of our self-consciousness? Yes, they do. Now the meaning of subjectivity is clear. Subjectivity is our conscious and unconscious perceptions of ourselves brought about by language and the social and political forces to which we are subjected. However, it would have been difficult for me to reach that understanding without my prior knowledge of the word "consciousness" or "self-consciousness" and my use of marginalia to make those connections.

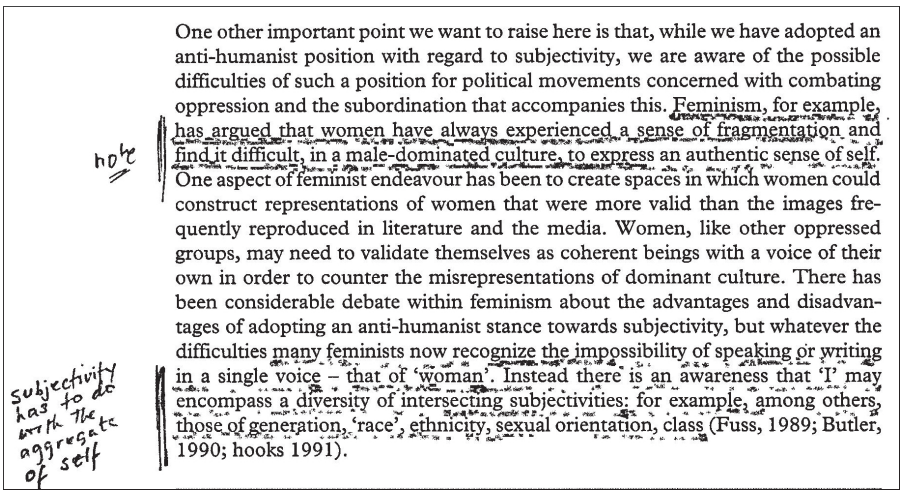


Figure 3. Brief notes summarizing a highlighted idea.[5]

Furthermore, sometimes marginalia that summarize the central thought of each paragraph in an essay can help the reader plot a reverse outline of the essay (see Figure 3, above, for an example). This reverse outline actually constitutes the structure of the essay and oftentimes the argument of the essay. Thus a consistent use of marginalia can help the reader reach a profound understanding of the main arguments of an essay. A general rule about essay

writing suggests that each paragraph of an essay should develop a single idea, and a constant gleaning of those single ideas should help produce a general impression of the essay and provide an insight into the thought process of the writer when writing that particular essay.

The genre of marginalia is rich in its potential. It represents our conscious efforts to get to the bottom of the rich meaning(s) of texts. Different readers produce different markings or inscriptions in the margins of texts that represent the various ways that these readers engage in meaning-making as they read. However, no matter the differences in style, inscriptions, or markings of readers, these margin notes or strokes are themselves texts that are located in the intersection between reading and cognition.

Endnotes

1. Collins, B. (2005). Marginalia. In *Billy Collins: Complete resource for Billy Collins poems, books, and readings*. Retrieved from http://www.billy-collins.com/2005/06/marginalia.html. The epigraph for this article is an excerpt from Collins' poem; the entire poem is available on the website listed here.

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3. Wassmann, C. (2008). Psychological optics, cognition and emotion: A new look at early work of Wilhelm Wundt. *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences, 64*(2), 236.

4. Giles, J., & Middleton, T. *Studying culture*, 191.

5. Giles, J., & Middleton, T. *Studying culture*, 192.

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Rocking a Documentary Film

Kara Steiner

This article is about exploring a more creative genre option than paper-writing: the documentary genre. In this article, the reader will learn about what makes a good documentary film and how to approach different elements of filmmaking. The reader will also find information on how to relate the process of creating a documentary to writing a research paper. This article can help with other types of projects such as filming music videos or skits.

Let me be the first to admit that I hate writing papers. Personally, I can't find much to like about it. The pressure of creating a concise paper (along with the tedious task of constructing organized ideas into words) never sounds very pleasant to me. On my bad days, it'll take me two hours to write a single paragraph because the allure of Facebook and my friends down the hall takes over. After spending four years of high school in advanced placement English courses and then taking two years of college English, the thought, alone, of writing another final paper was enough to push me over the edge. For our final project in my Literary Narrative course, my instructor gave us the option to either write a paper or come up with a creative project. I jumped at the opportunity to steer clear of a paper.

Without very much thought or preconceived ideas, I chose to make a documentary and dove head first into an outlet that I taught myself to utilize. Choosing to create a film was a much better route for me as student because it allowed me to fully check in to my imagination and produce something that many different audiences can enjoy. I liked the idea of making a film instead of writing a paper because film is a genre with endless creative options. Not only does the visual component of films create appeal, but also the auditory element contributes to capturing the audience. I do not regret a single bit that I said "No" to writing

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another paper, but I would've probably regretted not using my inventiveness to my advantage.

Never in a million years did I think I would have the opportunity to make a project on something as rebellious as punk rock in a classroom setting. I fell in love with punk rock at the age of eleven. After watching the Adam Sandler movie *The Wedding Singer* and seeing punk rock legend Billy Idol basically save the day, punk became a fascination of mine. I fell in love with the fast chords, angry lyrics, and the ability it has to perfectly match your emotions, whether they are aggressive or calm. Out of all the music genres, I believe punk is the most fun. It's about "sticking it to the man," so to speak; it's about living your life the way you want to and saying "No" to anyone who tells you otherwise. Fortunately for me, I was blessed with a unique and vivacious instructor, Amy Magnafichi, who opened the door to explore different genres.

During class one day, Amy listed off many different genre options we could pursue for our final project. There were the obvious choices that many chose, such as a paper or a poster, but then there were some off-the-map choices such as making a film or documentary. Knowing that I wanted to do something on punk rock, the idea of using a documentary film to showcase my favorite musical genre suddenly became the most interesting project I could've ever dreamed of. The concept of making a film from scratch that encapsulated all the different elements of punk rock sounded so fascinating to me, so I signed on. There are so many things possible with film that one cannot capture with two-dimensional writing. In essence, film allows an audience to dive into a created world rich in sensory stimulation. The information is delivered to them fast and efficiently, and it's much easier to retain their attention with different music choices and interesting pictures. Filmmakers engage their audiences' senses and expose them to information in an entertaining way.

Initial Anxiety

The only problem with all this was that I had never made a documentary film before, and quite frankly, had no clue where to start. I had used iMovie previously for other classes and family films, but I had never had to create an original documentary using tools like interviews, music videos, and voice-over work.

On the first day I began my documentary, I probably spent more time twiddling my thumbs than actually on Google doing any research. I remember sitting at my MacBook Pro with iMovie opened, staring at a blank screen and feeling a sweat break out on my forehead. I was initially pretty stressed about the film and didn't think I was going to make something worthwhile. Being a nursing major with a heavy science workload, I was concerned that I wasn't

tech-savvy enough to actually pull off a film that would interest anyone. The more I thought about how amazing I wanted the documentary to be, the more anxiety and despair I felt as I convinced myself that I wouldn't be able to meet my own expectations for the film.

I found myself constantly trying to think of a concept that would grasp my viewers. I didn't want my film to seem like a PowerPoint, thrown together at the last minute. I decided that it was going to need many different elements in order to hold the attention of my audience. After doing some critical thinking about what would engage my audience the most, I decided that the use of audio and visual simultaneously would create the effect I wanted. By coordinating what was on the screen with the type of music playing, my audience's senses could be even further stimulated. I also knew I needed to use lots of pictures and special effects to hold my audience's attention.

Genre Research

Once I started to build up my confidence and realized that yes, I could actually do this (doesn't every student experience that initial fear?), the ideas started to pour in. I realized that I could pull off the documentary style once I started to write down my ideas and build a basic timeline for my film. That way, I could see exactly what I needed to cover and wasn't left scrambling for ideas. After I worked through my initial fears, I found that teaching myself how to make the documentary wasn't as difficult as I thought it would be. I had to teach myself how to download and incorporate music into the film, integrate previously recorded interviews into the film, film my own interviews, and do voice-over work to enhance the information. I found that the best way to navigate iMovie (which was the option I had because I have a MacBook—any movie editing software would work) is to toy around with it and test out all the different functions before I even began my project. There are many different moviemakers out there, and the majority of them have tutorials online that are easy to access. Although I'm sure many people would benefit from viewing the tutorials, I found the best way for me to learn was to dive right in. The features are endless and the more I explored the program, the more tools I found to further impress my audience. Personally, I think that watching a bunch of slides slung together with no sound would be much less engrossing than quick facts with a visually engaging background and special effects set to relevant music. If a project is boring to make, then the chances the audience will be entertained are slim. Being a punk rock fan for practically a decade really helped in my original planning of the documentary because I knew that there was no way something as versatile and energetic as punk could fail to be enthralling.

During my genre research phase, I watched a lot of music videos and documentaries on YouTube. While perusing through the videos, I found that a music documentary is a lot like most music videos; there typically is a focus and the music correlates with the story. I got a good idea of the natural flow music documentaries needed to take and the importance of the music itself within the documentary. This was one element that I knew I needed to include in my documentary, especially because my topic was on a musical genre! I decided to go with punk rock songs with high energy to set the pace for the rest of the film. For the most part, the songs I chose were from the 70s and 80s, but I did choose two 90s songs, one by Blink-182 and the other by The Offspring, when discussing present day punk. By coordinating the music with the time frame I was discussing, my audience received an immediate example of what they were learning.

Content Research

When it came to researching the content of my film, I found it best to start with my instructor. I was unsure of where to begin, so I asked Amy for advice and she steered me in the right direction. Since I already had a pretty decent knowledge base of punk rock history, all I needed to do was some preliminary research of specific facts, which isn't difficult nowadays with the abundance of information you can find on the internet. The most difficult part of my documentary was finding interviews that I wanted to incorporate. I knew that the use of previously recorded interviews could be powerful in my film and make it seem more professional, so I spent a good ten hours exploring YouTube and all the wonderful videos it has to offer. When looking for interviews, quality is definitely more important than quantity. Sometimes I would find clips that were only fifteen seconds long (like the Dee Dee Ramone interview) that were just so much more powerful than some five-minute-long interviews I came across featuring other punk rockers. Most of the clips from the 70s on YouTube aren't of the best visual quality, but including the clips enhanced my documentary because it really established the correct time period. After weeding out interviews that were too long or off topic, I found some great ones that boosted my documentary substantially! One of the main ideas that I was trying to get across in my film—that punk rockers could be arrogant but fun—was easy to express once I found interviews that showed how rebellious (and intriguing) they could be.

Composing

I chose to have a live performance of the Sex Pistols' *Anarchy in the UK* as the opener because I wanted to set the pace for the documentary. The Sex Pistols performing that song captured all the energy and rebellion that I

wanted my film to possess. For the viewer that knows little to nothing about punk rock, I knew that I needed to expose them to it immediately in order for them to be drawn in right away. The music video I used was essentially the equivalent of an "attention-getter" in a paper—I knew it would intrigue my audience and let them know that the video they were about to watch wouldn't just be boring facts and no fun.

When it came to the visual aspects of my film, I knew that I needed to set the correct tone with my background choices and font. The font that I chose, Cracked, which essentially is an edgy style with cracked lettering, was a no-brainer; I knew that it conveyed the rebellious and badass look I was going for. This font worked a lot better for my film than a font such as Times New Roman because it immediately set the tone right off the bat. One of the main lessons I learned while making this film was that consistency is key. I chose to keep the font consistent throughout the entire film in order to prevent the film from appearing disorganized or amateurish. I chose to coordinate my backgrounds with the three topics I was discussing: punk history, punk fashion, and present-day punk. Although punks are notorious for using bright colors, the original NYC punk scene was more "underground," and I wanted to set that mood with a completely black background for the history section. I transitioned the background into an industrialized look for the fashion section, so that the viewer could visually tell that the topic was changing. I switched the background to gray when discussing present-day punk to "lighten the mood," so to speak. While discussing 70s punk in the past, I used all black backgrounds, so when it came time to move to the present, the lighter background helped signal a shift in time.

In order to really personalize my documentary and make it mine instead of a collection of previously recorded interviews and music videos, I knew that I needed to include my own interviews. This was actually one of the first ideas I came up with for my film. My target audience, college students, needed to be included in my film in order for them to identify with it. And since I knew that there were varying degrees of knowledge of punk rock on campus, I thought it'd be entertaining to interview students at random. In order to get a more accurate depiction of the student body's perceptions, I knew I needed to approach people other than my friends. I also used this opportunity to do a little field research and get a grasp on how much/how little students actually know about punk rock. The interviewing process went pretty smoothly, and I only encountered a few less-than-willing participants. A lot of students tried to back out of it by claiming, "I don't know anything about punk rock!" without realizing that they were exactly who I wanted to interview. If I were to do this again, I would make a sign saying "interviewees needed," instead of just randomly approaching whoever walked by.

Even though I sought out strangers for my interviews, I was fortunate enough to have friends that were willing to assist me in the making of my film. My friends, Nicole and Lindsey, were more than accommodating; they let me dress them up in full outfits and even acted out their roles. I had Nicole portray fashion misconceptions of a punk rocker and Lindsey modeled early 80's punk fashion. I'm really glad they did this for me because it added a personalized element to my film that gave it a more authentic feel. I decided to do voice-overs during their segments because I knew that if I put text over the video it would take away from their performances.

Putting the whole film together took some trial and error. I essentially created the blueprint as I went along, which isn't what you're typically supposed to do, but it worked for me. I basically let the film take over itself, and I would follow the natural direction that it was headed in. Although I didn't make a complete outline for my project, I did know what I wanted to cover. Figuring out first how I wanted to break up and present the material really helped when I wasn't sure what to do next because I wasn't completely left in the dark when the ideas didn't come automatically. After I completed my project and made sure to cite all my sources in the end, I submitted a piece of work that I was very proud of and genuinely knew would entertain my audience. I watched the documentary and showed it to my roommate and friends who were all intrigued and actually enjoyed viewing it. I felt a great sense of accomplishment and like a real filmmaker. It was much more rewarding for me than turning in a piece of paper like the rest of the class!

Looking back on that class and my choice to make a documentary, I don't regret it one bit. I sometimes find myself watching my film out of the blue, and I love it. I really enjoyed exploring this genre and actually had a lot of fun creating my original documentary. Whenever I felt overwhelmed by it, I would just take a step back and see what I had created so far, and any doubt would vanish. Although it was a fun and creative genre to explore, there is no possible way I could have completed it without weeks of hard work and a few sessions of dedicated research. Preparation and investigative work are a must, but once I covered those, I really dove in and showed what I was capable of making! I had a ton of fun with it, and it was a much less stressful process than any other genre I've tried.

Kara Steiner is currently a senior in the Mennonite College of Nursing at Illinois State University. After graduation she hopes to work as a NICU nurse in the city of Chicago. When she is not at school, she lives at home in Naperville, Illinois with her family and three beloved dogs. In addition to being an avid music fan, Kara enjoys spending time in the great outdoors, exercising, cheering for the American League Baseball Club in Chicago, and quoting Seinfeld episodes.

Cracking the Genre of the Resume

Kayla Bruce

In this article, Bruce explores the genre of the resume and the variations of what resumes can look like in modern-day society. She concludes with a focus on the "real-world" implications of resumes. Bruce discusses the historical background of resumes and then looks at different examples and audiences for which specific resumes are appropriate. Bruce concludes by addressing the fact that resumes are context specific, and the choices must be carefully considered in order for resumes to be effective.

One of the most complicated genres that I have ever composed in is the genre of the resume. This genre can be intimidating because of the implications of what is written, the authority of the reader, and the various places that the resume goes. Resumes can help usher someone into a job or can work against them to keep them out of a desired position. As such, the resume is a "gate-keeping" genre in that it is a medium used to judge and sort through potential employees. There is no one formula for writing a resume, nor can someone say that certain conventions—"a rule, method, or practice established by usage; custom" (Dictionary.com)—are fixed and finite. The resume is a genre that looks different for almost every writer, and it has to be constantly tweaked, added to, deleted from, and reworked in order to fit the various demands of the employers to whom it is addressed. The trajectory—places that something can go; the path that it follows through different situations, audiences, and contexts—of a resume can be overwhelming, so I will begin to explore the genre by asking: where did the genre of the resume come from? Then I will delve into how the genre has unifying conventions but also many different appearances in our world today. Cracking the genre of the resume isn't an easy task, but it is a genre that has real-world implications, so the more we know about it, the better our resumes can be.

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Where Do Resumes Come From?

One of the very first recorded documents to ever be called a resume was a letter written by Leonardo Da Vinci in 1482 (Lempicke, "History of the Resume"). This letter was simply a correspondence with a friend. This word-based resume is used again in 1500 when a lord in England offered a "handwritten letter of introduction to an acquaintance" (Lempicke). This may be a step closer to what we see as a resume, as this letter was giving details about this lord to his new acquaintance. It wasn't until 1914, though, that the resume as a list of qualifications to present oneself to an employer began to be used regularly. After this shift, people started to call this "list of facts" a resume, but, in these early days, it was almost always attached to an employment application letter (Popken 100). The employment application letter has evolved into a genre that we call a "cover letter" today. A cover letter, while it can vary in difficulty, length, scope, and purpose, serves to tell the employer about the applicant in a more narrative way than a resume. If we make a connection between cover letters and resumes, we might be able to understand the genre of the resume more fully. The important components of the letter, such as introducing oneself, listing outstanding qualities, and highlighting applicable experiences, are all elements that should appear in a resume as well.

Once the resume became more of its "own" genre (separate from the letter), it began to look more like information that could be included in a Facebook profile page, for example. See any resemblances between Figures 1 and 2 (below)?

Gentlemen:—

I wish to say, in answer to your advertisement for a stenographer, in to-day's Journal, that my preparation and qualifications are as follows:—

Age: 21.

Nationality: American.

Habits: Good. I neither smoke nor drink.

Education: Commercial High School — shorthand course. [Speed in shorthand and typewriting mentioned here.]

Disposition: Work harmoniously with associates.

Experience: [Here the positions held, if any, and the reasons for leaving are stated definitely. If inexperienced, training in school is mentioned.]

Salary: Nine dollars a week at start.

Yours truly,

Figure 1. Written resume-in-letter example, published in 1916 (as cited in Popken 102).

Figure 2. Personal Facebook profile page example, published in 2012 (as cited in Li).

The images above are prime examples of the ways that genres not only diversify, but also begin to take on fresh life as they are adapted into new forms. Facebook is an extremely popular website, and the information used on profile and business pages originated from resume letters. Figures 1 and 2 provide an excellent illustration of genres changing and people adapting to the changes over time.

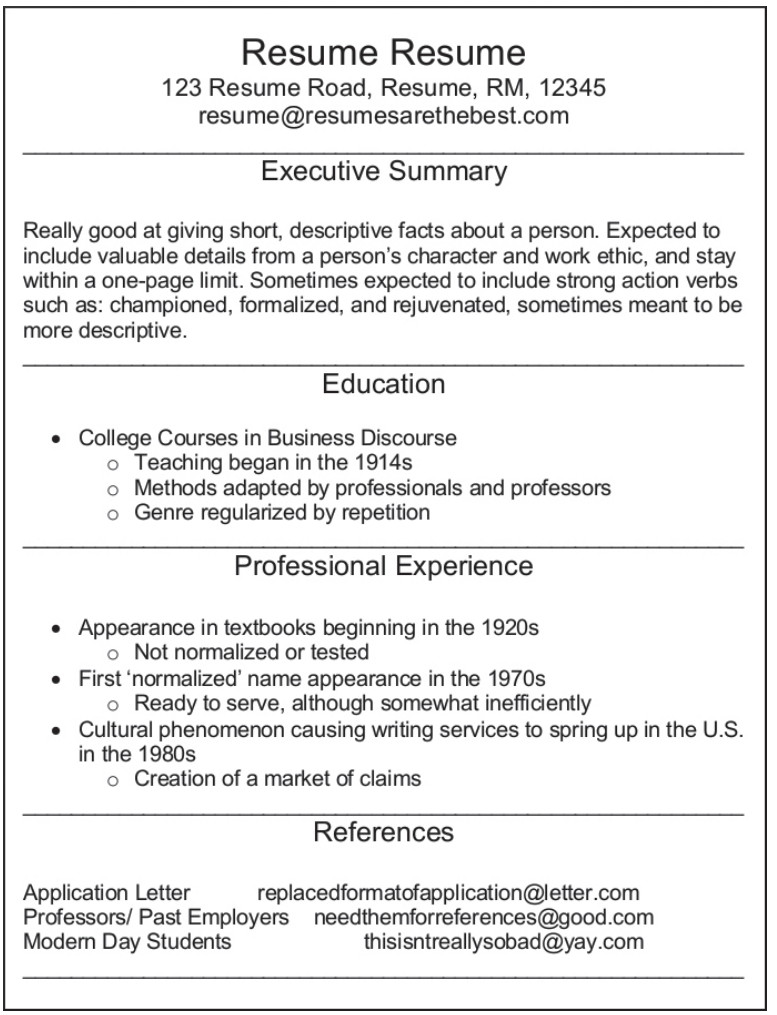
What Do Resumes Look Like Today?

Examining the history of the resume is somewhat easier than discussing what the resume looks like today. Writing from the past is completed and unchanging, so it is easier to identify similar attributes and trends between past resumes than to do so with modern resumes. A difficulty with modern-day resumes is that the genre is always shifting and changing. What was expected on a resume ten or even two years ago may look different than what is expected today. But while there are many differences, there are some very basic elements that are most likely expected on a resume. Here are some conventions that are *generally true* about the genre of the resume, currently, in the United States of America:

1. Name
2. Contact information
3. Desire/interest in a specific job and position
4. List of distinguishing qualifications

5. Past experience relating to the desired position
6. References that the employer can contact

That's it. There are only six things that we can consider to be generally reliable conventions in the resume genre. For a somewhat standard written resume, there are some conventional headings that can be used to organize the information: Executive Summary, Education, Professional Experience, and References. Now, how these categories are presented, what needs to be added to them, what needs to be readdressed or glossed over, etc., are all dependent on the position for which a person would submit a resume. Resumes are not uniform documents, and rarely can one resume be used for more than one position; they need to be edited depending on the desired job. To showcase one possible resume format, Figure 3 (below) shows an example of a one-page, written resume:



Resume Resume

123 Resume Road, Resume, RM, 12345
resume@resumesarethebest.com

Executive Summary

Really good at giving short, descriptive facts about a person. Expected to include valuable details from a person's character and work ethic, and stay within a one-page limit. Sometimes expected to include strong action verbs such as: championed, formalized, and rejuvenated, sometimes meant to be more descriptive.

Education

- College Courses in Business Discourse
  - Teaching began in the 1914s
  - Methods adapted by professionals and professors
  - Genre regularized by repetition

Professional Experience

- Appearance in textbooks beginning in the 1920s
  - Not normalized or tested
- First 'normalized' name appearance in the 1970s
  - Ready to serve, although somewhat inefficiently
- Cultural phenomenon causing writing services to spring up in the U.S. in the 1980s
  - Creation of a market of claims

References

Application Letter replacedformatofapplication@letter.com
Professors/ Past Employers needthemforreferences@good.com
Modern Day Students thisisntreallysobad@yay.com

Figure 3. Fictional example of written resume following basic resume conventions.

The resume in Figure 3 (above) is one way to format and present personal information. There are hundreds if not thousands of examples in books and on the internet that might look something like this resume but have variations.[1]

The genre of the resume changes as jobs and employers change. This has happened partly because of technological changes over the past decade or so. Reliance on the internet, digital media, and prioritization of the accessibility of documents has changed what employers expect from applicants. Though a basic paper resume is a good place to begin, there are now different kinds of jobs where more interactive or electronic resumes are better ways to showcase one's skills and information. Here is an example of a way to format some of the basic resume conventions, but in more graphic display:

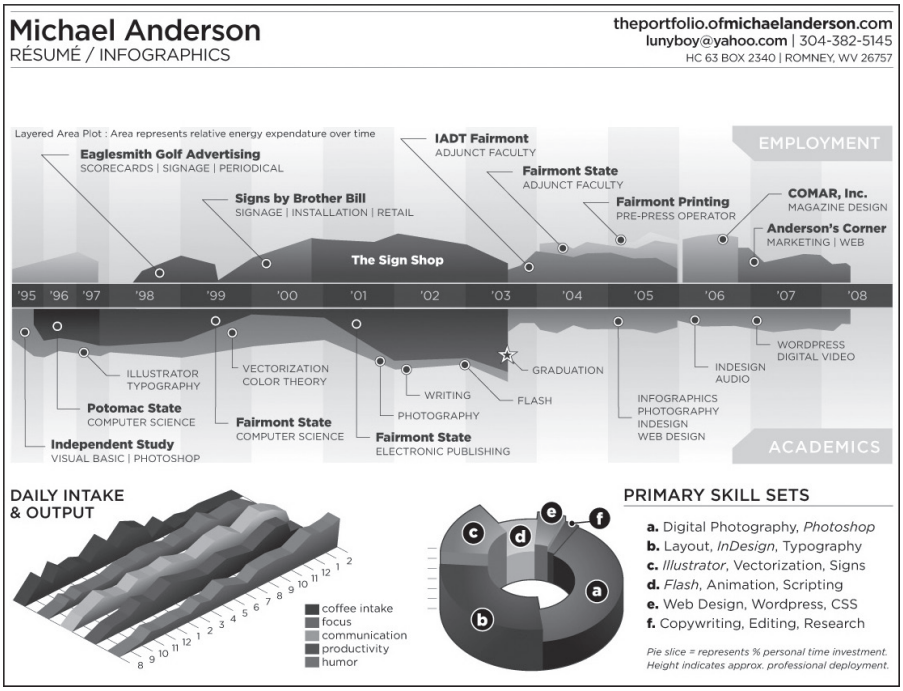


Figure 4. Infographic resume example, published in 2012 (as cited in Lauby).

The kind of resume represented above is called an infographic resume. It is created and distributed online, although it probably could be printed as well. An infographic resume supplies the conventional resume information, but because it does so in such a colorful, graphic format, it allows room for extra information as well. Resumes "with maps or infographics provide the same chronology of information, but with a bit more flair" (Larby, "9 Dynamic Digital Resumes"). The infographic resume is a genre that

employs not only the genre of the resume, but also the genre of the graph. The infographic format breaks a lot of "traditional" standards, but the information is still presented in a clear and concise way. Employers can still glean the potential employee's skills and basic information, but the resume showcases not only those qualifications but also the applicant's creative design skills. The infographic resume requires time and skill to put together, and as such, it shows a specific interest in graphic design *and* the position for which the person is applying.

Another resume that is gaining popularity in our digital age is the social media resume. Social media resumes are entirely online. To distribute a social media resume, employees would provide a link to employers (as exemplified in Figure 4), which would take them to some kind of social media site where the potential employee's qualifications are displayed. The social media resume operates under the assumption that employers are going to check social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn to find out information about the possible applicants anyway. The social media resume is definitely more progressive than the written resume, and while it may not be appropriate for all jobs or possible employees, using the social media resume could help a candidate stand out from other applicants. Using this kind of resume appropriately shows knowledge about popular culture as well as an intentional effort to procure a particular type of job, as the social media resume showcases not only the "basics," but also additional thought and effort.

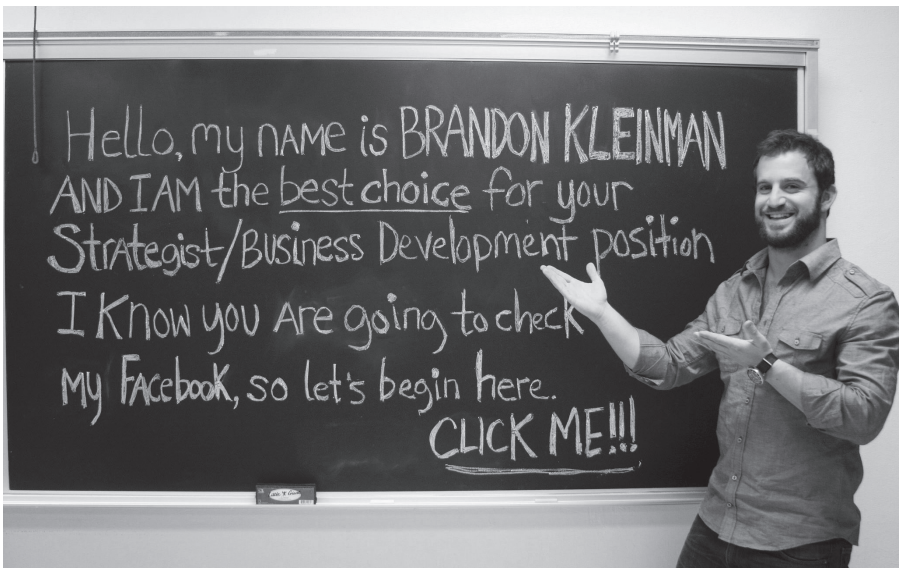


Figure 5. Link to a social media resume example, published in 2012 (as cited in Lauby).

The social media resume is just one way to engage an employer and link them to a dynamic, online resume. It becomes a resume that can be seen by anyone at any time and something that can lead to networking and exposure of skills that is not possible with a resume formatted in the standard way. An article on CNN Tech suggests that we are "already in a post [paper] resume era" (Gross, "Are Social Media Making the Resume Obsolete?"). While employers may not currently expect social media resumes, digital resumes seem to be the direction that resumes are headed, and may *someday* replace paper resumes altogether.

How Are Resumes Actually Used?

The above examples highlight just a few possible resume options. But regardless of the format chosen, each resume needs to be specifically crafted for the employer to whom it is given. Here is where the resume genre starts to feel complicated. We begin to ask questions like: What does a particular employer want? What is the best way to present my resume to a particular employer? Who will have access to this resume? These are the types of questions that *need* to be asked in order to determine what information should be used on a resume, as well as what kind of resume would be the best for each particular applicant and job. As shown above, there are different options for the presentation of resumes, and choosing the best fit for the job category is important. Resumes are resumes, though, and regardless of the type or format, they are a "gate-keeping" genre that will always be regulated by job markets and employers' demands. That the creator of the resume (the employee looking for a job) will always be "ruled" by the resume because of its changing, shifting nature is an interesting thought.

Each person must make his or her own decisions regarding what or what not to include in his or her particular resume, but the cultural reality is that we must always be exploring the genre of the resume because it will always be changing, and we must continue to strive to meet the *current* conventions of the genre. So while the genre of the resume might not be one that we can totally "crack," this initial exploration into the genre shows the necessity of research into the genre and an awareness of the current job markets and trends. Prospective employees must contend with the stress of being judged through the resume, so the more that they are aware and able to adapt to current expectations, the better their resumes can be. The more we research and explore, the more we try to "crack" open the genre of the resume, hopefully the better our resumes will be.

Endnote

1. There are many ways to format written resumes, and the "right" formatting depends on the job or position that one is applying for. Here is a link to an example from the Purdue OWL website of how to format a written resume, along with more help and instructions on resume writing: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/564/01/.

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Digging into a Scholarly Journal: The Secrets Behind Genre Analysis

Sarah Witherspoon

Witherspoon's article chronicles her process of writing a genre research report and describes her approach to performing a genre analysis of a scholarly academic journal. She suggests that the method she used can be applied to studying any genre of writing, and she discusses a method to determine the audience of a genre, known as an audience-reception study. Witherspoon's article shares her experiences as a writing researcher, the ups and downs of writing a genre research report, and her journey to conduct a study of genre and audience.

My Story

It was the first day of my English class as a sophomore in college, and I was already told we would be starting a research paper. "Great," I thought. "Just my luck." Let's just say English has never been my strong suit, so I was not looking forward to this. I am more of a science and math person, so having to write papers, let alone a research paper, is not my cup of tea. I thought to myself, "I have written plenty of research papers in high school. This will be easy."

However, I was incredibly wrong. As the professor began to explain the assignment to the class, I was lost. The goal of the project was to conduct primary research by performing a genre analysis of a scholarly academic journal. What is a scholarly academic journal? Little did I know, I was going to get to know scholarly academic journals very well.

As I sat in class taking notes, I heard terms I had never heard of before, such as specialized discourse, qualitative research, and genre analysis. My professor was jumping up and down about this project, but I sat in my

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chair, pouting like a child. Pulling my hair out, I thought, "Where do I even begin with this project?" My first thought was that I must choose a topic I would enjoy. But how could performing research on a journal be something that I would find interesting? I decided to choose an occupational therapy journal, since that was the field that I was currently majoring in. Friends, I must tell you, if you ever end up conducting genre analysis on a journal, choose a journal that you will enjoy researching and writing about. You will be spending a lot of time with this scholarly journal; it will become your best friend. For weeks straight, I had a date every night with the journal in my dorm room. Weekends were not spent with friends at the movies, but instead with my journal, collecting data. OK, I must admit that I am exaggerating just a little. I did not actually spend all my waking time with the journal, but I can't emphasize enough that before beginning your writing research report, you must first really understand the journal (or other genre) that you are working with. You can do this by spending a lot of time with it, getting to know it, and learning about it.

I say "or other genre" because while I studied the genre of a scholarly academic journal for my writing research report, you can study any genre that you please. You may be asking yourself, "Can I use the process that she used for other genres, too?" The answer is, "Yes!" The process that I used can also be used to study various other genres, not only scholarly academic journals. The main goal or purpose why I performed a genre analysis on a scholarly academic journal and not on a different, more "fun" genre was to gain an awareness of how and why professionals in my field of occupational therapy use writing in journal articles as a way of conversation and communication.

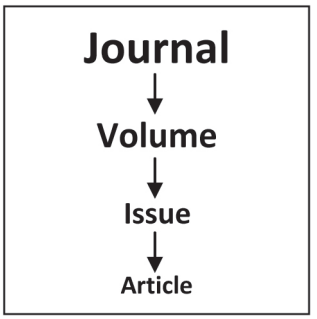

Figure 1. What makes up a journal.

My first task was to go to the library, walk through the journal section, and choose a journal. So, off to the library I went. In the journal section, there are hundreds of leather-bound journals. I had never been in this part of the library before, and I am not sure I will ever return to that dreaded nightmare of a place again. To be honest, I did not even know it existed. I felt like a lost puppy looking for home, only I was looking through journals, trying to find an occupational therapy journal. The fact that the journals are in alphabetical order by field made the fight much easier. Wandering through the books, I finally found the one I wanted: *Physical and Occupational Therapy in Pediatrics*. Yes! I had won the battle, and the journals had lost. Before collecting data, I had to learn what makes up a journal (see Figure 1), including volumes, issues, and then individual articles. I then filled my arms with multiple volumes of the journal. As I roamed around the library, I found an empty spot, sat down with the journals, and started digging into my

work. Eyes stared at me, thinking, "This blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl must be a nerd." After what seemed like hours of getting acquainted with the texts, I came back to my dorm, only to see papers of collected data scattered all over the place. It looked as though a tornado had just gone through.

Now that I have introduced you to how I met my new best friend or so-called roommate, the scholarly academic journal, let us continue on the journey of my research experience as a first-time writing researcher. First, I wanted to understand how and why scholars write in the journal. I was the researcher; I was the one behind all of the hard-collected data and analysis. By sharing my experience with you, I hope you will know one way of going about genre analysis and a possible set of steps to take if you are ever asked to perform genre analysis on a scholarly academic journal or any other genre for that matter. As I mentioned before, these same steps can be applied to researching any genre in order to better understand it or figure out how to compose more successfully in it.

Why Should We Perform Genre Analysis?

You may be wondering why anyone would want to conduct genre analysis on a scholarly journal in the first place. Trust me; I had my own doubts about what I was being asked to do as well. I wanted to find a reason for what I was doing, and lo and behold, after some digging and researching, I found an answer. According to writing researchers Downs and Wardle (2007), by performing a genre analysis, writers gain increased self-awareness about writing and awareness of research writing as a conversation, allowing them to practice the moves of other researchers. By examining scholarly articles, writers can get a sense of the specialized discourse within a professional community, also known as field or discipline. In this case, the field that I hoped to one day be a part of was occupational therapy. Therefore, I wanted to learn and understand how occupational therapy professionals communicate with one another as well as the expectations and values associated with performing research and composing writing in occupational therapy. Performing a genre analysis introduces a person to writing within a specific discourse community and the language used by the scholars in that discipline (Downs & Wardle, 2007). Genre analysis of a scholarly journal helps you to consider the parts of writing that work together in unison and to understand that research is part of an ongoing conversation. While I am sharing with you the steps that I took, there are many other approaches to conducting a genre analysis of a scholarly journal, or any genre for that matter. This is just one technique that worked for me. But, there may be another procedure that works better for you, so choose the method that you prefer.

Step 1: Choose the Genre for Your Genre Analysis/Research

I first began the research process by choosing the journal *Physical and Occupational Therapy in Pediatrics*. The aim of this journal is to reveal important information regarding clinical research and practical applications of therapy practice to physical and occupational therapists involved in the rehabilitation of pediatric patients. If you are unsure of what an aim is, it is essentially the intended purpose and desired outcome of the journal. In short, the aim is the reason for or the goal of the journal. Most journals will have a specific section or heading dedicated to the aim and scope, revealing it to the readers. Usually the aim will be near the submission guidelines for authors, which is where I found the aim for my journal. However, this may not always be the case, and then you might have to infer the aim of the journal.

The next thing I learned was that *Physical and Occupational Therapy in Pediatrics* is a quarterly journal that is peer-reviewed, also known as refereed. When I first heard the word "refereed," I thought, "You mean the official at a sports game?" I was wrong. To clarify, if an article is refereed, that means that the article went through a revision process before being published. A referred article will contain content vetted by experts and reviewed by an editor.

Once I located the aim and scope, I was able to determine the goal or purpose of the journal. It is highly important to understand the goal of any genre because it affects the audience for the journal and the language and tone used, as well as the topics that are discussed in the journal. So, the goal is what impacts the working parts of the journal. The goal of *Physical and Occupational Therapy in Pediatrics* is to bring information to all therapists involved in the developmental and physical rehabilitation of infants and children, discussing current clinical research and practical applications. The clinical studies introduced in the articles provide evidence and aid in guiding therapists in their intervention processes. Therapists rely on the information given to help them in their practice; they learn from and teach one another. The case studies give frames of reference for therapists to use, acting as a foundation on which to base therapy. Basically, the journal articles allow therapists to communicate with one another about their research and evidence. Additionally, many other fields besides occupational therapy have journals that are similar. Most likely, those journals will all have a different goals and purposes with different content and topics. However, all academic journals are similar in that they relay or report information from one person to another.

On Your Way to Becoming a Writing Researcher

In order to further learn about the goals, audience, and context of the journal I was studying, I decided to conduct primary research, or a qualitative

study. This is called writing research, and it is an ongoing process with many steps involved in order to collect and gather data about the genre being studied. As I became a writing researcher, I was able to experience how scholars carry out research, and this allowed me to create my own knowledge and make conclusions based on my findings. The research process included examining the features of the journal, such as the Table of Contents and common headings and sections, as well as the topics discussed and language used. In addition, I conducted an audience reception study to determine the journal's intended audience, which I will further explain later. I also examined particular paragraphs to observe the audience-specific language. In this study, I observed various working parts of the journal articles in the years 1981, 1999, and 2012 to determine trends and differences in the organization and infer the progression of the journal.

Step 2: Decide on Your Procedure

Since research is an ongoing process, researchers must first determine what they want their research approach to be, following it step by step. By having a procedure, it gives the researcher a guide to follow, almost like following a recipe or instructions. Each writer has their own writing process. Likewise, each researcher has their own individualized research process. However, by learning about my research process, it might give you some ideas about how to conduct your own research. For someone who has never performed writing research before, this might be extremely difficult. But I am here to tell you that it really is not as difficult as it may appear. In the end, I was able to conduct my writing research, and I actually felt like an expert or scholar.

Experts who collect data will often record that data in some kind of field research journal. In my case, my field research journal was a pink spiral notebook that included all notes, thoughts, and ideas about the research process, similar to a diary. Having a research journal was probably the best idea ever. My recommendation is to have a journal allowing you to write and record all of your data along the way. Then, when it comes to writing the research report, it will be easy as pie to summarize your analysis of the genre.

The Long-Fought Journey

After I decided on my plan of action for research and chose the journal, I started collecting data. So, where did I start? The first set of data I wanted to collect included the elements and features of the journal, such as the sections and headings of articles from Volume 1 (1981), Volume 19 (1999),

and Volume 32 (2012). I recorded similarities and differences between the years in my field journal. I found it easiest to record everything in a notebook and then color coordinate with various colored pens. I quickly scanned and read through the Table of Contents for these three years, creating categories of common word choices, topics, and authors.

Once I collected the data for this study, I then conducted an audience reception study. What is an audience reception study, you might ask? An audience reception study aids in determining who the intended and unintended audience is for the journal (or other genre), if it is not clear. So, researchers would especially want to conduct an audience reception study if they are interested in finding out whether their inferences about the audience of a genre are right. For example, just as Nicholas Sparks' romance novels are mostly intended for a female audience, journals and other genres also have a particular audience that writers keep in mind. But are Nicholas Sparks' novels really read by mostly women? An audience reception study can answer this question, and I wanted to find out something similar about the journal I was studying—who really are the readers of this genre?

Who Will Be Your Participants?

Volumes

The volumes chosen from the journal can be considered subjects used in the study, acting as the center of discussion. Volumes act as subjects because they are the focus of the study, just as people or mice are studied in other kinds of research. I selected three volumes from across the years of the journal for my audience reception study because I wanted to observe the development and progression of the journal. By comparing and contrasting, I could determine how the journal has changed since 1981. While I chose this method, every researcher has their own preference. Other researchers might chose volumes from three consecutive years.

Here is where the limitations of the study arise. I did not perform a genre analysis on every volume, issue, and article published throughout the years, but instead focused on a select few. Looking at all the volumes would have taken far too long to complete in the short amount of time I had. The results might have differed if I had conducted a quantitative study with more samples instead of a qualitative study. But I was looking at quality versus quantity. As you are writing your writing research report, it is important to discuss the limitations of your study and any sources of bias with your readers. Often times this is a step that researchers will skip, but it is a step that should not be forgotten.

Participants

I chose the participants, meaning people, for my audience reception study for a specific reason and purpose, not at random. If you conduct an audience reception study, you may choose your participants at random, but the purpose of my audience reception study was to support my hypothesis that the journal's intended audience is occupational and physical therapy professionals. Thus, I chose six participants: three students in my English 212 class and three professors. I chose professors and college students in order to show comparisons and similarities. One professor teaches an occupational therapy class at Saginaw Valley State University and has been an occupational therapist for years, working in both pediatrics and geriatrics. Another professor is an associate professor of finance at Northwood University. The third professor instructs English writing courses at Saginaw Valley State University. By choosing professors in diverse fields with varying degrees, I was able to bring each professor's specific knowledge and viewpoint to my study.

I selectively chose the other three participants from my English 212 class so that their majors would differ. One is majoring in economics, the other in computer information systems, and the last in athletic training and pre-medicine. The participants were all asked to read the same abstract paragraph, and I then asked them to circle the words that they did not know. I also asked a few questions regarding what they understood from the paragraph. I decided to conduct my study in this way because it was a method that my professor had used as an example during class. I also chose this route for my study because it would only take the participants 5-10 minutes to complete, making it an easy way to collect data that wouldn't inhibit my participants too much. Another type of study you might consider is to have the participants highlight with a marker words that stood out to them. Additionally, if you are studying some genre other than a journal, the style of your study and the way you carry it out will differ. All in all, it is your decision how to conduct your audience reception study, but it usually involves asking participants to somehow indicate their knowledge or familiarity with an example of the genre.

Step 3: Collect Data and Results

Once you have gathered all of your findings, it is time to compose your writing research report about the information you collected. Crafting the actual writing research report is the easy step. After your data is collected, you are running to home base. It will be especially easy if you recorded everything in a journal like I did.

I discussed the results of my genre analysis in the order it was performed instead of skipping around. First, I described the features and elements of the articles within various volumes, which was the first set of data that I collected. I focused heavily on the Table of Contents, word choice, and common topics to examine trends and patterns. I was also interested in common themes that the scholars wrote about, so I read through many opening paragraphs of various articles. These components were especially important to me as they are all related to the intended audience. Lastly, because the scholars are experts in the field, I was attracted to observing authors who made note of other "popular" authors who had written multiple articles in the field. Basically, I took bits and pieces of the journal that worked together and broke them down, carefully making meaning of the data I collected.

One aspect of my research that really gained my interest was the audience of the journal, which led me to perform the audience reception study, an approach recommended to me by my professor. As you compose your writing research report, it is a good idea to select a focus. This way you can choose one aspect to solely devote your attention to as the main focus of your research. There are numerous techniques and ways of deciding on a focus, and really, it all depends on why you are researching a particular genre. This will determine how you should focus your writing research.

Who Is The Audience For Your Journal?

From my observations of the articles, it seemed to me that professionals in occupational and physical therapy are the intended audience of the journal. The word choice in the articles and the topics discussed in the journal worked in unison to fit the audience. However, I needed to conduct additional primary research in order to support this hypothesis. As mentioned earlier, I conducted an audience reception study to use as support, or in other words, to find out if I was correct. I asked participants to read an abstract paragraph from the journal and circle the words they did not know, followed by a few follow-up questions. I asked these follow-up questions in order to determine if they actually understood what was being said in the paragraph or if it was all mumbo jumbo to them.

Through the data gathered, I observed that the journal does have an intended audience. Except for the occupational therapist, most of the participants circled the same words, meaning that the occupational therapist had background knowledge of these words, which included "nystagmus" and "postrotary vestibular." Those outside of the field who

read the journal make up the unintended audience and are not necessarily "meant" to read the journal. In addition, participants who were not scholars or had no background knowledge of therapy or the medical field understood very little from the paragraph, while the occupational therapist was able to give a precise summary. All in all, I concluded through the audience reception study that the journal's intended audience is occupational and physical therapy professionals, hence the use of the field-specific language.

Start Digging into YOUR Genre

Research! Research is everywhere around us. We cannot hide from it. This will not be my last time conducting research. In my profession, as in many other professions, research is common. Therefore, the chances of me continuing to generate my own knowledge by conducting primary research are pretty high, unlike winning the lottery. But even if your profession doesn't require this kind of primary research, you, too, might want to perform a qualitative study or a genre analysis in order to further learn about a particular type of writing or a particular field. By practicing the moves of an expert researcher, you can gain awareness of how research is a process and how research acts as an ongoing conversation between scholars. But you can also learn what defines a particular kind of writing, so you might be able to compose something in that genre yourself.

My genre analysis expanded my knowledge about how my future profession interacts and engages within their specialized discourse community. Because of my research, I now know the values and expectations that the discipline of occupational therapy holds regarding writing and research. By practicing the moves, I gained the skills to be able to successfully write and perform research in my future endeavors. But the process that I used can be applied to any variety of writing. Just because you might not be asked to do what I did, you can still use my study as an example, conducting an analysis on another genre in the same way.

Now that I have discussed in detail my process and experience of conducting a genre analysis on a scholarly journal, it is time for you to start digging into the genre of writing you have chosen to study. Consider me as a fellow researcher and follow my footsteps as you begin your research. Or, you might take your own path, seeking out and discovering other strategies for writing research. Go ahead. You are the researcher now.

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Sarah Witherspoon is a junior at Saginaw Valley State University in Saginaw, Michigan. Surprisingly, she is not an English major but is currently studying Occupational Therapy, which goes to show that not just English lovers can write. She hopes to become an OT specializing in pediatrics or neuroscience. She has a dream of working in Arizona to escape the long Michigan winters. Sarah appreciates all the love and support from her family, and she would not be where she is without them.

They Just Don't Add Up: How Formulas Are Out of Place in Composition

Ashley Dolce

In this article, Ashley Dolce examines why she has struggled with the pains of creating "writing formulas" for different writing situations. She illustrates how students are sometimes taught to write using a specific formula in school even though those tools may be useless in other kinds of writing situations. Finally, she explores a new way of approaching writing that helps to create individualized formulas for specific writing situations to help writers get through the battle of composing.

Being a person whose strengths lie in mathematics and science, I spent most of my high school years searching for the one way to conquer any essay assigned to me. I could easily use derivatives to find how far a car traveled, how fast the car was going, and how fast it was accelerating, but writing a research paper with an intriguing introduction, an effective structure, and a well-developed argument seemed impossible. Sitting in class, all I wanted to do was demand from the teacher, "Just tell me what I need to do to write a good paper!" Unfortunately, I never got my response, because the truth is, there is no one right way to write a quality essay for every writing situation.

Because there are no easy answers when it comes to writing, some people try to create formulas to make sense of the puzzling situation essays (and other genres) corner us in. Struggling writers, like me, search to create a set of criteria that make up a good essay. These writing formulas typically consist of a specific type of structure, diction (or word choice), and manner of presenting evidence in a paper. This could mean a linear structure that leads from one point to the next, or a structure in which the paragraphs alternate between the writer's argument and a correlating story, for example. The diction could be dry and to the point, or it could be descriptive and colorful.

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Authors can simply say, "The evidence suggests that . . . ," or they can imbed quotations and make the evidence part of their own sentence. These are just a few examples; the possibilities are endless. However, what writers may not realize is that these formulas they are taught to use are traps.

In an ideal world, there would be one formula for writing, no matter the genre, but in reality, that simply does not work, due to the differences within and between genres. Poets should not use the same diction as newspaper reporters, nor should they use the same structure. Poetic diction is meant to be symbolic, elaborate, figurative, and descriptive—at least in some kinds of poetry. Poets use this kind of diction because their work is meant to evoke emotions in their readers. On the other hand, reporters use concrete, blunt, and simple language that allows all of their readers to comprehend the story.

While formulas seem to fail us, actually, in almost every aspect of writing, they are still commonly taught to students in their high school English and composition classes. Each year in high school, I established a new writing formula for myself based on the expectations of my teacher. Freshman year was all about the "mel-con" essay and eliminating "weak verbs" from my papers, also known as "to be" verbs. Mel-con stands for Main idea, Evidence, Link, and CONcluding statement, the structure that is meant to govern the entire essay and each of the paragraphs within it. The typical mel-con paragraph was formatted around the mel-con formula, starting with the topic sentence of the paragraph, which is followed by evidence supporting this point or an example. The writer must then answer the question, "So what?" In order to answer this question, I had to start the following sentence with, "This means that . . . ." Then I would have to explain the importance of the evidence. This process can be repeated as many times as necessary based on the evidence available, but it is usually about three times. The paragraph is then concluded with a closing sentence. The structure of the essay would include an introduction, three body paragraphs, and then a concluding paragraph. Thus, the mel-con paragraph is essentially a smaller version of the essay as a whole. This formula carried on in my English classes throughout my sophomore year.

When I took AP English Language my junior year, the formula changed completely. My teacher, Mr. Bottiglieri, was a stickler for grammar, despised the five-paragraph essay, and would not even bother reading an essay that did not have an attention-grabbing introduction. In this method, the structure of the essay was almost as important as what you wrote. We were given pieces such as "The Falling Man" and "A Modest Proposal" as examples. I spent a week trying to figure out how to structure my essay before I could even write it, but it was part of my formula, and I had to follow it. Finding grammar mistakes in an essay was like playing *Where's Waldo* for my teacher,

so grammar was a major focus while writing. While this particular formula promoted more creative writing and left more room for variation, it was still very strict and structured, like the mel-con.

Senior year took me for another turn as I soon learned that everything I knew to be true was "wrong." My teacher, Mr. Assmussen, drilled into our heads that attention-grabbing openers were a waste of ink and paper, and that introductions should be blunt, representing our arguments. Structure was no longer extravagant, but instead illustrated the flow of ideas and the logical development of the argument. Writing "This means that . . . ," which at one point was crucial for an argument, was now characterized as unnecessary, and "I believe that . . ." at the start of a sentence was considered redundant. As he put it, the words "I believe" are "assumed, as you are, obviously, the one writing it." Another waste of precious space on the paper were simple explanations of an argument. Our essays were meant to provide in-depth analysis of literary works and complex arguments, and thus, should only include highly developed ideas. All of the straightforward ideas were assumed to be known by the reader. There was no summary of the story or explanation of the plot, unless the sequence of events was symbolic or added to the meaning of the novel. The writer never "did anything"; rather the "diction symbolized . . ." or the "imagery depicted . . . ." If he were to read this article today, he would probably scold me for my use of first person and demand that I rewrite the entire essay. (Of course, he's probably not familiar with the genre of the *Grassroots* article.) This specific formula containing requirements for diction, structure, syntax, and the development of ideas was geared towards providing quality analysis in the eyes of my teacher.

While it is clear that none of these formulas work universally, my experience in high school taught me another lesson: the audience dictates what the writer does. I never once wrote what I would have chosen to write, were I given the choice. I wrote what my teachers wanted me to write; I wrote what would give me the best grade. While that may seem like I have a lack of integrity as a writer, it is what we all do as writers. Even for those not writing for a grade, people will selectively choose their topic, wording, and organization to best please their audience. Facebook users use slang, abbreviations, acronyms, and short structured phrases that sometimes disregard the "grammar rules" because they are trying to write efficiently and only need to worry about getting their message across. Some bloggers write in first person, using informal language to connect with their readers on a more personal level. Most writers, even if they don't realize it, actually place enormous focus on how to write for a particular audience. In fact, one could go mad trying to please everyone with his or her writing while also being specific. While each of my teachers had different expectations for me, real-

world audiences also have expectations for non-student writers. For example, romance novelists probably will not include alien invasions in their stories. The authors know that this would not appeal to their primary audience, who are interested in reading about sensitive treatments of people in relationships. On the other hand, writers of science fiction know that their main audience is going to be looking for action, futuristic technology, and adventure. Authors want not only to appeal to their audiences, but also to avoid offending them in a way that will drive them away.

Even writing within the same genre can have different circumstances, and therefore, writers have different options for how to go about writing particular pieces. For example, writers for *The Wall Street Journal* have a different writing style than those who write for *The Black Sheep*. These are both national newspapers, available in print and online, and they each have professional writers. The differences between these magazines can be seen, at least at first glance, by the categories for articles on their websites. *The Wall Street Journal* has a list of categories including: "Home," "World," "U.S.," "New York," "Business," "Tech," "Markets," "Market Data," "Opinion," "Life & Culture," "Real Estate," and "Management." Thus there is an emphasis on mature, informative news in *The Wall Street Journal*. On the other hand, *The Black Sheep's* categories are listed as "Local Articles," "Bar Specials," "All Articles," "Party Pics," and "Submit." These categories appear to emphasize the importance of partying and drinking, much more immature and flagrant pieces. *The Wall Street Journal* writers use diction that is more developed and politically correct than that of *The Black Sheep*. For example, a reporter from *The Wall Street Journal* would not single out his or her friend in an article, calling the friend an "asshole" because he has "had [his] Halo ODST for like four months," as a reporter did for *The Black Sheep* (Dreidelschleitze, 2012). Rather, a reporter from *The Wall Street Journal* might talk about how "the White House and Republican lawmakers faced pressure to reach a solution to the looming budget crisis" (Paletta et. al, 2012). The titles of the articles also contrast greatly. A *Black Sheep* author chose the overly dramatic title, "The Great Watterson Flood," to represent a sarcastic article (Dreidelschleitze, 2012). On the other hand, "Pressure Rises on Fiscal Crisis" covers the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*, illustrating a more serious approach to reporting. Thus, while they are both published newspapers, the same article content and diction rules do not apply.

Because of this variation that occurs within and between genres, rather than creating formulas for writing, a better approach is to have a set of guidelines for how to approach the particular writing situation. Essentially, I think of it as a formula for creating a formula. In every writing situation, we must consider the audience, genre, diction, structure, and persona that the

writer wishes to take. The writer first needs to determine what the audience expects from him or her and what the values of the audience are. *The Black Sheep* knows that its audience is college students who are unlikely to be offended by the use of curse words or vulgar language and will probably appreciate the caustic tone. However, *Black Sheep* writers must be careful because some of their articles could offend the audience they are trying to please. While the newspaper is meant to be comedic, content such as, "I'm sick of these religious nut-jobs blocking our walkways and clotting our minds with nonsense religious bullshit through this 'point and shoot' adoption policy," could easily offend anyone who would subscribe to the religious beliefs being promoted by the people in question (Staff). And yet, since this article was published, it's clear that part of *The Black Sheep's* attempt at appealing to their audience is to print potentially volatile and controversial material, perhaps to attract both readers who would agree with the articles and those who would take offense.

At the other end of the spectrum, *The Wall Street Journal* knows its main audience is educated adults interested in more serious topics. This is why they focus on politics, the economy, and worldly news. Yet, the writers for each of these venues have, essentially, the same situation and genre: both are reporters trying to inform their audiences of current events through the genre of a newspaper. Writers for both newspapers must also decide whether they wish to use a developed and creative vocabulary or more simple and concrete diction. These are not the only options for writers, but rather a broad sense of what they can choose from in terms of diction. The audience also affects this choice, as writers must present their arguments in such a way so that their audiences will comprehend and accept them. The structure an author chooses can vary widely from a few long paragraphs to several small paragraphs. Newspapers might choose to present a story and then connect it to bigger ideas or alternate between parts of the story and how those connect to certain concepts or themes. They must create a structure that interests their audience and gives them a reason to keep reading. If a structure is too complex, the reader might give up on the article. Finally, these writers must consider how they want their audiences to think of them. A reporter could choose to deliver the truth no matter how much it may upset people, but an advice columnist is probably going to want to please his or her readers in order to build a fan base to keep his column going.

Now we will look at how authors from these two newspapers approach their writing. Because I can't reproduce the entire articles here, I've included some short excerpts from one article from each source that I want to comment on. (Readers can access the full text of each article at the websites listed below.) Under each of the excerpts, I have provided some analysis and thoughts regarding the authors' choices in this genre in order to compare the two.

Newspaper: *The Black Sheep*
Article Title: "Top 10 Things a Dictator Could Do to Improve America"
Author: Diego Salazar
Date of Publication: March 27, 2013
URL for Full-Text Access: http://theblacksheeponline.com/article/top-10-things-a-dictator-could-do-to-improve-america

Excerpts:

1. "Top 10 Things a Dictator Could Do to Improve America"

   Structure: The author organizes the article into 10 separate points, all of which are described in a few sentences. This makes it easy to read and keeps it short, so the audience will not have to spend too much time reading it.

2. "America is dying. The economy is a piece of shit, our social issues are a piece of shit, and even our pieces of shit are pieces of shit. It's sad. Our country is going nowhere, and it's all because of Democrats and Republicans.

   We need someone to take action, not to just talk about taking action. We need a revolution! We just need to establish a new leader . . . A dictator!"

   Situation: The author begins by addressing what he believes are the current weaknesses in America and how we should address the problem. The author approaches this through satire, which is obvious by the promotion of a dictator, a notion that goes against the core beliefs of the country.

3. "The dictator will do everything in his power to improve our country, whether we like it or not, and whether it's a good idea or not."

   Audience: The targeted audience for *The Black Sheep* is college students. This article is relevant to college students who are moving into adulthood and worrying about what kind of situation society will be in when they move into the workforce and begin to occupy positions of power.

4. "Your dictator will divide the U.S. in two: He'll make every Democrat move to the North and every Republican move to the South, and then let them be for ten years and see who advances the most. The winner gets ice cream and bragging rights, the loser gets annihilated!"

   Persona: The author is comedic, approaching what could be a sensitive topic with jokes.

5. "Our dictator will put a ban on people wearing key chains on their belts so they don't jiggle whenever they walk: It's fucking annoying!"

   Diction: The writing is very subjective, which brings out the personal opinion of the writer. This shows readers that the article is based on the interests of the author rather than the general public. It also portrays a sense of passion about the topic that can easily engage readers, whether they agree with his viewpoint or not.

6. "The dic' hates bad parenting and second-hand smoking more than anything else in the world . . . And that's saying something, because he really hates democracy."

   Diction: The diction is in first person and uses abbreviations, perhaps in an effort to relate to other forms of communication (e.g. texting and Facebook) that college students use in their day-to-day interactions.

7. "BOOM: Is North Korea misbehaving? Venezuela? The Vatican? BOOM! With a Dictator we could just bomb those fuckers into submission! BOOM! BOOM! There, what used to be a country is just another Grand Canyon."

   Diction: The diction also becomes vulgar and offensive at points. While many college students may be open to cursing, this could still be offensive to some readers, so writers for *The Black Sheep* are taking a risk in this way.

Newspaper: *The Wall Street Journal*
Article Title: "States Harden Views Over Laws Governing Abortion"
Author: Louise Radnofsky
Date of Publication: March 31, 2013
URL for Full-Text Access: http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324883604578394873113377806.html?mod=WSJ_WSJ_US_News_3#articleTabs%3Darticle

Excerpts:

1. "States are becoming increasingly polarized over abortion, as some legislatures pass ever-tighter restrictions on the procedure while others consider stronger legal protections for it, advocates on both sides say."

   Situation: The author sets out to inform readers regarding the opposing viewpoints of the abortion controversy and the results of the debate in legislation across the United States.

2. "At the same time, Washington state is weighing a measure that would require all insurers doing business in new health insurance exchanges created by the Affordable Care Act to reimburse women for abortions."

   Audience: Here are the demographics for the readers of *The New York Times*:

   - Average Age: 47
   - Male/Female: 58.7% / 41.3%
   - Household Income $100,000 and up: 31.5%
   - Household Income $150,000 and up: 10.4%
   - College Graduates: 57.9%
   - Business Decision Maker: 22%
     (*The Wall Street Journal* Digital Network)

   The article is tailored towards this audience because this topic affects the insurance business; women from adolescent age and older; advocates, physicians, and hospitals; and politicians, among others. In addition to the content, other features of the writing are tailored to this "business class" audience. The diction is professional and advanced, and the information is presented as factual and direct, so it is easy to follow for those who are busy and do not have much time to read.

3. "State legislators seeking to limit access to abortion have the backing of a 1992 Supreme Court decision, Planned Parenthood v. Casey, confirming states can restrict the procedure in ways that fall short of banning it entirely. In recent years, more abortion opponents have turned their attention to state legislatures, especially after gains by conservative lawmakers in 2010 elections."

   Diction: The author seeks an objective stance and removes herself from the situation by using third person. The language is formal and utilizes an advanced vocabulary, which is fitting to the content and this particular newspaper's audience.

4. "Court rulings have found that physicians determine viability, which generally is considered to occur after 22 weeks of pregnancy. The laws in North Dakota and Arkansas link viability to the presence of a fetal heartbeat, using differing detection methods.

   Leading antiabortion groups typically have given lukewarm support to restricting the procedure early in pregnancy, saying they think they have stronger legal grounds for tightening access to abortion through controls on clinics and regulating abortions carried out using a pill rather than a surgical procedure."

   Structure: The article follows a logical topical structure that correlates with the development of the argument. It is broken up into several short paragraphs, which keeps it organized and easy to follow—a feature typical of this genre.

5. "Sixteen state Constitutions protect the right to an abortion and an additional five states have laws that do so. In New York, Mr. Cuomo said he aims to incorporate protections for abortion late in pregnancy into state law in case the U.S. Supreme Court ever reconsiders the Roe decision."

   Persona: The author portrays herself as an objective third party who is a professional reporter of current news and events. She develops her credibility through references to past court cases and legislation, comparing them to the new laws being put in place now.

These two articles share the same broad generic category of newspaper articles. However, they are written very differently based on the guidelines expected from their editors and audiences. I chose these two articles because they represent the newspapers' styles very well. *The Wall Street Journal* tends to stay neutral (or at least as neutral as possible), informative, professional, and direct. On the other hand, *The Black Sheep* uses humor, sarcasm, opinions, descriptive language, and more colloquial terminology. Despite their differences, both of the articles cover major topics that are currently affecting United States citizens. An analysis of the two articles shows that there are multiple ways (or different formulas) one can use to address serious topics and to attract readers' attention. It all depends on who you are writing for and your own voice as a writer.

It is a cruel world we live in that presents us with writing challenges that aren't easily addressed through a single catch-all formula. If you are anything like me, when you sit down to write that dreaded paper for your composition class, it feels like your teacher is punishing you. That same sense of dread might also plague a reporter trying to meet a deadline or a teacher writing out a report to give to his or her administrator. We have a few tips and tricks, but, unfortunately, no two writing situations are the same, and we can't treat them that way. However, developing a set of criteria for your writing and analyzing examples can make this seemingly impossible task manageable. As writers, we need to understand and appreciate that every audience and every situation is different. Once we accept this, writing for a specific audience will appear much simpler, and who knows, you might just enjoy it.

Afterword: The Formula for "They Just Don't Add Up"

I had to consider several factors at several stages of my writing of this article: before I starting writing, while I was writing, and while I was editing. I followed my own model of analyzing the genre, situation, audience, persona, structure, and diction for this article, which I will review for you below.

1. Genre: My genre was an article for a professional journal about composition. The fact that the journal is in the field of writing studies affected my topic choice and the structure of the article.

2. Situation: My situation was writing an article for an academic journal. I had read articles from a former issue of the journal, and so I knew that topics were not restricted to basic writing, and that the authors kept their writing more informal than some scholarly journals. Once I had my topic, I also knew I would have to model the ideas I was talking about within my writing.

3. Audience: My audience is you! I knew that a large portion of my audience would read this for a composition course assignment, so I wanted to keep it personal and relaxed to avoid it being dry and tortuous to read. I knew I would be reaching people both interested and disinterested in writing, so I tried to create something that appeals to both groups. Having been in your shoes, I thought back to what I thought made these articles enjoyable (unique topics with a relaxed tone) and tried to emulate those features in my writing.

4. Persona: After researching articles in previous issues of the journal, I knew that I wanted to use first person, informal, and clear language. These make the articles much easier to read and understand. However, I still wanted to display my credibility by using developed vocabulary and several examples. I started the article with a subjective tone in order to make it easier for the audience to connect with me, but then moved towards a more objective nature when analyzing the newspaper articles and presenting my own solution to the problem.

5. Structure: My structure was based mostly on how I thought I wanted to present my argument. I started off with my personal connection to the topic, and then I presented my thesis and showed how two pieces even within the same genre can be radically different. I then explained the focus on writing for a specific audience in the field of composition. After displaying how complex the writing process can be, I included my "solution" to the problem: using a formula to create a formula for each writing situation. Then, I analyzed two articles from the aforementioned newspapers to show the method in work. After a brief conclusion, I chose to include this analysis of my paper so that my audience could benefit from my analysis of this process as it applies to my own writing.

6. Diction: It was very important to me that my diction included my voice, which essentially means that my personality and my style are portrayed through my writing. That is why I kept the diction informal and used first person language. My diction is largely concrete because I am describing a process, analyzing information, and presenting a solution.

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f(audience) = infinity

Samantha Donovan

In this article, Donovan uses mathematical references and the investigation of several different genres to analyze what it is that appeals to an audience. She discusses how there are infinite yet many indeterminate ways to appeal to any audience. Many paths may be taken in order to appeal to a particular audience, much like when attempting to evaluate a math problem.

f(appeal to the whole audience) = DNE[1]

Appealing to an entire audience is a nearly impossible endeavor, whether your audience is all United States citizens, the entire freshmen class of ISU, or a twenty-member kindergarten class in Seattle, Washington. The diversity among people in terms of culture, gender, age, and class can make the struggle even more difficult. It may seem simple to portray an idea to a broad audience, but engaging the entire public approaches the unachievable. In this article, I will explore the implications of attempting to attract a specific or general audience through writing. Through the discussion of a wide variety of genres and specific examples, I will illustrate the complications involved with attempting to appeal to any audience. I hope to show that although it's complicated, paying attention to audience is necessary for any writer.

$(x\text{-purpose})^2 + (y\text{-audience})^2 = \text{attraction}^{2\,2}$

Gilbert K. Chesterton once wrote in *The Ethics of Elfland*, "Now, I have to put together a general position, and I pretend to no training in such things."[3]

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Under Chesterton's method of madness, he writes this piece by laying out his thoughts. His writing seems to be in order for him to *find* a message instead of writing to *send* a message to a particular audience. With the intention of searching for his message, he writes about finding a purpose; at least that is what some readers have understood his writing to be about. Like Chesterton, the struggle of any writer is to seek a purpose for writing and a method for approaching their audience. While Chesterton's approach to his audience was not clear, except that he obviously viewed himself as an integral part of his audience, many readers found his piece very intriguing, and he gained some popularity. Chesterton managed to successfully find and attract an audience with (seemingly) little attention to such matters, but this is rarely the case in most writing situations. Despite Chesterton's success not having done so, it's worthwhile for writers to think about how to engage a particular audience, especially because a message cannot be received without reaching an audience.

1, 2, 3, 4, 76, 24, 300, 24,000,000 . . .[4]

One way that some authors attempt to appeal to a diverse audience is to broaden their topic. Conveying an extremely broad message can certainly reach a greater audience, but sometimes that route may be less effective than appealing to a specific audience. A prime example of this tactic can be found in the genre of the fortune cookie. A common message someone might find in a fortune cookie is: "A book is in your future."[5] No duh. I will probably open a book tonight to study and tomorrow to study again. According to a recent calculation, the literacy rate of the United States is 99% and rising.[6] With this extremely high literacy rate, it is simple to generalize and speak of reading a book "in your future," as this will apply to most audience members. Another fortune reads, "Today's a good time to start something new." Although our lives are routine, we begin new tasks monthly, weekly, daily, even hourly. As these fortunes illustrate, it is easy to encompass the entire audience if you speak vaguely, but specificity is consequently diminished. Speaking from personal experience, whenever I have opened a fortune cookie, I have encountered a message with some sort of application to my life. That's why people get excited to read the contents of their fortune cookies. So, in the case of this genre, being vague and generalizing attracts audience members, which makes this strategically effective in capturing a large-scale audience.

sin(specifics) = limited audience[7]

In contrast to a broad delivery, some writers specifically aim to reach a particular audience, which challenges their delivery. For instance, car

information on a website or at a dealership contains extremely specific information, which dealers have to provide due to liability reasons. For example, the information listed in Figure 1 (below) for a 2013 Chevrolet Avalanche is specific to the exact model and year of this car. The facts are delivered with the intentions of only reaching a limited group of people. Unfortunately, in the car world, that limited audience would be only those educated enough to understand what looks to me as a jumble of nonsense, which may also be the case for potential customers. At first glance, providing all this information that the customer may not understand might seem like a negative tactic, especially because the selection of a car is the result of the actions of the customer, and whether the information appeals to the customer determines if the customer will purchase the car or not. However, providing these specific numbers and a wide variety of statistics regarding the vehicle may actually provide the customer with the information they need to understand the product, once the statistics are explained to him or her by the salesman. Thus, after the customer understands the car synopsis, car dealers are no longer hindering the members of their audience with a jumble of unintelligible facts, but rather using the detailed information to their advantage in explaining the specs of the car to the customer. This process of providing specific information and educating customers is what leads to the success of car dealers and the genre of the vehicle specs sheet.

Specs and Dimensions

Compression ratio:	9.90 to 1	**Engine horsepower:**	320hp @ 5,400RPM
Front headroom:	1,044mm (41.1")	**Rear legroom:**	993mm (39.1")
Payload:	634kg (1,397lbs)	**Turning radius:**	6.6m (21.5')
Exterior height:	1,946mm (76.6")	**Curb weight:**	2,632kg (5,803lbs)
Front shoulder room:	1,656mm (65.2")	**Exterior body width:**	2,009mm (79.1")
Wheelbase:	3,302mm (130.0")	**Towing capacity:**	2,268kg (5,000lbs)
Engine bore x stroke:	96.0mm x 91.9mm (3.78" x 3.62")	**Rear hiproom:**	1,582mm (62.3")
		Air Pollution Score (AP):	5
		Rear headroom:	1,016mm (40.0")
Greenhouse Gas Score (GG):	2	**Front legroom:**	1,049mm (41.3")
Engine displacement:	5.3 L	**Exterior length:**	5,621mm (221.3")
Engine torque:	335 lb.-ft. @ 4,000RPM	**Rear shoulder room:**	1,656mm (65.2")
GVWR:	3,266kg (7,200lbs)	**Front hiproom:**	1,532mm (60.3")

Figure 1. 2013 Chevrolet Avalanche synopsis.[8]

On the other hand, a movie synopsis is an instance when being too specific could be inappropriate to the genre. Revealing the perfect amount of information is vital when introducing a movie. If a critic reveals the resolution of the movie, readers might choose not to see the movie. Yet, the opposite may occur as well. If a critic is not specific enough and leaves the audience

questioning the main plot points, then the synopsis is ineffective. Consider reading a synopsis with a last line that reads, "Then Joey dies and the family escapes." That's definitely a plot buster. Being a consumer, I would no longer be interested in watching the film, and thus, the writer would have missed out on attracting a particular audience member—especially since I probably won't be reading synopses by that particular author again.

Intended Message ≠ Received Message[9]

Unfortunately, sometimes an author attempts to convey a message, but the opposite message is received. For instance, many skeptics appear to have missed the intentions of Mark Twain in *Huckleberry Finn*. Twain used this novel to attempt "to illustrate his own epiphany about American racism."[10] It seems that these intentions may have been misunderstood by critics who called him racist and disapproved of his infamous novel. In my opinion, Twain wrote his novel in order to give justice to the suffering individuals during this period of tension. Furthermore, I believe that Twain had virtually no intention of producing such a popular work of art. Yet, critics continue to scrutinize his masterpiece. Nonetheless, the amount of attention this novel has received, from both people who approve of it and those who don't, has been massive, even if some of the audience members are misinterpreting Twain's intentions.

Similarly, as Chuck Palahniuk wrote *Fight Club*, he envisioned a romance novel. When a room full of critics failed to recognize this aspect of his novel, Palahniuk realized that his intentions were not received as he expected. One critic exclaimed, "*Fight Club* is anything but a romance and sappy novel, but it's writing in its finest."[11] Although this novel is fairly recognized and popular, having the bulk of his audience miss his intentions may have left Palahniuk feeling bitter. Evaluating these examples of missed intentions brings up many thought-provoking questions: Should an author be disappointed if he or she creates a popular novel or movie that the audience views differently than it was intended? Do missed intentions have an effect on whether a particular message is received or not? Analyzing audience uptake may never reveal clear answers to these questions. While, for Palahniuk, audience members misunderstanding his intentions led to the popularity of his book (and the resulting movie), audience misinterpretation of an author's intentions may also lead to the loss of an author's popularity. This goes to show that authors are taking a risk when they introduce their writing to the public and that sometimes capturing an audience (or not) is a factor that authors have little control over.

Sarcasm > Seriousness when f(audience) = humorous[12]

The authors of some genres write with the intention to delight their audience with humor. This common tactic is employed by such authors as A. A. Milne. He wrote about disinterest in diary keeping in one of his pieces entitled, *The Diary Habit*.[13] He writes, "I suppose this is the reason diaries are so rarely kept nowadays—that nothing ever happens to anybody." Using this kind of humor, an author is sometimes able to attract audience members. Similarly, some authors use sarcasm to attempt to appeal to a particular audience. Sarcasm is a sharp, bitter, or cutting expression or remark, and it has been said that "sarcasm is the lowest form of wit, but the highest form of intelligence."[14] Sarcasm is used to catch the attention of the audience and draw them in. For example, in the graduation speech at my high school, the speaker began with the following: "I'd like to thank the internet, Google, Wikipedia, Microsoft Word, and copy and paste for helping me graduate . . ." These sarcastic remarks made the audience roar with laughter. Humorous remarks may not always relate to every member of an audience—like the teachers at my school, who showed their frustration at this student after all their efforts to teach the "correct" techniques of research—but they are typically highly accepted by the audience, depending on the genre. And especially because humor and sarcasm aren't appropriate in every genre, using sarcasm doesn't answer the ultimate audience question: how do you reach the broadest audience and still remain effective in your message?

[hit] or {miss}[15]

While I wrote this essay with the intention to appeal to my entire audience, I knew going in that it would be impossible. The impossibility is similar to "2+2=5" in *1984* by George Orwell.[16] (See, right there, I appealed only to those who are familiar with the novel and/or this particular reference.) The context of this ambiguous message in *1984* is that the government trained all the members of society to erase their past and to accept any government-sanctioned statement as true, even the notion that 2+2=5. Being able to recognize such references may stem from different levels of familiarity with the source of the reference. Someone who is familiar with this particular *1984* reference may or may not have actually read the novel. And even distant knowledge of the reference may still allow the audience to connect to the parallel the writer is trying to make. What I am trying to illustrate, here, is that although including references like this one may only attract a small portion of the audience, once the reference is explained, the rest of the audience will probably be able to understand and benefit from the reference

as well. Does this tactic work to broaden my audience? Can I draw people in by making and explaining particular references throughout my piece, or am I just leaving some of my readers confused?

For example, some modern authors include pop culture references in their work, which are only effective when understood. Upon recognizing their target audience and the diversity therein, writers can evaluate and justify which references to make given the social characteristics of their audience. The authors of the television show "The Big Bang Theory," for example, recognize their audience and make references accordingly. Such references include quotations from the movie *Mean Girls*, such as, "She doesn't even go here!" and "There is a 30% chance that it's already raining!" Such references are used because the target audience is presumed to be aware of such references, particularly because *Mean Girls* has a similar target audience as does the "Big Bang Theory." However, because there are always going to be people unfamiliar with particular references, this action by authors and screenwriters is a risky endeavor—they'll either have a hit or a miss. Some shows that rely heavily on pop culture references have been highly successful, such as "The Big Bang Theory" and "South Park," yet others have failed to earn a reasonable profit.

$\lim_{x\to\infty}(\textit{appeal}) = \infty$[17]

One topic that has escaped discussion thus far is my use of the headings within this article. These headings all use math-related functions and symbols. With the addition of words instead of numerical values, I attempt to hint at the topics within that section. My reason for creating these headings was to establish a sort of "insider language" that would appeal to particular members of my audience—i.e. those who understand this mathematical jargon. This tactic is similar to how some writers use Latin words (or words from other languages) in their writing that are often understood only to those educated in Latin. Although it is probably somewhat familiar, one such reference is the phrase "*per se*." The direct translation of this phrase is "by itself," and it is used in English with this meaning. If a person came across a sentence using the term *per se*, such as, "I do not enjoy reading *per se*, but this novel caught my eye," he or she may not understand the message without conducting further research. Thus, using a particular "insider language" may effectively attract a limited audience while leaving others out. It was my intention to experiment with this tactic in my article by using the "insider language" of mathematics—of course, I attempted to bring those unfamiliar with mathematics into the experience by creating footnotes to explain each of the headings.

Because of the use of these headings and the references to particular genres and pieces of writing throughout, I recognize that this article may only appeal to few. Yet, because I knew about the potential limit of my appeal going in, I attempted to alter wording and explanations so that even if a reference did not apply to one of my readers, he or she could still understand the point being made. Additionally, I paid special attention to my target audience and what they would find appealing. As an author, it is interesting and exciting to make these audience-related decisions, and it's even more fun to find out what works: which audience members you are able to attract and for which audience members your piece falls flat. You'll have to let me know what you think.

Endnotes

1. f(any value) means "the function of any value." "DNE" means "does not exist."

2. This is the equation for a circle centered at (purpose, audience) with a radius of attraction.

3. Kincaid, Zachry O. *The Narrative World of G.K. Chesterton Finding the Ethics in His Elfland*. Thesis. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2004. Print.

4. This is considered a series of numbers, steadily increasing in value; however, this particular list does not have a specific value connecting each number in the series.

5. "Fortune Cookie Quotes and Message Ideas, Like Ones in the Restaurant." *Custom Fortune Cookies – Made Fresh. Write Your Own Message for Cheap*. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 Dec. 2012.

6. "Central Intelligence Agency." *Welcome to the CIA Web Site*. N.p., n.d. Web. Mar. 2013. This information comes from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and classifies the definition of literacy as the "ability to read and write at a specific age." For the United States, this age is 15. It also states that an agreed standard must be made within a given country since there is no universal definition or standard for literacy.

7. Sine ("sin") is defined as the trigonometric function that is equal to the ratio of the side opposite a given angle (in a right triangle) to the hypotenuse.

8. "2013 Chevrolet Avalanche LTZ Black Diamond For Sale In Bloomington." *Leman's Chevy City*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Oct. 2013.

9. The symbol "≠" is defined as the "does not equal" symbol. Therefore, the subtitle reads: the intended message does not equal the received message.

10. Hotchkiss, Craig. "Rewriting Huckleberry Finn Twists Twain's Intentions." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 07 Jan. 2011. Web. 01 Dec. 2012.

11. "Fight Club." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, n.d. Web. Mar. 2013.

12. The symbol ">" is defined as the "greater than" symbol.

13. Milne, A. A. "The Diary Habit." *A. A. Milne's Essay*. N.p., n.d. Web. 2013.

14. "Sarcasm." *Dictionary.com*. Dictionary.com, n.d. Web. Mar. 2013.

15. "[" and "]" are denoted as square brackets. "{" and "}" are denoted as braces.

16. Orwell, George. *1984*. Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1997. Print.

17. $\lim_{x \to \infty}$ denotes the limit function. The "∞" symbol means infinity. Therefore, this subtitle reads: the limit of appeal as x approaches infinity equals infinity.

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I'm Doing It Wrong: Political Posts on Facebook

David J. Marshall

Facebook is something many of us use every day, and as we use it, its uses change. There are social and political pressures to behave in certain ways on Facebook, and acceptance of these powerful forces can limit what we do with Facebook and other social media. Marshall argues that our interests and activities define what Facebook is, not the other way around, and that any use of Facebook is a social and political act.

A person from a group I liked on Facebook (Planned Parenthood) posted the variation on a meme shown below in Figure 1.

I've never met the person who originally posted this image. Most who had also belonged to this Facebook group (meaning they had liked this group sometime in the past and had not un-liked this group since that decisive digital move) and who were moved to respond to this post in some way gave rave reviews and favorable comments. I liked it so much I shared it on my wall. About an hour later, one of my friends posted the image pictured in Figure 2, another variation on a meme, and I saw it as I scrolled down my browser while eating lunch.

Figure 1. An image I liked and shared on Facebook ("Vote").

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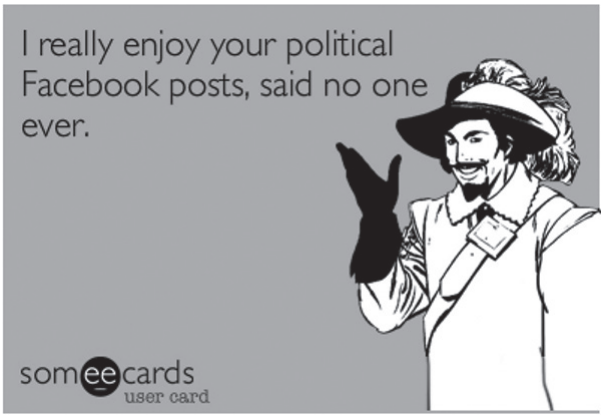

Figure 2. An image that criticizes political Facebook posts and posting ("I really enjoy").

So, one of my friends shared this image with me. Well, actually, my friend shared it with all of his friends, and many of them are not my friends, so it was not directed specifically at me. (Or was it?) Figure 2 is funny because I believe it is accurate to an extent. It seems most people on Facebook share vacation photos, pictures of pets, what they are listening to on Spotify (or whatever), or some hilarious things their kids said. Of course the "no one ever" part of this modified meme ruins it for me, because I (sigh), David J. Marshall, have at many times enjoyed "political" posts on Facebook.

And while I'm in this confessional mood, I should also mention that I've posted what might be construed as "political" materials to my wall on Facebook. I'll stop putting "political" in quotation marks after this sentence because it is probably annoying, but I have been doing so to make a point. The meaning of the word itself is a subject of contention and has been for quite some time. (For example, people tend to categorize things they don't like as political.) And in my experiences on Facebook, I can also see conflict regarding what might be called the "appropriateness" of publishing/sharing or commenting on political material. This conflict shows evidence of Facebook in the continual process of defining itself as an activity system, which is basically any group or individual socializing process, or what David Russell defines as "any ongoing, object-directed, historically-conditioned, dialectically-structured, tool-mediated human interaction: a family, a religious organization, an advocacy group, a political movement, a course of study, a school, a discipline, a research laboratory, a profession, and so on" (504). But what really makes activity systems interesting—to me at least—is that they are, again according to Russell, "mutually (re)constructed by participants using certain tools and not others (including discursive tools such as speech sounds and inscriptions)" (504). This description means that what I do within an activity system defines it, and what others who participate in that system do also defines it. Sounds like Facebook to me, but maybe I'm doing it wrong. Maybe my friend is right.

My friend's variation on the meme in Figure 2 (not her own creation but shared by some other person who shared it from someone else, etc.) made me think. I wondered if my past and current Facebook behaviors were

appropriate. I mean, not everyone posts stuff on Facebook about Planned Parenthood, political funding, human rights, Occupy Chicago, or other material that's just plain critical of corporations. And I am aware enough to see that most people avoid saying anything even vaguely controversial on Facebook. But isn't this avoidance, this exclusive type of behavior, actually political in and of itself? This kind of participation in the activity system that is Facebook says to me, "You're doing it wrong. Behave more like me. Post pictures of your cat. If you don't have a cat, buy one. Or a dog. This is normal behavior in this system." If I am shamed into thinking about the appropriateness of my interests and purposes, isn't that socialization (the changing of behavior to meet norms), and therefore political? Aren't all activities that involve the reading and writing of many different genres, like Facebook, about enacting the power to comprehend, interpret, and then shape behavior? (And as I write the word "many," don't I mean "most" written and even visual genres? I can put any type of alphabetic writing on Facebook. I can put films, clips, or links to anything on the web. So is Facebook, by its uses, merely a generic black hole, the "eater of all digital genres"?) There are dynamics at work here that are fueled by considerations and inconsiderations of audience, purpose, and genre, demonstrating Facebook's social and cultural (and yes, political) power.

Perhaps, then, what we are looking at is a constellation, or network, of activity systems in Facebook. My friend wants to use Facebook to see pictures of cute doggies and kids eating birthday cake, and that's certainly a popular activity on Facebook. On the other hand, I want to use Facebook to read about what is happening in the world and to connect to other people who think taking thoughtful action is what makes the world worth living in, and as I'll argue later, this is quite a popular activity on Facebook, too. Is one of these ways of behaving more appropriate than the other in this activity system? Regardless of the answer, what ends up happening is that all of these activities become connected in some way, be it intentional or unintentional, meaningful or not so much. Still, those who fall in the former group of Facebook users might accuse me of "doing it wrong," as Figure 3 suggests.

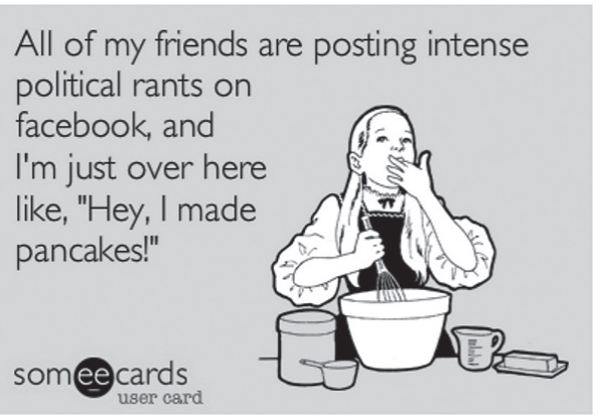

Figure 3. An example of "normalizing" behavior on Facebook ("All of my friends").

Maybe my arguably "inappropriate" behavior on Facebook is just a misjudgment of audience on my part. But it is difficult to talk about all users of Facebook as an audience. There are one billion of them, according to Mark Zuckerburg. What do any one billion people have in common, except for the fact that they use the same web-based software to communicate some of the time (and do so on the same planet)? I mean, do you know anyone who uses only Facebook to communicate? I'm sure they are out there somewhere, but I don't know them.

Supposedly, a Facebook user's audience is the group of people authorized to get full access to their page, their friends list. Of course, this is complicated by the fact that Facebook policies and end-user agreements are changing all the time. When I post something, who is my audience? Is it really just my friends? I can also choose only some of my friends, a group of friends, or just family, as long as I designate who those people are. What if a friend re-posts my post? What if I don't know what my privacy settings are or how to work them? We've all seen what can happen when someone misrecognizes an audience—when TMI (too much information) and Facebook collide, and people lose jobs, marriages explode, and future political ambitions disintegrate forever. And when I respond to someone's post, people outside of my friends list see that, right? And even if a post stays only on my wall and only my friends see it, I have a range of people from my life on Facebook—from high school friends I haven't had a real conversation with in many years, to former professors, to parents of my friends. It seems, then, if Facebook is an activity system, or a network of activity systems, the capabilities of the tools involved enact a collision of audiences and trajectories and purposes. If this collision is not intentional, then I would have to say that Facebook is poorly designed. But I don't say that.

So when users put something on Facebook, they are implicitly and/or explicitly thinking of these audience considerations (and likely many others) before, during, and after the act of typing, uploading a photo, sharing, etc. But the crowded make-up of the audience with which we are communicating makes any thoughtful navigation of said audience somewhat of a crapshoot. And more importantly, it smushes what might reasonably be called several different activities with several different audiences into one complicated online space. It might be reasonable to say that "taking my audience into consideration" when posting on Facebook is a fragile and tenuous process at best. And Facebook isn't necessarily special in this regard. While using most social networking sites, knowing one's audience can be mostly guesswork.

In addition to my audience confusion, maybe my "problem" with Facebook is that I don't understand its purpose. Facebook started out as a

"social" site for college students, but has since grown to include people of all different ages, backgrounds, and social characteristics. As the audience has expanded, the number and types of purposes have also necessarily expanded. And if you believe much social theory (cf. Foucault, Barthes), there is little difference between a discussion of the "social" (as the study of behavior) and the discussion of the political, anyway. The site-as-party-documentation role of Facebook is just as political (in that it argues for particular ideological and cultural values) as someone posting an article about a petition or a letter-to-your-congressperson campaign, or even a "flame war" that has people posting insults back and forth. (Personally I value these exchanges, although I don't participate in them. Where else can you see people using activity systems like the ones in Facebook to define, persuade, and express their opinions, being honest enough to involve emotion? But that's just me.)

Perhaps it would be useful to have a body of research that shows how people generally use Facebook. There is relatively little research on general usage statistics because that kind of information is highly valuable advertising information that Facebook sells (and if that's not technological and political black boxing, I don't know what is). But there are a few studies that have looked at how people engage the political through social networking sites like Facebook. In one such study that focused on the 2008 election, it was found that political self-expression was deemed acceptable by many users, but efforts to persuade were less acceptable (Vitak et al. 112), which suggests that there is nuance involved in ranking the "appropriateness" of particular social networking activities like those that take place on Facebook. Some political activities like "expression" are okay, but when you try to "sell" that expression to someone, it's not okay. (But please, sell me something from Target or Walmart.) Of course, we should wonder what the difference is between "expression" and "coercion." If someone is expressing their political beliefs using a networked system of activities, like Facebook, with all of the audience complexities I discussed earlier, are they not trying to persuade us, at least in some subtle way? Again, it's hard for me to see any expression on Facebook as completely "innocent" or devoid of intent or political significance, whether it is an expression related to a political party or simply about a product or store. It's also worth mentioning that this study was done in 2008, when Facebook users numbered a mere four hundred million. I wonder how much these dynamics have changed in the last five years as users of Facebook (and many other social networking sites) have increased significantly.

So why does it seem like there is so much resistance to the political on Facebook? A quick search on Google using the words "political posts facebook" shows that many people are trying to avoid political material on Facebook. Articles with titles like "How to Block Annoying Political Posts on Facebook"

and "Noppl Lets You Hide Your Friends' Political Posts on Facebook" seem to make up most of the search results. There is even an official community on Facebook called, "Nobody Cares About Your Political Posts. Really." (Of course, the group only has 301 likes.) Maybe even the apolitical groups are too political for most people (and that's not surprising because, by definition, encouraging people not to post something is political behavior). It seems odd that political engagement is supposedly valued in our culture, and there are often complaints when people don't participate politically (as in news articles that tell us about low voter turnout, polls showing low interest in campaigns, etc.), but when people actually do engage the political (beyond sending a donation) on Facebook, for example, there is "norming" pressure to cease these activities.

On the other hand, Planned Parenthood has 343,538 likes. So there are people like me out there. That's comforting. But maybe they are all doing it wrong, like me. And maybe these Planned Parenthood people don't like reading other kinds of political posts. Or maybe some of them don't think Planned Parenthood is political.

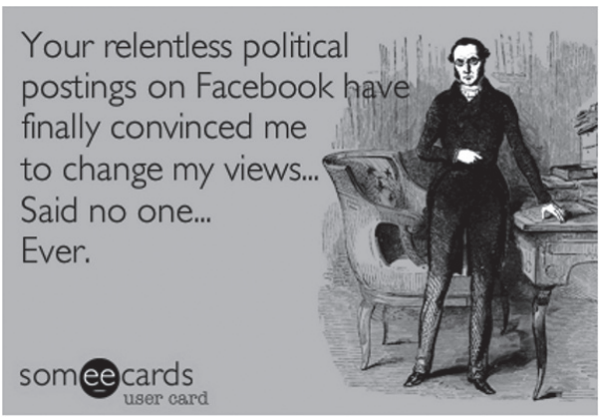

Figure 4. Another image that criticizes political Facebook posts and posting ("Your relentless political postings").

Most of the memes I come across about political behavior, like Figure 4, suggest that political posts on Facebook have no effect, which is what really gets me going. Earlier this year, the Susan G. Komen Foundation changed its policy decision to de-fund Planned Parenthood largely due to communications and petition activity started on Facebook and Twitter. So I'd say there was a big difference made there. Also, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a formerly influential and well-funded political "non-profit," has been essentially de-funded due to campaigns started on Facebook and Twitter. These campaigns convinced huge corporations like McDonalds, Amazon, Microsoft, and many others to stop funding ALEC because of their political activities (like voter disenfranchisement according to race and economic status and the design and implementation of "stand your ground" laws). So I have to disagree with those who say political activity on Facebook changes no one's mind. It may not seem like much, but it is not "no one." These two examples also illustrate how social networking sites have changed how we "do" politics, in that people are using Facebook for what Lanlois et al. call "issue networks," in which people/users find groups devoted to a single

issue or a small group of issues rather than seeking out the larger political parties or posting on a presidential candidate's official "person" page (421). This dynamic becomes much more pronounced and significant in a network of activity systems like Facebook.

Beyond the effectiveness of the political movements or networks on Facebook, some evidence suggests that individual people do change their minds due to what they see on Facebook. According to the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project, 36% of a particular population sample said that they use social networking sites (SNS) to keep up with political news. And "25% of SNS users say the sites are 'very important' or 'somewhat important' to them for debating or discussing political issues with others." That's not a majority, but, again, one-fourth is hardly "no one." And according to Vitak et al., Facebook may play an important role as another training ground for young people (or anyone, for that matter) to try out "civic skills" and learn more about their own views as well as the views of others (108).

Maybe Facebook was not meant to be political. It was meant to sell stuff, right? And advertisers don't like to muddy up their squeaky clean brand images with the reality of the political, the cultural, and the social. But maybe one of the dynamics at work on Facebook is one that advertisers and political avoiders can't bottle up and sell, or prevent. When people use Facebook and other social network sites, they don't just take what Facebook has to give, (although they do that, too). They also give of themselves. They contribute. They participate. They appropriate it for themselves. And when people use or interact with something (a genre, a book, a game, an activity, a company, a conversation), they can change it. Sometimes these changes are negligible, but sometimes they can change the purpose of something. Even Facebook. Facebook can define our behaviors. It is a powerful network of activities. But that activity will always be defining and redefining itself through our behaviors in that activity system. We can define Facebook simply by using it in ways important to us as individuals, not just the way it was intended. So, I guess I'm not doing it wrong after all.

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Me, Me, Me: It's All About Meme

Katie Shoukry

As Shoukry takes an adventure through the interwebs, she discovers and reports on the basic production and form of memes. As she explores this web trend, she discusses the formula for their particular brand of humor. Finally, Shoukry discusses the importance of relatable comedy in this genre and ultimately defines what a meme means to her, personally.

What's in a meme? That which we call a gif by any other name would be worthy of retweet . . . And after I spend nearly an hour thinking up that little verse, I ponder, what is a meme? I search the all-knowing Google to begin finding an answer, discovering that there is in fact an origin to this trend, as the dictionary definition that was spewed back out at me indicates: "An element of a culture or behavior that may be passed from one individual to another by non-genetic means, especially imitation" ("Meme"). Even though I merely skimmed my search results (as I'm sure anyone would), I conclude that this definition serves only to remind me that, once again, the internet has invaded its proverbial 7th grade vocabulary list and turned a previously little-known word into an overused concept. And yet I still don't know what a meme is, at least in terms of its modern conception. I rack my brain and certain phrases come to mind—funny pictures, funny quips, funny everything. This organization of thoughts brings forth the idea that any internet genre may be so ambiguous that its explanation might be different for each individual audience member. As I scavenge through the internet's every nook and cranny and ponder the subject tirelessly, I come to an over-arching theme that encompasses the subthemes I will also discuss: audience. Within

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our investigation of memes, we will look specifically at the basic production of a meme, several subgenres, and the relationship between author and viewer. Finally I will discuss how all of these elements come back around to our main point of audience analysis.

Basic Production

When I told my dad about this article I was writing, being as technologically incapable as he is, he asked me what a meme was. Verbatim, my response was, "a reused background picture that denotes some specific comedic connotation, with a funny, relatable turn of phrase; they are very popular and circulating the internet." With that, even my father understood and recognized the genre, so I believe this is a good definition of a meme, at least as a jumping-off point. While there are multiple forms that the general term "meme" can entail, I'm going to take this complex genre and narrow it down to the most basic form—a single picture meme with very few words (see Figure 1 for an example). If nearly any audience can recognize the meme in its most basic form (including even my over-the-hill parental units), then it's a more effective genre and can be circulated with even more frequency.

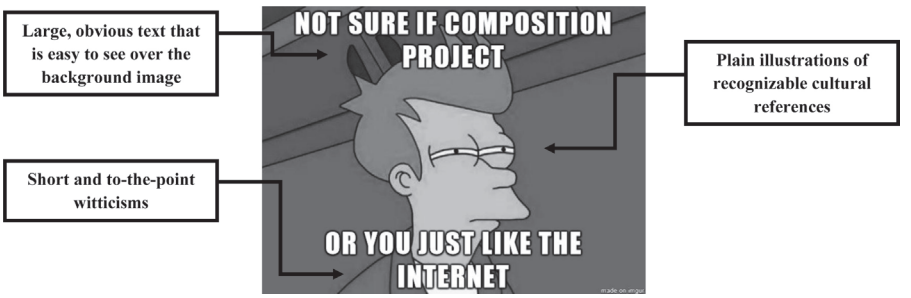

Figure 1. Fry meme (Norris).

As I continue my search, I come across a contradiction in my meme definition. What about when a meme has a background picture that I don't recognize? There are hundreds of memes bouncing around the internet with references I am unfamiliar with; however, I can still identify them as memes. How do I just know? I soon realize that even from a thumbnail version of any meme, I can still distinguish the bold white lettering of the quip atop a simple image. Granted I don't have the security of knowing exactly what I'm in store for if I click to enlarge the image, but I expect, from recognizing this tell-tale formatting, that I will laugh, and perhaps out loud, when I open the image. Well, at least that's what I'll say when I repost it somewhere else so that the public can appreciate the humor, too.

And yet, this idea of humor still eludes me. Why are they so funny? What makes this genre of humor different from other forms of internet comicalness? With this question in mind, I scoop another spoonful of Nutella and return to the deep crevices of the interwebs in search of an answer.

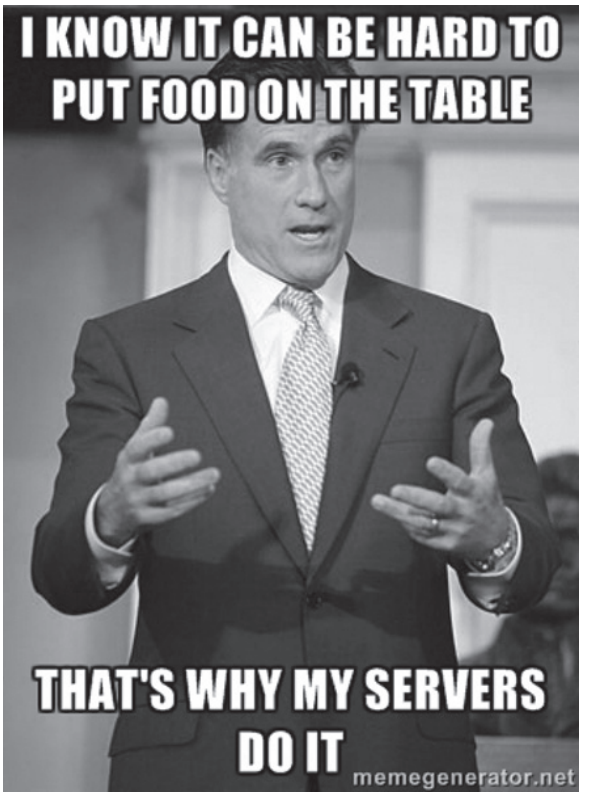

Figure 2. Mitt Romney meme (Filmgeek514).

Approximately one hour later, I think I've come up with some semi-concrete ideas on the matter. First I explored the idea of the humor lying in the succinctness of the wording. As Shakespeare wrote, "Brevity is the soul of wit" (2.2.92). Does this apply here? I think yes. (See Figure 2 for an example.) Humor is mostly derived from the execution. When someone tells a joke and it takes longer than thirty seconds or so, we become disinterested. The same idea applies to memes, as audience members would rather read a one-sentence joke then a lengthy paragraph leading to an ultimate punch line. The conciseness adds a witty flair that's quick, like an insulting jab at times, and serves to keep the audience interested. Not to mention, the limited time it takes to read the phrase allows for the reading of multiple memes in a tiny length of time—on a break at work, for example. You could rifle through a hundred memes in the matter of few minutes, enjoying oodles and oodles of laughs. I'm not saying I've ever done something so ridiculous. (I totally have.)

Subgenres

Maybe it's because I like the internet, or maybe it was for research purposes, but as I continue my research quest, I soon find myself amidst an endless abyss of memes by means of multiple websites—MemeCenter.com, MemeGenerator.com, Know Your Meme on CheezBurger.com . . . (As I slowly get more distracted by my web-browsing, add another half hour of "investigation" to the hours of time not productively spent!) Scrolling and scrolling through the never-ending webpages, I realize that my personal favorites always tend to be memes popularly referred to as "Not Sure If . . .

Fry" (see Figure 1 for an example) and "Condescending Wonka" (see Figure 3 for an example). These reused backdrops set the memes up into categories of sorts, or subgenres, that allow me to pick up on what kind of humor the meme will include.

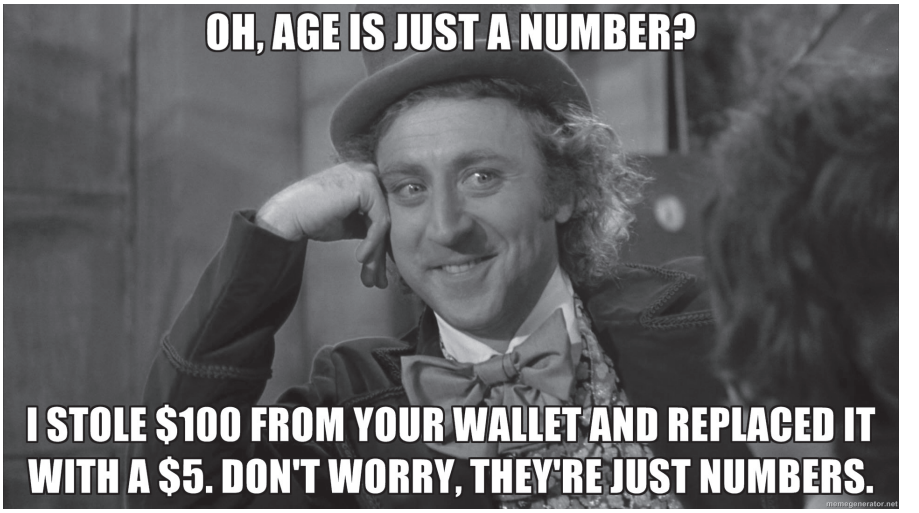

Figure 3. Condescending Wonka meme (canwejustgopretend).

Consider, for example, the "Condescending Wonka" meme. This backdrop features a grinning Gene Wilder from the 1971 *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. This image implies that, most likely, sarcastic and patronizing comedy—matching Wonka's haughty wide-eyed expression—is to follow after you click to enlarge the image and read the text. The "Not Sure If . . . Fry" meme showcases a doubtful-faced Phillip J. Fry from the adult cartoon show, *Futurama*. When you click on a Fry meme, you can expect it to begin with the phrase "Not sure if . . . ," followed by a jab at a person by comparing two ideas, implying that one is truth and the other is just a cover for the truth. Another example to further clarify the different implications of memes is the meme called "Socially Awkward Penguin" (see Figure 4). Highlighting a particularly goofy looking penguin and a basic blue background, this meme usually entails a brief description of a situation in which someone is considered socially abnormal, foolish, and/or introverted. You can guess what kind of humor the audience can expect as they maximize

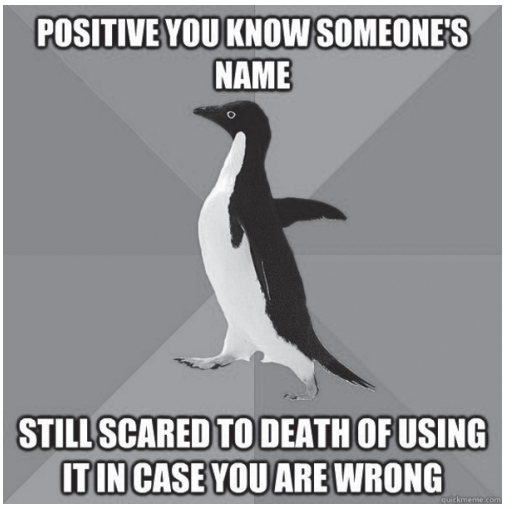

Figure 4. Socially Awkward Penguin meme (meme-spot).

their browser. There are hundreds upon hundreds of similarly recognizable memes, these examples being just a few of them, each containing its own particular brand of humor and connection between image and text.

Relationship between Meme, Creator, and Audience

The way I imagine the relationship between the creator of the meme and the audience is one of close friends who share common interests and enemies. This may be the actual case in some situations, as certain images are made in order to be an insulting joke between two-or-so persons. But sometimes memes seem to have the purpose of deriding a large group of people. For example, in a political meme, it's almost as if each political party—this referring to specific individuals expressing their beliefs on one side of a particular issue—is a catty clique, and the image is a physical representation of an insult towards those who support the other side of the issue (see Figure 2). And after someone takes offense, it's then that the other party responds back with its own meme. And so a war begins, each new addition producing humor for those on "their side" and offense to those on the "other side." This process has been used in multiple situations with many different "battling" groups. This back-and-forth production is sometimes what makes the humor so special. Even while the genre is largely anonymous, as some memes are nearly untraceable, they can still be so personal at the same time, targeted toward specific individuals.

As I wrap up my searching, I come across a final and important deduction: when you feel like you're "in on the joke" of a meme, it becomes more personal. With most web genres, it's easy to fall into the assumption that the audience is anyone who can read or navigate the internet, but with memes it's different. When you find a meme that contains references you understand and enjoy, it's almost as if, even though many other people probably also understand the implications of the quip, that meme was tailored for you and you alone. So it's as though an unknown author created a relatable joke that you feel is only between you and the author. It feels like an inside joke, something you could share only with someone who has been through a lot with you. This could entail a haughty moment of condescension that you share for an equally disliked concept, or it could also include moments where you think, "Oh my God! Me too! I'm not the only one!" Probably the best examples of memes that give me this feeling are the "Socially Awkward Penguin" memes (Figure 4), previously mentioned. As I sit here and muse over the fact that I just admitted to sharing qualities with an arctic bird, I realize that it's not actually the bird itself to whom I am relating, but actually I'm relating to the creator of the meme and the other people who find humor

(and perhaps just a little bit too much relevance to their own lives) when they view these Penguin memes. Because the internet can be such an impersonal place to interact with people, it's good that we have genres like memes that have the capacity to spark shared laughter between complete strangers. And hey, through memes, they feel like our friends.

After an entire night of weeding through images and analyzing this unique genre, I find myself at the end of my research. If I never see another meme again, it would be way too soon. With one last scoop of Nutella left, I decide that I now better understand what a meme entails. As I mentioned before, most web genres are so ambiguous, it can be difficult to put a label on them. They are made up of multiple other subgenres that could take months of analysis to understand. However, it comes down to this, at least for me, as an active audience member: I want to laugh; it better entertain me. I also appreciate it if the meme makes me feel like I'm not alone when it comes to all my strange antics and humor, that I'm just like plenty other web users around the world. It ought to be quick to read, and I better know what I'm getting myself into by a quick glance at its main image. And while these statements don't constitute a definition per se, all of these qualifications define memes for me and probably for many other members of their huge worldwide audience.

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Tweet That, Like This, Check-In Here: Social Media Meets the Real World

Maddy Marchini

In this article, Marchini explores how social media policies are created and used in business, emphasizing their importance as an up-and-coming genre. Her knowledge and experience is rooted in her ENG 145 Business English course.

In this era of technology, practically everyone has a Facebook profile; beginning in August 2008, there were 100 million Facebook users worldwide, and as of October 2012, there were 1,007 million.[1] Moreover, eighty percent of those social media users prefer to connect with brands through Facebook.[2] People make Facebook profiles for their future children and their pets, and now it's a fad for grandparents! My third cousin twice removed from Italy, my pastor, and my grandmother all have social media profiles. Twitter and Foursquare are also becoming more and more popular as time goes on. Compared to other communication methods (blimps, emails, televised announcements, or print ads), using social media is the best way to contact a massive amount of people in a rapid manner, whether the news is that Miley Cyrus has gotten even crazier or that Ellen DeGeneres will be showing up at your local Best Buy on Black Friday.

Businesses are trying harder and harder every minute to "get with it" or "get with the in-crowd." In this situation, the "in-crowd" would be considered their customers and stakeholders. Businesses will do whatever they need to get the scoop, get the word out, and create a buzz. Thankfully most businesses have caught on and gotten on the "social-media bandwagon."

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Many businesses have Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and sometimes they even keep a blog. To us it seems so simple for businesses to keep up with the social ages; they just need to like things, post things, poke things, tweet things, or whatever else is expected of the social media package. But what may go right over our heads (as customers) is that using social media is not as simple for businesses as it is for us on the other side of things. Rules and guidelines need to be put into place before any company social networking takes place. Most businesses have a mission statement that sets the morals and line of ethics that businesses are committed to follow. And when it comes to using social media, these morals still need to be followed consistently. Businesses sometimes hire a specific person to use social media on behalf of the company and to keep up with the different types of social media, as they grow, to cater to the over one-trillion people using them. But many businesses do not have a specific position for this task and just have different employees post for them, hence the need for regulations regarding company social media use.

The way businesses go about putting their social media activity in line is with an In-House Social Media Policy. This semester, I learned how to create one, learning which aspects of the genre are absolutely necessary and which depend on the company's style and culture. To investigate how these policies work, I created one for a fictional sports store called Champion Sports. Through my research, I learned that the goal of a social media policy is to monitor social media in order to learn about and regulate what stakeholders are sharing and saying about a company and its employees. If a business is going to participate in social media, it is going to need one of these.

At first, I had no clue where to start . . . I created a few rules that I thought would be necessary, such as: 1) refraining from posting on personal accounts while on company time or computers; 2) not posting personal opinions, but rather, only posting the opinions of the company as a whole; and 3) not posting anything sexist, racist, or in any way offensive to anyone or to a certain group of people. But I could tell I was not even close to being done. So then I began my research, and I quickly realized that there was so much more to a social media policy document than I had ever expected. It was incredible to see how much work had gone into these policies, a new and yet very important genre. Some companies had extremely developed and thorough policies, while others were not as detailed, depending on the company's atmosphere and needs.

An example of an extremely detailed policy would be the one created by the U.S. Department of the Interior.[3] This governmental entity covered everything from different Acts (for instance, the Freedom of Information Act) to Intellectual Property in their comprehensive policy. On the other hand, the Adidas Group had an extremely basic and to-the-point policy, containing

twelve basic guidelines.[4] This comparison is a great example of how policies can be extremely different but still reach the company's goal, depending on the culture of the company. There were general items and conventions that were repetitive and consistent among the different policies I researched. Some of these included the following: professional and concise descriptions of each section, mandating the use of appropriate ethics when conducting social media related activities, an overview and/or goal for the policy, ensuring that the entire policy revolves around the mission and culture of the company, as well as various specific regulations, to name a few.

The most helpful website I referenced was our very own Illinois State University marketing social media standards and social networking identity web page, which I found with some assistance from my Business English instructor.[5] The formatting for the entire document was very professional (it was pleasing to the eye—the structure of the document was neat, obviously created by a professional), but at the same time, the policy was extremely understandable, which some companies tend to struggle with. I continued researching, finding several different useful sources, including an article on Costco's social media policy,[6] an article offering tips for drafting social media policies,[7] and a database of several different companies' social media policies,[8] which I found either through advice from my instructor or by conducting a simple Google search of my topic—another great way to get the brainstorming started!

After conducting this research, I began to make a list of what was necessary for the social media policy of my fabricated business. This list covered many topics, including the values of the company (leadership, connectivity to the sports world and customers, responsibility, etc.) and confidentiality. I knew these weren't my final needs or wants for the policy, but it was a good start. I had to figure out what I knew I wanted in my policy and what content I should include to accompany the professional formatting of the document. Occasionally, some of the examples that I stumbled upon did not seem relevant to my imaginary business. For example, the U.S. Department of the Interior's policy referenced governmental Acts that would not necessarily pertain to another company, like the Adidas Group, for instance. Because the U.S. Department of the Interior is a governmental entity, the policies and guidelines need to be much stricter than those of the Adidas shoe company.

After I established exactly what I needed in my policy, I created the table of contents. My table of contents looked similar to many of the examples I found, but it did have some differences, only because my "company" did not need as many categories as some of the examples had, and I wanted to stick to the basics. The tables of contents from some of the examples I referenced included sections like "Section 508," "Records Management Retention and

Archiving," "Information Quality," and "Availability and Disclaimer," to name a few categories that I chose not to include. These sections pertained to those particular companies and were developed from years of social media use. For example, "Section 508" is in reference to a certain part of a specific company's bi-laws; thus, this section does not need to be consistent for all social media policies. In the table of contents I created, I decided to divide the policy into two different sections: Section 1, "Social Media and Social Networking Policy," and Section 2, "Regulations and Policies of Social Media." While many of the examples I found had two or three sections in their policies, and usually the first section was an introduction, I decided that having both an "Introduction" and an "Overview of Policy" section was redundant and repetitive for readers. The first section of my policy included the broader topics of the policy: "The Overview of Policy," "Official Use of Social Media," and "Social Networking and Non-Official/ Personal Use of Social Media and Social Networking." The second section included much more narrow and specific topics: "Responsibility," "Accuracy," "Copyrights and Fair Use," "Confidentiality," "Branding of the Company," "Site," "Stay Connected," "Respond," "Judgment," and "Don't Spam."

The first item in Section 1, "Overview of Policy," is essential because it offers a general synopsis of the policy and establishes the purpose for the document. It gives an idea to the readers (and/or employees) what will be contained in the document and where to find what they are specifically searching for. All of the policies I reviewed in my research have an overview of the policy, which is why I originally knew I should include it. The overview I wrote is as follows:

> ### Overview of Policy:
>
> This policy has been established in order to create organization and professionalism within the social networking of the company. This document highly supports the use of social networking and for no reason discourages the opportunity to expand our networking and to give customers what they want. This is a standard guide that should be followed when social networking for the company Champion Sports.

The next item in section 1, "Official Use of Social Media and Social Networking" (below), contains an explanation as to why social networking and social media are important for the business to participate in, and it also contains the listing of social media sources that the company is allowed to use and contribute to. The examples I researched all listed the different social media sources that the company is entitled to use. I decided to use a

broad range of these sources for my company. I have found that using a large number of possible sources gives your company room to grow and feasible goals for social media in the future.

Official Use of Social Media and Social Networking:

> It is encouraged to participate in Social Media and Networking, considering current generational trends. It is the best way to reach the public with our mission and messages pertaining solely to the company.
>
> Social Media Approved: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, and YOUtube.
>
> This contract includes but is not limited to: Media Sharing, Blogging, Social Networking, Document and Data sharing repositories, Social Bookmarking, Widgets (GoogleMaps: add this, Facebook: "like" button, Twitter: tweet this).

The last item in section one is "Non-Official/Personal Use of Social Media and Social Networking," which explains what is and what is not expected of employees dealing with social media. It explains rules regarding the use of a personal account on a company computer and how posting on a personal account can affect the business, in addition to offering a clear example of a "company social media accident." I realized that this was a vital portion of the document because it encompasses, at least initially, the entire purpose of the policy. Employees need to understand where the line is drawn and when they can and cannot post using the company's equipment but in such a way so that they continue to feel respected as employees. After referencing a few of my research examples, I decided that the wording I chose (below) was a happy medium and would get the goal of my guidelines across company-wide.

Non-Official Use/Personal Use of Social Media:

> When using Social Media for personal use, be aware of the association you are portraying with our company. Anything that is posted on your personal profile or account may be seen by any of our customers or the public eye. For this reason, we ask that you do not use your personal social media accounts on a work computer. Doing this could lead to accidents or mishaps that will never be erased (nothing can be hidden on the internet). Although we expect the best intentions from our employees, accidents are bound to happen. For example, it could simply be that an employee wants to wish his or her mother a happy birthday. He or she decides to use a work computer to go on Facebook and send the birthday message. What the employee doesn't realize is that the company, Champion Sports,

> is still logged in to Facebook. The public would then see Champion Sports wishing "mom" a happy birthday. This would not be the worst scenario, but it would still confuse our customers and the public.

After all the rules and basics were out of the way in Section 1, I used Section 2, "Regulations and Policies of Social Media," to get into the finer details and to list all of the rules and reasons for each. This is similar to how several of my researched examples approached the specifics of their policies, including "Illinois State University's Graphics Guidelines" and "adidas Group Social Media Guidelines." Below is an excerpt from Section 2 of my document. In my complete project, I also included several other items within Section 2, including: "Represent," "Branding of the Company," "Site," "Administration," "Stay Connected and Respond," not included in this article. I decided these sections were significant due to their content and consistency in the sources I researched.

Responsibility

When posting and using the different sources of social media, please ensure information is professional, accurate, and relevant to the conversation taking place. If you are for some reason attempting to post on your personal account, be aware of what you are saying and where you are putting this information and these opinions.

Accuracy

It is important to take the time to learn about an issue or topic before posting. It is helpful to others to provide citations and links for different topics discussed on social media. If there was something posted by mistake, please be sure to correct it, and apologize as soon as possible. Depending on the mistake, you may be let go or put on probation.

Copyrights and Fair Use

Please remember to credit others for their ideas, plans, and work. Do not post work by others without the proper permission and/or citation of the work. Many times people do not realize that they are stealing others' work; please be conscious of what you are typing, posting, and saying.

Confidentiality

Please respect the workforce and the confidentiality of Champion Sports: not just Champion Sports as a whole, but also each individual employee. Do not share information that is or was not meant to be for the public or common knowledge.

Through my research and experience creating my own, I learned that there are some important "final touches" writers should address in order to create an effective Social Media Policy; here are four defining characteristics that should be considered:

- Understandable Diction: Write descriptions of each category that are easily understandable, and include the reasoning behind that rule or regulation.
- Ethics: Keep the policy ethical and include details on which ethics need to be addressed while keeping up with social media.
- Organized Sections: Each section should be organized and divided to accommodate those who will be reading the policy, insuring simplicity and readers' ability to understand the content.
- Detailed Explanations: Each section will need a detailed explanation of what each section means, what it will do or change for the social media experience, and why it was created.

Once I revised to be sure that I had these four necessities in place, I knew that the policy was finally complete. Another final touch included creating a cover page for my document. The cover page should include the name of the company, the title of the document (in this case it would be "In-House Social Media Policy"), and the company's logo. The end product of my policy was five full pages, including the cover page. My last step was to do one last run through of editing for grammar and punctuation, just to be sure there were no errors in the document.

By learning the basics of creating an In-House Social Media Policy, any company should be able to keep up with this generation and sift out any social networking issues. Social networking for a company may have, at one time, seemed fairly simple, but after learning about this genre, I hope you now understand the necessity for a Social Media Policy in the workplace. With this genre, any company can easily keep up with over one-billion Facebook users and effortlessly compete with the latest Miley Cyrus newsflash (tough competition, I know).

Endnotes

1. Statista. "Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide from 3rd quarter 2008 to 2nd quarter 2013 (in millions)." 2013. http://www.statista.com/statistics/37545/number-of-active-facebook-users/. This statistic was given in graph form and has many more details about the different years, but this contrast in users stood out to me the most. It was extremely interesting,

and I knew it would be interesting to those wanting to learn more about social networking, both in business settings and altogether.

2. Jorgenson, Kevin. "Facebook Marketing Statistics You Need to Know." Business2Community. 24September2012. http://www.business2community.com/facebook/facebook-marketing-statistics-you-need-to-know-0289953. Business2Community presents an article on different social media statistics that are extremely helpful in creating your business' social media plan. This article analyzes the necessity for marketing through social networking and also how important marketing is from the consumer's point of view.

3. Lee-Ashley, Matt. "Notices - Social Media Policy." U.S. Department of the Interior. 18 November 2010. http://www.doi.gov/notices/Social-Media-Policy.cfm. This Social Media Policy created by a governmental source has a unique style that achieves its goal.

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5. Illinois State University Marketing and Communications. "Graphic Standards for Social Networking." 2013. http://advancement.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/identity/ISU_SocialNetworkingIdentity.pdf. To help understand how an In-House Social Media Policy should look, the University uses one that is a great reference. It is easy to see how this document is organized and structured, which serves as a great model for those writing their own.

6. Katz, David M. "NLRB to Costco: Your Social Media Policy Needs a Do-Over." *The National Law Review*. 25 September 2012. http://www.natlawreview.com/article/nlrb-to-costco-your-social-media-policy-needs-do-over. A great article I used to help understand the necessity for a social media policy, discussing an incident reported about Costco and their social media activities.

7. Appenteng, Kwabena. "4 tips for employers drafting social media policies." *Inside Council*. 17 August 2012. http://www.insidecounsel.com/2012/08/17/4-tips-for-employers-drafting-social-media-policie. This source I found gave four quick tips for companies creating a Social Networking Policy. This resource helped me to understand the tone to use so that employees still feel respected.

8. Boudreaux, Chris. "Social Media Governance." 2013. http://socialmediagovernance.com/policies.php. I discovered this database, which provides access to access to hundreds of companies' Social Media Guidelines. I used this source to develop a lot of my research.

Maddy Marchini is a third year undergraduate studying Marketing at Illinois State. She is planning to be an event planner for a large corporation or business but has always loved creative writing and telling stories, even to brighten up a duller topic like the business world. Maddy loves to dance and help people, even if it's just to help them find their smile.

Hegemony Cricket: Standardized Testing and You!

Daniel P. Hummels &
Deborah Riggert-Kieffer

In this article, Hummels and Riggert-Kieffer fuse the genres of dystopian narrative and research focused on standardized testing. This hybrid article claims that standardized testing reduces students to easy-to-manage numbers using a dystopic narrative to show the dangers of testing taken to its powerful limits.

Preface

The article you are about to read is a fusion of research and dystopian narrative. Dystopian worlds are often defined in terms of the *opposite* of utopia, amazing worlds where nothing unpleasant happens. In the dark universe of dystopian narratives, the elements of power, communication, and the individual are often included. The focus on power and how it is exerted is a central theme in dystopic narratives where the consequences of absolute power are often explored (Heinz & Ostry, 2003). *The Hunger Games*, which features an all-powerful capital, is an example of a dystopian novel and a blockbuster movie, as is *Fahrenheit 451*, a novel and movie featuring firefighters who start fires to destroy books, which are illegal commodities. Within the dystopic setting of this narrative, standardized testing plays a prominent and powerful role. You might be asking yourself why standardized testing matters to you. Maybe you have taken the ACT or SAT as an admissions requirement for college. And if you are planning to attend graduate school, you will likely take the GRE. The writing you will complete, which could determine the school you attend, will be assessed by a company like Educational Testing

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Deborah Riggert-Kieffer

Service (ETS). Your carefully written response will be graded in a process Todd Farley (2009), a former ETS employee describes as follows: "From my first day in the standardized testing industry until my last, I have watched the open-ended questions on large-scale assessments be scored by temporary employees who could be described as uninterested or unintelligent, apathetic or unemployable" (p. 225). Did you realize that the essay you wrote or will write was or will be scored by someone who probably spent less than two minutes assessing your work and had no interest in the outcome? Do you think these folks care about your scores when they have hundreds of essays to read every day? Still, standardized test scores determine, in part, admissions and scholarships, but what do they really tell us? Farley suggests, ". . . the business I have worked in is less a precise tool to assess students' exact abilities than just a lucrative means to make an indefinite and indistinct generalization about them" (p. 241). Farley continues, "The idea standardized testing can make any sort of fine distinction about students—a very particular and specific commentary on their individual skills and abilities that a classroom teacher was unable to make—seems folderol to me" (p. 241). So, while these tests won't tell your teachers or professors what you have the potential to accomplish, they do function to generate a ton of cash, and they have been shown to be fairly accurate predictors of socio-economic status. While seemingly harmless, standardized tests have the power to influence the type of education and the educational opportunities students receive.

> *"Faith rested neither in the secondary-school instructor nor in a certificate issued by such individuals. Faith now rested in the examination."—Elliot (2005, p. 39)*

As I walked into Rand School, I wondered what my first day would reveal. I never really fit in with the kids at my other school. I spent too much time reading, writing, and thinking to be part of the popular crowd. Team sports and competition never interested me. I have always been more comfortable reading and researching. As a result of my interests, even the more advanced students had difficulty comprehending my thoughts. I learned to keep to myself and only speak of the things the others would understand. I didn't realize the relative freedom I had experienced until my recent move to the town called Malice, a place that recently fell under the rule of the strict Rand Empire. I found Mrs. McFallen's room and took a seat in back.

"Hello. I'm Mrs. McFallen. I am highly educated and received my online Master's degree in leadership from the esteemed Pearson Academy. Now, we will begin the year with standardized testing, and this will tell us everything we need to know about you. I won't bother getting your names.

You'll be assigned a number as soon as we've finished the testing. You will also be given a color so you know which books to read. The best students will be the color blue. You blues are the best test-takers and can read any book you choose. The greens are just average. You should only choose books with green covers. Finally, there are the reds. Reds are bad test-takers. We consider you low readers, but I won't call you "low." As soon as we finish the testing, I'll just call you by your number or sometimes by both your number and color. Anyway, you reds can only choose books with the red covers. You really can't understand anything else, and I wouldn't expect you to try."

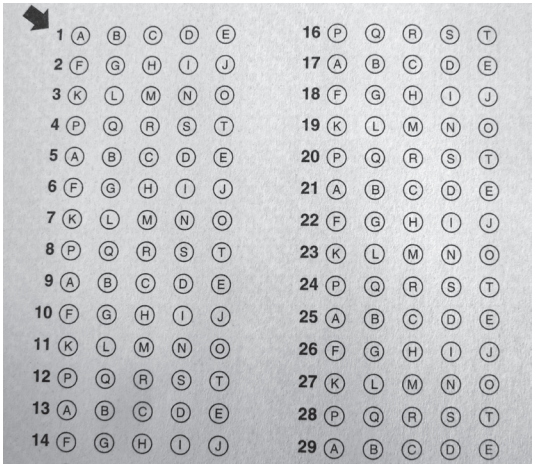

Figure 1. A common standardized testing, bubble-style answer sheet.

McFallen continued, "You will be the same color all year, even though we will test you many times. Your color is never expected to change. In fact, it rarely happens. In all my many years of experience, no student has ever changed color."

One student dared to asked, "Don't the books in your library have titles? Why are there just colored covers?"

McFallen responded, "You don't need to read the titles; you just pick the colors. That's all you need to know. In fact, I could choose the books for you. It's simply a matter of choosing the right color. In fact, if I could change your schedules, I'd put all of the same color in each class. It makes my job so much easier to teach to one type of color at a time."

Then the first-day rules were explained by McFallen: "In our system, you will learn to walk the halls in a precise, quiet manner, staying on your side of the hallway with your hands tightly clenched behind your back. This is to ensure that you pose no threat to an authority figure, but, above all, that you are willing to submit to my commands. There will be no noise in the hall because other teachers might become distracted if they hear you. The rooms and the halls must be completely silent unless you are otherwise directed. The final rule of expected hallway behavior is that you will always take your hat off inside. If you do not do this, you will be ridiculed and labeled as a D-STU or a delinquent student. If you are labeled as such, you will receive a red ribbon with a white "X" on it, and your IDENT cards will be imprinted with the term. The computer will label you so that you may never receive dessert or extra food rations."

A dead smile crossed McFallen's ashen face as she proclaimed, "Are you ready to begin learning? Of course you are, because I am ready to begin giving you the knowledge to be successful in today's real world. Take out your guide to the Hogan/Savage Curriculum for Raising Standardized Achievement. It has a gold cover. Of course I wouldn't expect any of you reds to actually read a book title. Last year we won the lavender star for near excellence in the field of programing students to take standardized tests. This is an honor because it is a reward from the blessed state; however, we still need to improve our performance because they have just come out with the Tope Star of Trust and Justice. This is a measure of how compliant you are to take the test. Not only do we want you to be compliant test takers, but we also want you to be fast when you are taking them. You see, the knowledge that I give you needs to be taken in like a deposit, and like in a bank, when knowledge is deposited, it can be taken back out at any time. This, of course, is exactly like your brain, or it should be. My brain is automatic, and I have memorized all of the mandated facts the state requires you to learn; however, because you have not reached my level, you need to continually be pushed through the steps of the sacraments of evaluation."

McFallen's detailed explanation persisted, "If I need to manage you in any negative way, then you will be punished according to your color. For example, if you are a blue, you will be judged less harshly than a red, because you have proven yourself compliant in other areas, and thus you will be more in my graces than a filthy red."

Student attention began to drift as McFallen droned on, "While you are in different groups, you will be taught the exact same thing at the exact same time in the exact same manner, but if you do not learn it, I will not go back because if you need help, then you are weak, and the weak are not useful to our society. We thrive on competition; it is the most blessed of human desires and emotions. If you are unable, or worse, unwilling to compete, then you will probably be a lifelong "X," and sent to the colony of exiles."

"Even though today is the first day, I am going to be teaching you to write. The first thing that you need to learn is that good writing is always done in our prescribed, generic form, and I always tell you the genre you will use. If you use any other genre or if you use the wrong form for writing, points will be deducted. I am the sole audience for your writing. You may only write about the topic that I give you, and if you write anything I deem inappropriate, then I will erase your file, and you will be forced to attend re-education during the detaining hour. I know a few of you reds will be occupying space in the re-ed. room so that Detention Officer Padlock can change your wrong ideas into the real facts that you need to be programmed

with in order to pass the test and function for success. Back to writing; the first thing you need to be aware of is that your paper will be broken into five sections, one will be an introduction, and one will be a conclusion. The other three will be your appropriate thoughts on the subject I give. Your paragraphs will be four sentences at most, and if there are more, then you are nearing an investigation. Remember: too much thought in writing will only get you in trouble."

Finally McFallen dismissed the class, "You may enter the halls, but remember the rules. I'll be watching."

As I left my first class, I also began to understand my position within the school. The main goal of school is to provide the workforce with compliant workers at each level of society with the majority of jobs coming from corporations. School dictates the values and the ethics that guide the lives of the people. School teaches the rules of "good" behavior and the proper attitude that children should have in order to operate correctly and professionally. Workers must reliably take up the ethics and values of mainstream society to be successful.

Even before the move, I had heard neighbors talking about standardized tests in hushed tones, but I didn't understand their concerns at first. After thinking about class today, some of what they said started to concern me. I know I shouldn't be thinking in ways that are not sanctioned by the school, and I know impractical thinking has recently been forbidden and is no longer discussed. Still, that information made me curious as I considered the following bits I had overheard, mainly that standardized testing functions to effectively reduce students to numbers and categories. Therefore, students are grouped by their scores. While the reliability of a standardized test score may be viewed with skepticism—considering the narrow range of questioning, the rigid format, the timing limitations, and simplistic multiple choice questions—there are teachers and principals who believe in the power of the test. My mind wandered back to the days when we could read anything, and I remembered finding a book in the attic called *Standardized Minds*. It made me think more about the tests we had to take at school. I considered a response from the Assistant Superintendent of Johnson County in North Carolina who, when questioned about students "falling through the cracks" due to high-stakes tests, replied: "There are no children who do not test well" (Sacks, 2001). Couple the efficiency of the one-shot, standardized test with the attitude of one-measure-fits-all, and children can be easily sorted for their future roles. Standardized testing is one of the tools schools use to label students as successful or non-successful in the educational world. Being a member of the middle class gives some students an understanding of the

world that is useful to do well on standardized tests. Then I remembered my parents quoting Louis Althusser, a cultural theorist and one of their favorite authors who wrote about how culture is enacted in the schools. They commented on the way Althusser described schools and how schools worked to maintain the values of the middle class (Szeman & Kaposy, 2010). I guess the training of getting rewards for answering the way a teacher would want you to answer gives you a higher standing in the class and helps to prepare for one of the corporate jobs. The opposite is also true: if you do not become comfortable with the Rand Empire system, then you are labeled negatively.

I began to wonder about who was accountable for the programming of the schools. I knew curiosity seemed to be forbidden at my new school, but I decided to defy Mrs. McFallen and do some research. I sneaked into the computer lab and hacked the password, the way my big brother taught me. I found some information that made sense. I read about why students were required to go to school in the old times and wondered about the history of testing. I really should not have put myself in such a dangerous position, but I thought about kids in the past again and had to keep researching. I discovered more than I planned. Compulsory schooling for all children was seen as essential by the secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, Horace Mann (Pinar, 2006; Sacks, 2001). A supporter of education for all, Mann also believed in the efficiency model of education based on the work of Frederick Taylor. In the name of efficiency, Mann was one of the first to use written standardized exams for students in the Massachusetts school system (Sacks, 2001). He did this in response to a request for school reform from the state school superintendent (Sacks, 2001). These original exams were designed to reform schools and make the headmasters look bad (Sacks, 2001). With just thirty questions from over an entire year of school work, these written tests results were narrowly designed and resulted in students averaging less than 30 percent correct (Sacks, 2001). In Massachusetts, public officials misused the tests of individual students to rank the schools for comparison (Sacks, 2001). This marks the early beginnings of the political manipulation of test scores. According to the U.S. Office of Technology Assessment:

> The idea underlying the implementation of written examinations, that they could provide information about student learning, was born in the mind of individuals already convinced that education was substandard in quality. . . . tests are often administered not just to discover how well schools or kids are doing, but rather to obtain external confirmation—validation of the hypothesis they are not doing well at all. (Sacks, 2001, p. 109)

Could this be what was happening at my new school? Did the Rand Empire believe that the education at Rand School was substandard?

I wondered what all of the research meant. Just as I was thinking about this quotation, I heard the computer lab door open and saw two peace enforcers step into the room. They told me that I was in violation of the Interweb Rule. I was accused of using a computer without permission and proper supervision. As a punishment, I was charged as a D-STU. I received a red ribbon with a white "X" on it, and my IDENT card was imprinted with the term. Now that I was labeled, I would never receive dessert or extra food rations. I didn't care. I would find another way to continue my research. I headed for the library. I knew I could override the computer controls. Once online, I continued my search on standardized testing, looking up sources from the list I made while reading *Standardized Minds*. I found that the persistence of standardized testing remains, and the design has not evolved since the days of Horace Mann. These tests still include only a sample of important skills for each grade level. Because a sample is used, the measure of error can be quite wide. Consider the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). These high-stakes tests, requiring a passing score for students to advance to the next grade, carried a measure of error of 13 points for the math subtest for 6th grade students in the Spring of 1997, which is a huge margin of error (Sacks, 2001). Yet in the name of efficiency, schools continue to test students without concern for the tests' power to make predictions about students. When the Texas Education Agency examined the TAAS scores from 1992 through 1997, they found that poor and minority students were "twice as likely as whites to fail the TAAS, even while succeeding in their math class. For instance, more than four in ten African-American tenth-graders passed their math courses but failed TAAS math" (Sacks, 2001, p. 113). While the TAAS didn't correlate with success in the classroom, it was a predictor of socio-economic status: "Four in ten students from poor families of whatever race didn't pass the TAAS, despite succeeding in schoolwork" (Sacks, 2001, p. 113). From my research, I could see the power of the tests to sort students by social class. I wondered how people who seem to want what's best for students could allow the tests to define what students could do.

As I continued my research, unnoticed, I realized that the effects of standardized testing can be seen throughout the educational system. Students prepping for SAT, ACT, GRE, or MAT tests and paying to maximize their scores are buying into an illusion. Bates College, a liberal arts institution located in Maine, did away with the required standardized test scores as part of their admission requirements in the 1990s as a result of research analyzing test scores and student performance. The trend beginning with Bates has gained momentum as more colleges remove the standardized test requirement from their admission requirements (Fairtest.org, 2012). At Bates, "The lower-scoring students who opted out of the SATs performed just as well at Bates as higher scoring ones who did submit scores" (Sacks, 1999, p. 260). Certainly

Bates isn't an isolated case. Standardized test scores have been found to have small predictive values in many instances. What they do, in fact, predict reliably is social class (Peterson, 2005). Consider this: one-third of students from upper socioeconomic classes earn SAT scores of 1,100 or higher, which is double the rate of students with a middle-class background and four times that of students from lower socio-economic classes (Sacks, 1999).

It seems that Charles Eliot's 1908 vision of education remains. As president of Harvard, he saw schools as instruments for sustaining class divisions with a small upper layer attending universities and controlling the managerial roles, followed by a layer of workers skilled for trades, continued with a commercial class, and last, a large lower level to perform the jobs requiring the least education (Pinar, 2004; Sacks, 1999). Eliot envisioned educational systems that would serve each social class. So, the ideal of school providing equal opportunities for all amounts to mythology.

I was about to begin a search on Binet when the library minister ended my session. "You are classified as a D-STU. You have no right to be in the library. The Thought Security will escort you to the door. Do not return here," the minister threatened. As I left, I knew the spot to continue my research, Rick and Ilsa's, a small café on the outskirts of my childhood town that housed old computers that couldn't be traced. This would be my only option. Rick and Ilsa welcomed me, and I went to work. I knew my research could continue without interruption under the protection of my friends.

Alfred Binet was responsible for creating the first intelligence test in 1904 as a means to identify "defective" children (Sacks, 2001). The Binet-Simon consisted of 30 tasks, like naming objects, and defined children in terms of mental age (Sacks, 2001). The Binet-Simon favored those with strong verbal language skills and was slanted toward the dominant, middle class culture. While Binet and Simon acknowledged the cultural bias of their test and did not deny research by Decroly and Degand, published in 1910, that reported children of wealthy families had superior performance over those from lower social classes, they continued to support their belief that the Binet-Simon scale measured a "natural intelligence" or untrained ability (Sacks, 2001).

Lewis Terman of Stanford University adapted the Binet-Simon for the American market in 1916 and the Stanford-Binet became the standard for measuring intelligence (Sacks, 2001). In Measurement of Intelligence, Terman defines the uses for intelligence tests including the potential to weed defectives from society (Terman, 1916). Terman stated, "It is safe to predict that in the near future intelligence tests will bring tens of thousands of these high-grade defectives under the surveillance and protection of society. This will ultimately result in curtailing the reproduction of feeble-mindedness and the elimination

of an enormous amount of crime, pauperism, and industrial inefficiency" (Terman, 1916, p. 6-7). Terman's insistence in a test as a reliable tool to uncover potential ability, rather than looking to authentic accomplishment has been institutionalized. Currently under Public Law 94-142, students are categorized as eligible for special education services on the basis of test scores (Sacks, 2001). Terman's categories of intelligence based on a numerical score are still practiced because norm-referenced scores and leveled categories are still used.

While many of Terman's conventions in intelligence testing persist, the finding that Terman's data was a reliable predictor of social class remains largely transparent (Sacks, 2001). According to Terman's data, membership in a privileged social class gave a seven point advantage in IQ score, and belonging to a low social class equated with a seven point disadvantage (Sacks, 2001). Terman explained this difference in terms of heredity, an idea that went unchallenged. The importance of social class in the role of testing, still largely unacknowledged, remains as transparent today as it did in the early 20th century. Although heredity is no longer credited as a cause for differences in testing, schools now place the blame on teachers and students.

From my research, I could see how the tests were being used to tell my teacher everything she wanted to know about me. I started to understand where the labels originated, and I started to understand their trajectory. If students do not respect the authority represented by the standardized tests, then they will not likely get the jobs that will help them remain a member of the middle class.

I was caught up in thought for too long. If I was away from the community for an extended amount of time, people might begin to get suspicious of my thought time. Thought that becomes solitude has been made illegal because there have been some reds who have rebelled. We do not know what has become of them. I don't know what to do with these thoughts; surely they are subversive. I knew any form of independence was punishable by tribunal, and I was blanketed in a cloak of fear.

What am I supposed to do? I'm one of the lucky ones; the life that has been decided for me will be a good one. Even with the D-STU label, my parents have the influence to get the mark removed. I am a blue, and I will be set with a job at a corporate office, which is the pinnacle of employment in my district. Who would want more? But this knowledge and these subversive thoughts will not leave. I see people, good people, who drink too much at approved adult meeting times, who have walked the streets crying or screaming. They disappear.

I finally decided that I couldn't do anything. I will have to close myself off to these thoughts and never let them out. I have to forget everything now; anything else is suicide.

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Namaste broseph and brosephines, I was just having a weekend in Sausalito when I meditated this out of my thought stream like a grizzly bear catching a salmon. My education isn't important, but I went to ISU for two Bachelor's degrees, one in English and one in education. Currently I maintain citizenship in the earthly realm, but I am willing to relocate. Shalom.

CHATting in the Workplace

M. Irene Taylor &
Jeff Rients

Jeff Rients and M. Irene Taylor, non-traditional students currently pursuing graduate degrees in English Studies, discuss the conventions of specific genres in their respective professions. Jeff, who recently left the banking industry, talked about the foreclosure letter, and Irene, a former administrative assistant, explained the work order form. In reviewing the transcript of their conversation, they discovered that Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is applicable as much in the workplace as in any classroom or research project.

Upon returning to the university after having spent many years in the workplace, Irene Taylor and Jeff Rients decided to put their heads together to reflect on the use of writing in an office environment. The following transcript condenses and streamlines many hours of conversation held over several months, including both face-to-face communication and email exchanges.

Highlighted throughout this article are examples that clarify the terminology used in the application of CHAT to the writing process. This terminology includes Production (both the tools and practices used to create a text); Representation (issues related to the way people conceptualize and plan the creation of a text); Distribution (consideration of who receives the text, for what purpose, and by what means); Reception (how a text is taken up and used by others, how they might re-purpose the text, and how the text is constrained); Socialization (the interaction of people as they produce, distribute, and use texts and how this relates to the cultural norms of an institution); Activity (the actions involved in producing texts); and Ecology (the physical, biological forces that exist beyond the boundaries of any text). For more on CHAT, see Joyce Walker's "Just CHATting" in *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* issue 1.0.

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Jeff Rients

Jeff: We are here to talk about the forms of written communication we used in our previous professions.

Irene: Yes. I will be talking of my work as an office support staff member, and I believe you were in banking—customer service. Is that right?

Jeff: Yes. My primary responsibility was communicating with banking clients who were past due on their house payments.

Irene: In my last position, I was responsible for designing the work order form (Figure 1) and ensuring that it was as clear and concise, even as simplev as possible. By this I mean that completing this form had to pose a minimal disruption to a faculty member's routine.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH -- WORK ORDER

FROM: _____ Today's Date: _____ Today's Time:_____

_____ Date needed _____ Time needed

Please let staff member know if the request requires less than a 24-hour workday turn-over time.

_____ SCANNING REQUEST **(Limit of 10% per book or journal)**

(Please provide title) _____

_____ HARD COPIES **(Limit of 10% per book or journal)**

_____ No. needed _____ Number of pages attached

_____ Check here if you want color paper. _____ If you have a preference, please indicate.

ALL hard copies will be run front to back and will be collated and stapled UNLESS otherwise noted below:

_____ Check here if you do NOT want us to run the order front to back.

_____ Check here if you do NOT want us to collate and stapled.

Work order run by: _____ (worker's initials) collated by: _____ (worker's initials)

Figure 1. Department of English work order form.

Jeff: I see. So just to be clear, in your particular office, which was in an academic setting, the work order was a tool used by faculty to inform the staff of their needs. For example, I need this particular item copied by this particular time.

RECEPTION: Consideration of a reader's reaction to a text is critical, especially when the goal is to secure a specific action as is the case with the work order.

Irene: Right. The form allows the faculty member to tell me what I need to do in order to give them what they need in the classroom.

Jeff: I see. Could you explain what you mean when you say "this form had to pose a minimal disruption to a faculty member's routine"?

Irene: Well, a faculty member has many responsibilities to meet in any given day. S/he doesn't have the time, or patience for that matter, to spend

deciphering a form so detailed that it requires careful review of what one has entered once it's completed.

Jeff: It's not like they're filing taxes after all.

Irene: Exactly. And in that same vein, we aren't writing a newspaper article. The "who/what/when/where/why" doesn't apply. OK, that's not quite true; we are asking for "who" (the faculty member's name), "when" (date and time needed), and "what" (number of copies needed). Of course, as digital technology plays a more prominent role in the department office, the number needed has taken a back seat to a different "what": a title.

Jeff: I'm not sure I understand.

Irene: What we're seeing now, at least on the university campus, is the paperless classroom, which means a prevalence of digital copies (PDFs, for example) replacing hard copies. Some departments are even using digital exams projected on a screen. So to ensure accuracy and clarity, I asked that faculty members provide us with a file name for their documents, one they believe the student can readily find online.

Jeff: Can't you do that?

Irene: We could, but I preferred that it be the faculty member's call. They know their students; they also know how they commonly refer to these articles. Some faculty use the author's name, some use the title. For consistency's sake, I liked them to decide.

Jeff: So that was on the form?

Irene: It was on the form, but it wasn't always filled in.

Jeff: Why do you think that's the case?

REPRESENTATION: Visual rhetoric can play a significant role in any genre.

Irene: Because it was a change from the norm. To draw attention to a change, you have to make something more prominent. But when you do that, you give it an importance that doesn't apply. It's breaking the convention in a way that isn't appropriate. It became a Catch 22. If I didn't give this part of the form prominence, it was missed. But if I did, it took on a level of importance it shouldn't have had.

Jeff: So what was your solution?

Irene: Well, I changed the design of the form in order to grab people's attention while not giving too much prominence to the title request. It worked to a degree in that the faculty couldn't fill it out by rote. It caught their attention, but it had a simplicity that I liked.

Jeff: Did it work?

Irene: Sure. Well, to a degree. I have to admit, I still engaged in a number of follow-up calls securing the information I needed.

Jeff: In preparation for this discussion, I went to a few different departments on campus and talked to them about how work orders are processed. One department said, "Oh, we have some laying around. Hardly anyone uses them anymore. We just get an e-mail that says, 'Here's a file. I want you to print 25 of them.'" Also, each department had its own form. There was nothing uniform, which I found interesting.

Irene: The work order is not uniform. Departments are unique and have their own needs and priorities.

Jeff: And one department, I believe it was Chemistry (Figure 2), had *typing* as an option on what the staff readily admitted is a rarely used form. None of the other work orders show that.

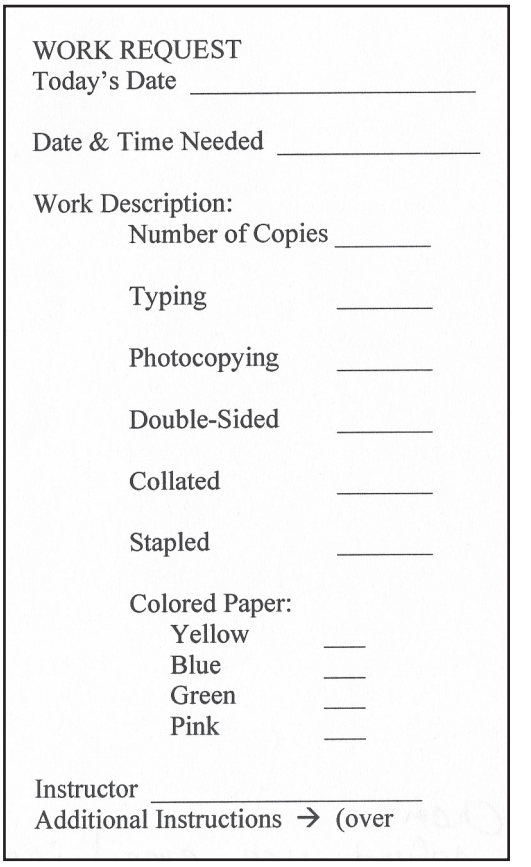
Irene: That was an old format. I can't remember the last time I actually typed a document, even an exam, for any faculty member.

Jeff: Because of the advancement of office technology?

PRODUCTION: Obsolete or not, the technology we are using impacts decisions we make in creating a final product.

Irene: When I first came to ISU to work, my area was called the "Typing Pool." I won't say how many years ago that was, but even then, the title was a misnomer. I don't mean to get off the subject, but computer technology has had such a dramatic impact on the workplace, so much so that even something as simple as the genre of the work order has been affected.

Jeff: The advent of computer technology has impacted the private sector as well. In the time I worked in banking, I saw computers being brought into


WORK REQUEST
Today's Date _____

Date & Time Needed _____

Work Description:
Number of Copies _____

Typing _____

Photocopying _____

Double-Sided _____

Collated _____

Stapled _____

Colored Paper:
Yellow ___
Blue ___
Green ___
Pink ___

Instructor _____
Additional Instructions → (over

Figure 2. Department of Chemistry work order form.

individual offices and that made a big difference in my approach to writing. When I first started, I would dictate letters and my assistant would then type them up. By the time I left, however, I was composing letters myself using a computer. This not only eliminated that middle person (allowing him to focus on other tasks), but it also allowed me the opportunity to edit and personalize the letters more than I could before. I could give added attention to the tone and effectiveness of each message as opposed to waiting for a letter I had dictated to come back to me for approval. This was especially important for those times when I would find myself frustrated with a customer, for whatever reason, but couldn't risk letting that frustration come through in my writing. I believed it was my responsibility to help the homeowners even when they didn't always recognize that fact, and it was important that my correspondence always reflected that commitment.

REPRESENTATION: In formal genres, the tone of one's writing can be as important as grammar, spelling, punctuation, and organization.

Irene: That's interesting. It brings up an important point about writing. You don't want your tone to negatively influence how the reader reacts to the message. I find that e-mail communications can inaccurately convey emotions. For example, "thank you" ending with a period is much more formal, even detached, than if it is followed by an exclamation point.

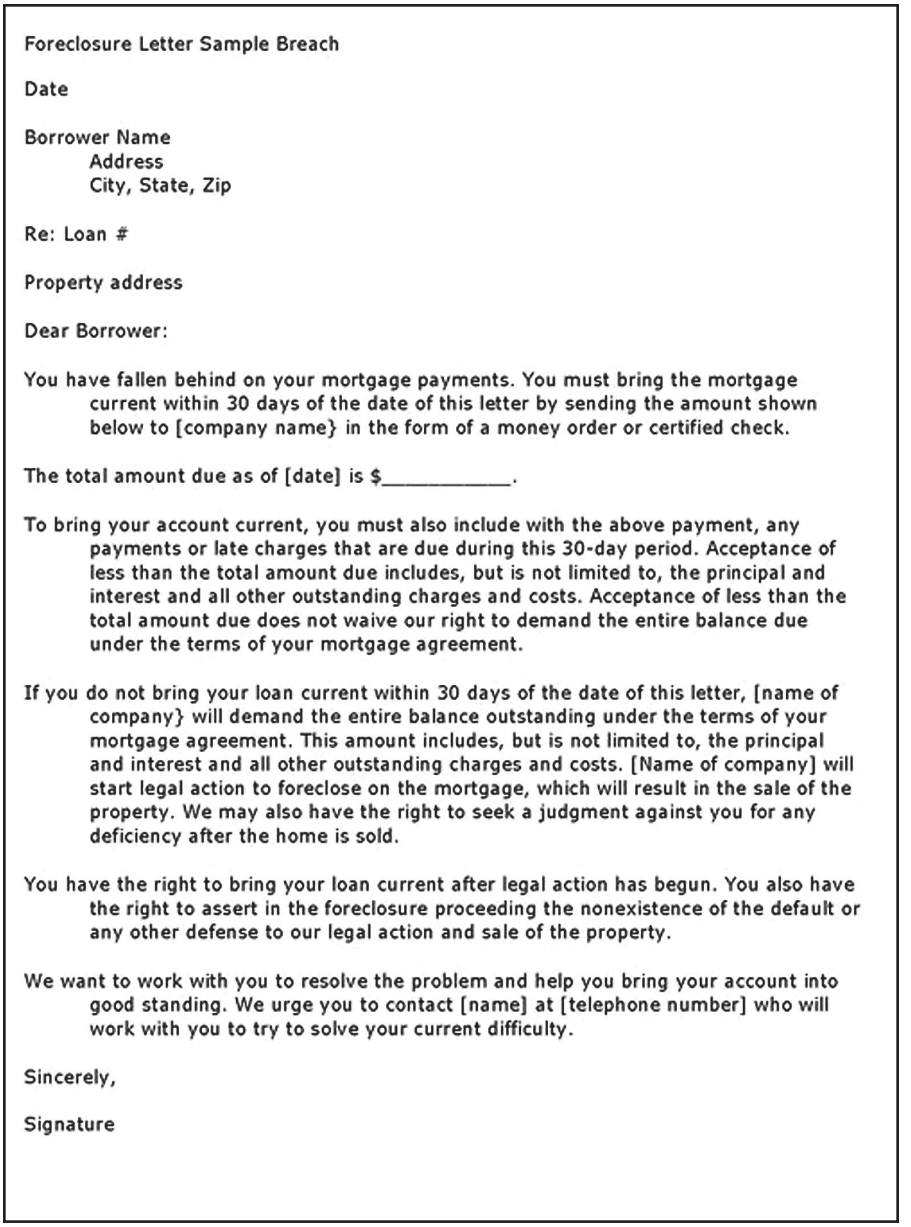
Jeff: I found it much easier to be misinterpreted in an e-mail than over the phone or face-to-face, especially if I would shoot off an e-mail in a hurry, like I would to a friend. But there's also a dynamic that exists in these two genres that has nothing to do with speed or content. For example, the same text that appears in e-mail would have an entirely different impact if it appeared in a letter. The simple fact that there would be an envelope with letterhead makes it look more official; that's the effect of the heavy-weight paper with a full color logo. A letter was an official communication from a bank, which carried more weight than getting an e-mail from some guy named Jeff. Even an e-mail with properly formal wording could send a different message about the seriousness of the situation.

DISTRIBUTION, PRODUCTION, & ECOLOGY: The medium used as well as how the message is produced and delivered affects how it is received.

Irene: Well, given the subject matter, you wanted to give your clients the feeling that you (or your company) were willing to make that investment in the nice paper or color ink or first class postage. It gave it gravitas.

Jeff: Absolutely.

Irene: So, to be clear, the primary genre of communication you had with your customers was the formal letter, and you were responsible for the content in the initial efforts at communication. You worked in steps. You composed the initial letters, but at some point, the form letter came into play. It was the final step.



Foreclosure Letter Sample Breach

Date

Borrower Name
Address
City, State, Zip

Re: Loan #

Property address

Dear Borrower:

You have fallen behind on your mortgage payments. You must bring the mortgage current within 30 days of the date of this letter by sending the amount shown below to [company name} in the form of a money order or certified check.

The total amount due as of [date] is $_____.

To bring your account current, you must also include with the above payment, any payments or late charges that are due during this 30-day period. Acceptance of less than the total amount due includes, but is not limited to, the principal and interest and all other outstanding charges and costs. Acceptance of less than the total amount due does not waive our right to demand the entire balance due under the terms of your mortgage agreement.

If you do not bring your loan current within 30 days of the date of this letter, [name of company} will demand the entire balance outstanding under the terms of your mortgage agreement. This amount includes, but is not limited to, the principal and interest and all other outstanding charges and costs. [Name of company] will start legal action to foreclose on the mortgage, which will result in the sale of the property. We may also have the right to seek a judgment against you for any deficiency after the home is sold.

You have the right to bring your loan current after legal action has begun. You also have the right to assert in the foreclosure proceeding the nonexistence of the default or any other defense to our legal action and sale of the property.

We want to work with you to resolve the problem and help you bring your account into good standing. We urge you to contact [name] at [telephone number] who will work with you to try to solve your current difficulty.

Sincerely,

Signature

Figure 3. Breach of Mortgage Notice or the Default Letter.

Jeff: Yes. There is one class of letter that is called the Breach of Mortgage Notice or the Default Letter (Figure 3). I sent this letter when someone had reached their third payment past due. I didn't get to choose what was in the text of that letter. That format is set by an industry standard and the wording is approved by lawyers. I'm not a fan of these sorts of standardized communications, as they effectively treat all customers as if they were in the exact same situation, which they are not. But these standards are in

place to help insure everyone is properly notified that there is a problem with their account.

Before that point, the first communication to the customer was a late fee notice that was automatically generated. It is a very short form letter that typically was sent out when a payment was fifteen days late. It basically said a late fee had been assessed. One of my great personal victories at the first bank where I worked was when I convinced management to add my phone number on the bottom of that letter. Previously, customers would only see a 1-800 number, and then they'd bounce around the voicemail system trying to find the right person. By adding my direct line, clients could actually reach the Collections Department immediately so we could start early working out a solution to their problem. Other than that small gain, I had no input on the wording of that text, but at least it could put me in touch with the customer.

SOCIALIZATION: What sort of texts we produce is bounded by institutional forces such as laws, corporate policies, or club rules. That's not to say we can't influence those forces.

Typically at the thirty-day past due mark, when a second payment came due, I got to determine the content of the letter. I would usually say, especially if it was my first communication with a customer, something very straightforward like, "Our records indicate that your account is now past due. Please contact me so that we can discuss it." That was usually the main thrust of my letters. Ideally this would lead to a phone conversation, and I could start making inquiries like, "What's the problem? Are you mad at the bank and not sending payments out of protest? Is it that you are unable to make payments, and can I help to work out a new note?"

Most of the letters were my attempt to open up a dialogue. I could do this until we reached the sixty-day point, at which I was obliged to inform the customer that he or she was in danger of foreclosure. So the normal progression would be an automatically generated, very short late fee notice, at least one attempt from me of a letter basically begging for contact, and then advising the clients of their rights and informing them that they were looking at foreclosure in one month. But prior to that, if I could get a dialogue started, I would instead send the customers letters saying, "Hey, I thought we were going to get together for an appointment? You didn't come in. Are you still wanting to work something out?"

Irene: It sounds like you would use a more informal or at least a friendlier tone in your initial communications. I could see how this might be frustrating. Knowing you as I do, I'm sure your first priority was the well-being of the customers, doing all you could to see they kept their homes. At some point, it must have gotten frustrating, especially when dealing with people who didn't want to respond. At those times, did you take a day—I mean in terms of the emotions—to pull back, or did you not have that luxury?

ACTIVITY: Emotions can play a significant role in the practice and habits that go into the composing process.

Jeff: Most of the time you could wait, especially if you were feeling really intense about a situation. Everybody I ever worked with took the idea of filing a foreclosure very seriously and would be upset whenever they had to do that. I once saw a co-worker break down in tears for not being able to avoid a foreclosure. So we would talk it out as a unit. I would never fly solo on this sort of thing.

Irene: Given the gravity of this work, when you came into the position, were you given any training on writing these kinds of letters, or did your employers assume you had this skill already in place?

Jeff: I received very little training. There was just an assumption that if I could get dressed and come to work in the morning then I would know how to write a letter, apparently.

Irene: Did you come in with a degree?

Jeff: Yeah, I had a Bachelor's in English literature at the time.

Irene: So your employers assumed that if a person had a college degree, he or she could write letters.

Jeff: Right. But the truth was that I was not acquainted with the genre of the formal business letter. So I would go through previous files that had gone out to customers and get a feel for what that kind of letter looked like. For a long time, I just worked off of other people's old files. Then I worked out a relationship with our attorneys; they would advise me when my letter was out of date due to changes in the law and tell me what I needed to do to bring them up-to-date. Eventually I developed my own voice. At first I would sometimes have customers call in angry because of the way I had worded the letter. So I would go back and talk with my colleagues. I'd ask them, "What can I do to get the customers to call in but not be upset?" What I discovered was that I had previously been writing, "Your account is past due." And so many customers called in angry, saying, "Well that's wrong. I sent in payments." Maybe they did, maybe they didn't. Either way, we needed to talk. So I revised my letter to say "My records show such and such. Could you call me about this?"

REPRESENTATION: The writer needs to be sensitive to how a message will be received in order to garner the response needed.

Irene: You took ownership of the problem. It made them feel less threatened, less defensive, and the lines of communication opened up.

Jeff: Right. That's why I would say "my records" and not "our records." I was trying to communicate the idea that this was a one-on-one conversation.

Irene: It's interesting. I found I needed to adopt that philosophy as well. It's important to take ownership. As someone serving a clientele, or in my

case, supporting a certain community of professionals, I wanted to avoid a confrontational tone. It all goes back to the idea of "taking a moment." We were both serving an audience, and we needed to leave the person open to our message. I relied heavily on e-mail in my position, so written communication became a very important component in the process, before, during, and even after a work order had been completed. I couldn't e-mail someone with a message reading: "I can't waste department resources scanning or copying an original that's not readable." Instead I would write, "Before I process this work order, I want you to know that the text is not clear (either it is cut off, a section is missing, or the print is unreadable). Do you have an original that we might use to secure a cleaner copy?"

Jeff: I find it interesting that the quality of the original can affect reception two steps removed from the original work order. There's an audience you're not seeing—the student in the classroom—who could be impacted by how a work order is processed.

Irene: Am I getting off topic?

Jeff: No, I don't think so. You're talking about your direct audience, the faculty member, but there is another audience, the student, whom you never see.

Irene: Is that trajectory?

RECEPTION: By "trajectory" we mean the way a text goes out into the world and does work. We don't always get to see the ways our texts operate, but we can at least attempt to plan for how they will be taken up by various audiences.

Jeff: You know, it just might be.

Irene: I have one more question I'd like to ask you, and I wrote it out in advance. So here it is: "There aren't many professions out there that don't require writing in some genre, whether it's the waitress putting in a food order or a banker writing a foreclosure notice. It was your writing skills that secured your position in your former job, but I'm thinking it is that same skill that allowed you the option to walk away. You are now in an environment that asks you to work in a wide range of genres, from designing a class syllabus, to filling out a class preference form, to writing response papers. In both of our cases, we are moving from the 'work world' back into academia, but most of the people reading this article are going in the opposite direction. Do you have any advice to someone reading this article about making such a transition?"

Jeff: The thing that I found the most useful was that when asked to produce something, I would ask for some examples or find a file that had some examples in it. Don't hesitate to ask the person requesting the item if they have some examples you could look at. So if you can get your boss to say, "Here's a memo I sent to my boss," then that will give you a clue as to what your boss wants to see in the memos you write. Also, don't be afraid to snoop

ACTIVITY: Writing research doesn't only happen in school environments. It's a tool that you'll also need for non-academic work.

around for reference material. I knew nothing about the law, but I was able to find a famous reference book called *Black's Law* that was extremely helpful. There are reference books for all kinds of professions. They are out there. Find them.

Irene: That brings up something I discovered while doing the research for this discussion and that is the issue of research or securing information. I'll be honest: I wasn't comfortable going into a bank and asking if I could have a copy of a foreclosure letter or even a template, so I relied on Google. You are absolutely right when you point out that talking to *people* is an important tool for research. I believe this was the first time I did formal research for an assignment that the search engine let me down. After many versions of my search topics—"foreclosure letter," "bank foreclosure letter," "letter template for bank foreclosure"—I finally found *one* example from a bank. And that same template showed up on several different sites.

What I had absolutely no trouble finding were templates of letters responding to foreclosures. It is a cottage industry out there, as most of these sites offered "free trials." So if you wanted to use the letter, or if you needed more assistance composing such a letter, services were available for a price. I realized I would have to rely on my conversation with you to get the information I needed.

Jeff: Well, we probably should be wrapping up. This has been a very interesting discussion. I learned a lot about your work.

Irene: As I did about yours. I'm pleasantly surprised to see the commonalities in what we did, or at least in the responsibilities we provided for our respective clientele.

Jeff: That's very true. How we communicate carries weight, doesn't it? Well, thank you.

Irene: Thank you. It's been fun.

M. Irene Taylor studied acting at the University of Illinois and went on to earn her M.A. in theatre at Illinois State University. She recently performed her original one-woman play *Suppos'd to* as the debut production of the New Route Theatre's main stage season. She saw two of her poems published in the 2012 McLean County Barn Quilt Heritage Trail "Words on Quilts" and has been asked to write for the 2013 publication. She is coordinator of New Route Theatre's Creative Writing for Seniors program and a doctoral student in ISU's Department of English.

Jeff Rients holds a Bachelor's degree in English from the University of Illinois and a Master's from Illinois State University. In between those two degrees he worked in banking for seventeen years. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D. at ISU's Department of English. He is an avid *Dungeons & Dragons* referee and his publications in this field include *The Miscellaneum of Cinder*, *Under Xylarthen's Tower* and the forthcoming *Broodmother Skyfortress*, as well as contributions to *Fight On!*, *Open Game Table*, *Hekatoteratos*, *Green Devil Face*, *Crawl!* and *Encounter*.

Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*

GWRJ Editors

Our Mission Statement

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

General Information

Submissions

Articles can be submitted to the *GWRJ* at any time. However, we do have deadlines for upcoming issues. For issue 5.1, which will come out in August, 2014, articles must be submitted by February 1, 2014. For issue 5.2, which will come out in January, 2015, articles must be submitted by October 1, 2014. Contact the Associate Editor at grassrootswriting@gmail.com with queries about possible submissions and to submit your work.

Queries and Drafts

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

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

Honoraria

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

Style and Tone

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Media, Mode, and Copyright Issues

The *GWRJ* can publish both visual and digital texts. We encourage multimodal texts, including still images, audio, video, and hypertexts. However, authors working with these technologies need to be careful about copyright issues as we cannot publish any kinds of materials that may result in copyright infringement. We can sometimes seek copyright permissions, but in the case of materials such as works of art or graphics/images owned by large companies, this is often not possible. This is true for print-based articles that use images as well. We can, however, include materials that are covered by Fair Use; see http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html for Fair Use guidelines. Also, video/audio of research subjects can require special kinds of permission processes, so you should contact the *GWRJ* editors before beginning this kind of work. Research using subjects who are considered "protected" populations (people under eighteen and people with mental disabilities, among others) are not acceptable for *GWRJ* articles unless the author has received approval from Illinois State University or another institution to conduct research with human subjects.

Researching for *Grassroots*

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

But what does it really mean? In more practical language, it means finding some situation where humans are doing things that involve language (which can mean composing in oral, aural, visual, etc. genres, not just writing on paper) and thinking, "Hey, that looks interesting," and then taking the time to investigate that practice in some detail.

But this kind of research isn't just about people. It's really about what we call "activity systems," which just means that we want to learn about all kinds

of complicated interactions, not just what a particular kind of text looks like or what a particular person does when they produce a text (although we're interested in those things, too). We also want to know about the interactions between people as they produce texts and the interactions between humans and their tools, practices, and different kinds of textual productions. And we're interested in how certain kinds of texts work to shape our interactions, for example, the ways the genre of resumes might shape how people interact when they are engaged in the activities of finding and offering work.

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

Investigating Genres

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

Personal Explorations of Literate Practice

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

Composing Practices

This kind of research looks at particular kinds of composing practices, including invention (coming up with ideas), research, revision, etc. It often overlaps with personal exploration research because authors are often investigating their own practices. However, this research could certainly involve interviews or observations of how other individuals or groups engage in these practices. One issue that concerns the *GWRJ* editors is that this kind of research can lead to assumptions that these composing practices are "universal"— that is, that they work in similar ways across all kinds of genres and writing situations. While it is possible to trace similar kinds of literate practices across different situations (and, in fact, it can be really interesting—see, for example, Kevin Roozen's writing research, "Tracing Trajectories of Practice: Repurposing in One Student's Developing Disciplinary Writing Processes," in *Written Communication*, 2010 27:3), it is important to remember that we really can't talk about an activity like "revising," for example, as if it's something that a person does the same way in every kind of situation.

Literate Activity in the Wild

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

Case Studies of Individual Literate Practices

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

Linguistics Writing Research

The work that currently exists in the journal in this area tends to focus specifically on grammar conventions or on the usage of particular kinds of stylistic or punctuation devices. However, we want to encourage linguistic writing research that is more robust and complicated, including projects that explore corpus linguistics (using a collection of data to look at particular kinds of textual practice) or sociolinguistics (investigating the particular ways that humans use language within social systems).

Global or Intercultural Literate Practices

It is only within a few issues of the journal that the *GWRJ* has been able to publish research on literate practices as they move across cultural and/or geographical spaces. For examples, see Adriana Gradea's article in issue 4.1 ("The Little Genre that Could: CHAT Mapping the Slogan of the Big Communist Propaganda") and Summer Qabazard's article in issue 3.2 ("From Religion to Chicken Cannibalism: American Fast Food Ads in Kuwait"). We would like to encourage more of this kind of research in future issues as we are highly interested in research that studies the ways that people and textual practices move across these kinds of boundaries.

The Researcher's Process

According to one of our *GWRJ* authors, Lisa Phillips, it can be useful for authors to investigate and articulate a personal process that will be meaningful for them when developing ideas for research projects. She

offered us her notes on the process that she followed to create her article for the 3.1 issue of the journal, "Writing with Tattoo Ink: Composing that Gets under the Skin." Her process is presented below in ten "steps" that *GWRJ* authors might find useful.

Step One

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

Step Two

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

Step Three

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

Step Four

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

Step Five

It can also be important to think about "target genres," or types of writing that might be used as examples during the research and writing process. Obviously previously published *GWRJ* articles can be useful in this way, but it can also be interesting to think of other kinds of writing that might serve as examples. Writing research in the field of rhetoric and composition can

be useful (for example, books and articles found on the WAC Clearinghouse Website at http://wac.colostate.edu), but other kinds of research into social practices or even different kinds of journalism can be used as interesting models.

Step Six

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

Step Seven

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

Step Eight

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

Step Nine

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

Step Ten

As the text is being produced, it is critical to keep in mind the needs and interests of *GWRJ* readers. They are interested in reading about a wide range

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

Questions?

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