The Writing Research Annual is created by the Writing Program at Illinois State University as a resource for students in ENG 101 and ENG 101.10. This print text is supplemented by a range of online resources, which instructors in the writing program can adapt to their particular assignments and to the needs of their students.

Each student in ENG 101 and ENG 101.10 during the 2010/2011 academic year should have a copy of *The Writing Research Annual*, issue 1.0.

This card represents your proof-of-purchase, and should be turned in to your instructor by the end of the first week of classes.

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Student Signature

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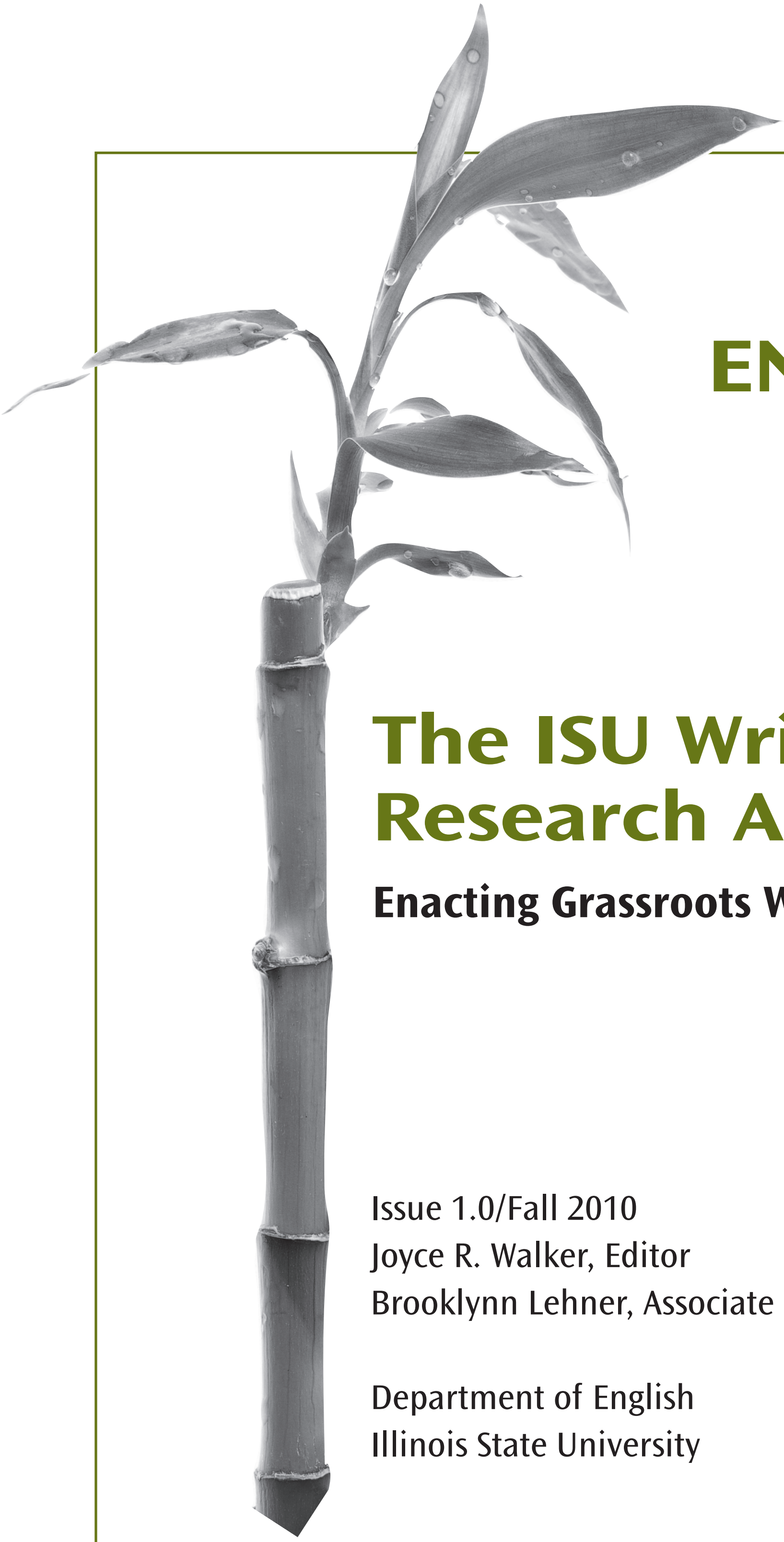

ENG101

The ISU Writing Research Annual

Enacting Grassroots Writing Research

Issue 1.0/Fall 2010
Joyce R. Walker, Editor
Brooklynn Lehner, Associate Editor

Department of English
Illinois State University

HAYDEN McNEIL

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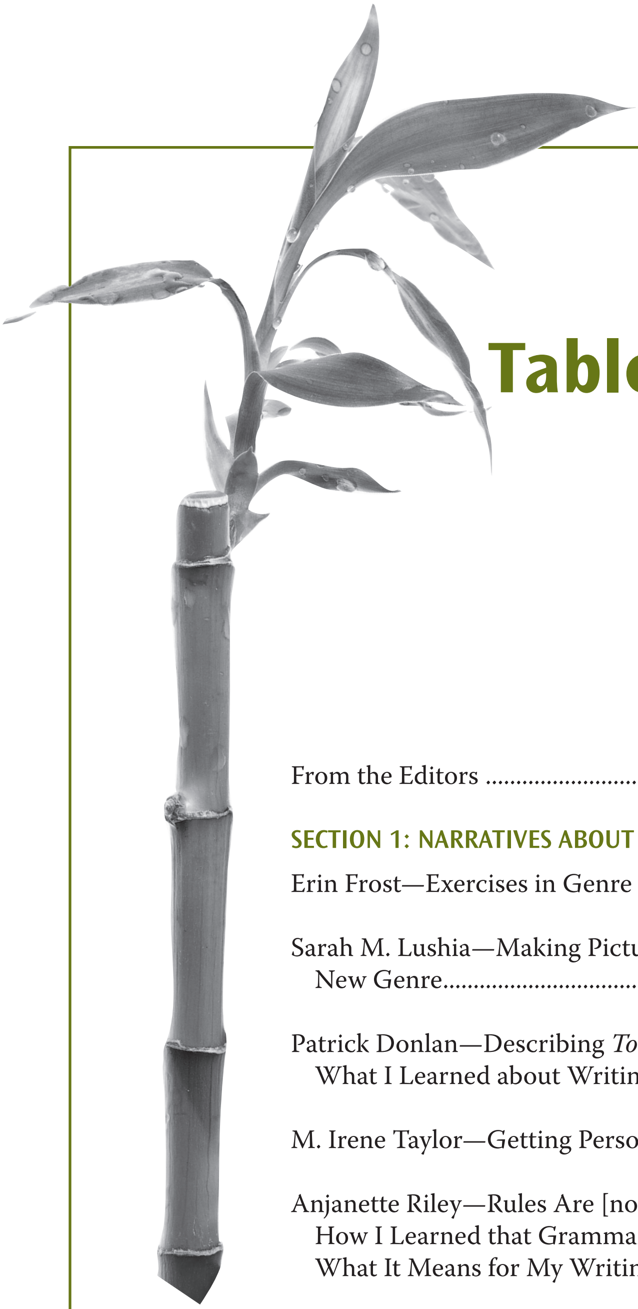

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From the Editors

This inaugural issue of the *Illinois State University Writing Research Annual* was a collaborative effort. Not the least among the contributors are the instructors in writing at Western Michigan University, where the concept for this publication was initially developed from 2006–2009. Both here at ISU and at WMU, our goal has been to conceive a text that would move beyond the role of a writing *textbook* and begin instead to establish a network of authors willing to share their stories, their research, and their knowledge about how we learn how to learn about writing.

But it is here at Illinois State University that we have finally developed the concept of a "research annual." This yearly publication will continue to solicit and represent authors as they investigate writing practices, research writing activities and genres, and study the ways that we both learn about writing and how we "do" writing in different situations.

This first issue is an experiment, as most "first" things are. We have solicited texts from faculty, graduate students, undergraduates, and other members of the community, and we were interested in a wide range of possible topics, although our focus is on writing research, or research about writers and writing. Our authors are varied. They are all writers and thus are all researchers of writing practices (at least their own); some are professionals while others are not, and some actively teach writing while others don't, and some have expertise as scholars in writing research while others don't. As a result, the tone and style of these different pieces is as diverse as the writing and research interests of our various authors. Some authors are writing from a personal space, offering stories of the work they've done, the knowledge of writing they've gained, and the different kinds of genres and writing situations they've encountered. Some authors have focused primarily on their individual experience, while other authors are attempting to explicitly teach their readers about a particular genre or an important skill or concept that may be useful to them as writers.

The subtitle of this journal, “Enacting Grassroots Writing Research,” expresses our continuing mission: to solicit and encourage authors to share not only what they’ve learned about writing, but *how* they learned it. We want to encourage a stance toward writing that acknowledges that we are all learners, all researchers, all collaborators in creating and sharing knowledge about writing and writing practices, and we want to open a space where writing researchers with different interests and experiences (and the texts that they produce) can meet and interact.

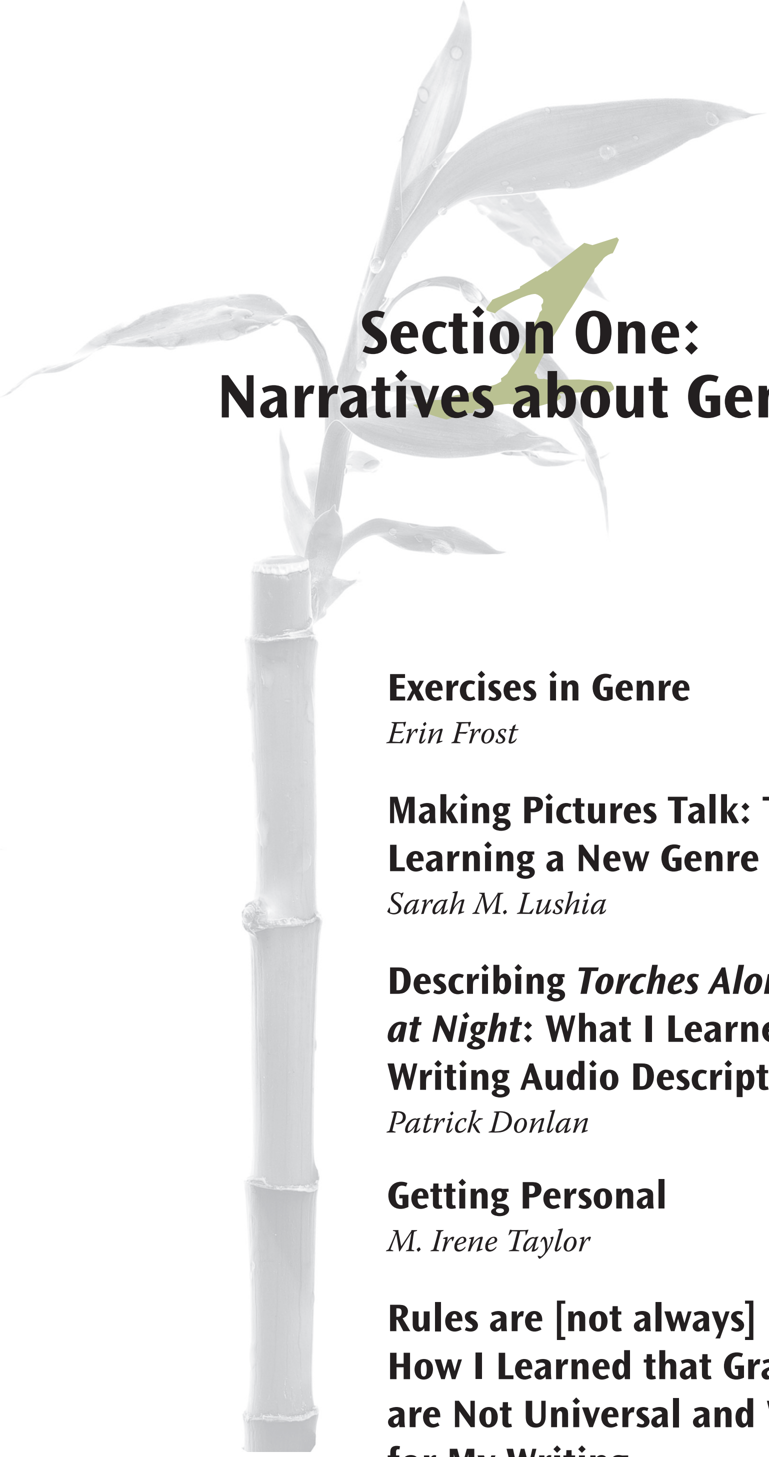
Articles in this Volume

While all the essays in this volume enact writing research, we have organized them into three main sections based on how they relate to genre. The first section includes narratives about authors researching specific genres. Often coming to a genre for the first time, these essays are accounts of how the authors figured out how to write in a particular genre. In “Exercises in Genre,” Erin Frost writes about her experience encountering the quad chart and her process for researching this new genre. Sarah M. Lushia, in “Making Pictures Talk: The Journey of Learning a New Genre,” writes about how a librarian she often collaborates with first introduced her to the genre of audio descriptions; her narrative discusses her process for researching this genre so that she could then teach it to others. Patrick Donlan’s article, “Describing *Torches Along Our Beach at Night*: What I Learned about Writing Audio Descriptions,” describes how he encountered audio descriptions in a writing course, and his narrative discusses what he learned about writing in that genre. Describing her experiences with writing personal essays, M. Irene Taylor’s narrative, “Getting Personal,” focuses on what she learned about “getting personal” in that genre. Anjanette Riley’s essay, “Rules are [not always] Rules: How I Learned that Grammar Rules are Not Universal and What it Means for My Writing,” offers a narrative analysis of how, confronted with writing in a new genre, she researched grammar and stylistic conventions for newspaper articles. Together, these essays indicate the different ways writers encounter new genres and then go about figuring out how to write in those genres.

Section two includes detailed analyses of specific genres; written in different styles, these essays all look closely at features unique to a particular genre. Pankaj Challa, in “Real World Writing: Meet the Screenplay,” analyzes the screenplay genre by first noting key distinctions between screenplays and research papers and then discussing features particular to the screenplay. Eileen Weidbrauk’s essay, “Making Memoir,” analyzes the memoir, or what is sometimes referred to as the personal narrative; in her essay, she identifies five specific features common to many genres—focus, detail, order, introduction, and trajectory—and discusses what these features look like in the memoir. Writing in the genre of the feature article, Courtney Schoolmaster discusses and enacts the conventions of that genre in “Follow the Bread Crumbs: Adhering to the Conventions of a Genre.” Looking specifically at Apple’s iPod advertisements, Susana Rodriguez’s essay, “Reading Visual Texts: A Bullet for Your Arsenal," analyzes how colors and black silhouettes help Apple construct and sell "cool," "hip," "stylish," and "edgy." While each of the essays looks at a different genre, together they demonstrate the specificity of each genre and show a range of potential types of genre research.

Section three includes essays on a range of topics that are applicable to writing in many genres. Joyce R. Walker's article, "Just CHATting," discusses cultural-historical activity theory and how it's a useful tool for examining "how/why/what of writing practices." In "What do Video Games and Writing have in Common?" Andrew Taylor makes connections between video games and writing; in his essay, he explains how success at a video game depends upon knowing the boundaries of the video game (knowing, for example, what tools the player has at her disposal to solve a puzzle) and considers how knowing your boundaries can also apply to writing. In "It's a stoplight; it's a spring; it's a semicolon!" Amy Newday closely looks at the semicolon and discusses both the metaphors that often accompany descriptions of how to use it and her own process for understanding its usage. In "Nomenclature," Gina Cooke writes about how researching words, or what she refers to as the "stories behind words," can give writers a nuanced understanding of what it means, for example, to draft or compose. Finally, Heidi Bowman, in "'Good Enough': Getting the Writing Written and Letting It Go," writes about procrastination by discussing how it affects her writing in a variety of genres and how she moves from avoiding writing to finishing her writing. While the topics in this section are diverse, each of these essays enacts a form of writing research about concepts or writing practices that are not bound by a particular genre.

The *ISU Writing Research Annual* will continue to publish a yearly issue that focuses on new research. A "Call for Research" is available on page 105 and on our Writing Program website.



Section One: Narratives about Genre

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Anjanette Riley

Section One: Narratives about Genre

Exercises in Genre

By Erin Frost

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

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

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

I'm a member of the listserv, and so I'm sitting at my desk trying to avoid homework when I receive this email.

Erin Frost is in her second year of the PhD program in English at Illinois State. She teaches composition and technical writing and would like to someday teach rhetoric and gender studies courses as well. Aside from finding creative ways to avoid breaking a sweat, she enjoys knitting, traveling, and having *The Office* marathons (complete with junk food) with her husband Andy.

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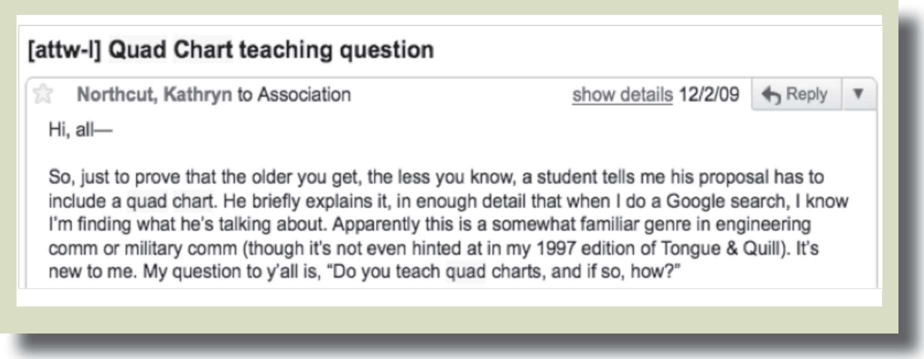


[attw-l] Quad Chart teaching question

Hi, all—

So, just to prove that the older you get, the less you know, a student tells me his proposal has to include a quad chart. He briefly explains it, in enough detail that when I do a Google search, I know I'm finding what he's talking about. Apparently this is a somewhat familiar genre in engineering comm or military comm (though it's not even hinted at in my 1997 edition of Tongue & Quill). It's new to me. My question to y'all is, "Do you teach quad charts, and if so, how?"

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

Research it is.

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

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

So here’s my cheat sheet:

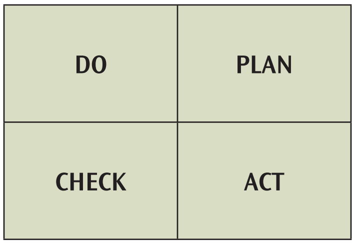
Quad Chart Cheat Sheet	
This section should contain some sort of image of the proposed concept. Maybe in engineer-world, it’s the token “pretty” section.	This is the marketing part. It details the capabilities of the proposal. What’s new and better about it?
I call this the “technology quadrant.” It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

Okay, I think. This isn’t so hard. What else does Google have to offer? I stumble across a database of quad chart samples at www.eng.umd.edu/nsf and am about to get sucked into perusing them when I start hearing my past English teachers’ voices in my head. Even though I’m getting lots of good information from Google, maybe I ought to be looking for some sort of scholarly article that I could cite if I ever use this in actual work for school.

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

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

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



DO	PLAN
CHECK	ACT

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

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

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

It turns out that quad charts and A3 reports are two distinct genres. For one thing, quad charts do not have to be done on 11 × 17 paper, and A3 reports are limited to that format. A3 reports always offer a solution to a problem while quad charts can do other things. But Wikoff said in her email that A3 reports are used often in engineering because of their visual orientation and ability to capture information for brief reports, and those concepts also apply to quad charts.

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

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

Easy enough.

Except it's not.

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

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

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

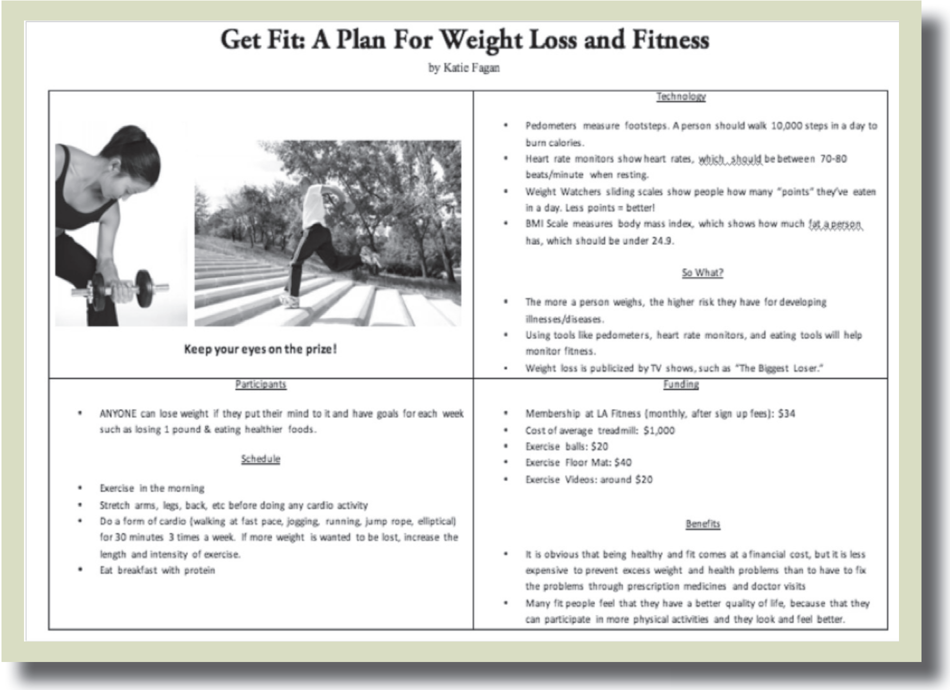
Wow, I think. How much time could this save people who have to read tons of stuff for their jobs? If the people who wanted something from them had to do the work to summarize and make one of these charts, it might really streamline things. Not only would there be less work for the people getting the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

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

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

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

I guess it serves me right.



Get Fit: A Plan For Weight Loss and Fitness

by Katie Fagan

Keep your eyes on the prize!

Technology

- Pedometers measure footsteps. A person should walk 10,000 steps in a day to burn calories.
- Heart rate monitors show heart rates, which should be between 70-80 beats/minute when resting.
- Weight Watchers sliding scales show people how many "points" they've eaten in a day. Less points = better!
- BMI Scale measures body mass index, which shows how much fat a person has, which should be under 24.9.

So What?

- The more a person weighs, the higher risk they have for developing illnesses/diseases.
- Using tools like pedometers, heart rate monitors, and eating tools will help monitor fitness.
- Weight loss is publicized by TV shows, such as "The Biggest Loser."

Participants

- ANYONE can lose weight if they put their mind to it and have goals for each week such as losing 1 pound & eating healthier foods.

Schedule

- Exercise in the morning
- Stretch arms, legs, back, etc before doing any cardio activity
- Do a form of cardio (walking at fast pace, jogging, running, jump rope, elliptical) for 30 minutes 3 times a week. If more weight is wanted to be lost, increase the length and intensity of exercise.
- Eat breakfast with protein

Funding

- Membership at LA Fitness (monthly, after sign up fees): $34
- Cost of average treadmill: $1,000
- Exercise balls: $20
- Exercise Floor Mat: $40
- Exercise Videos: around $20

Benefits

- It is obvious that being healthy and fit comes at a financial cost, but it is less expensive to prevent excess weight and health problems than to have to fix the problems through prescription medicines and doctor visits
- Many fit people feel that they have a better quality of life, because that they can participate in more physical activities and they look and feel better.

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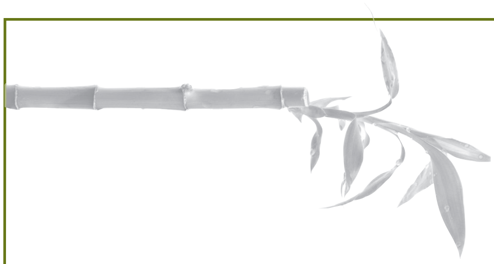

Section One: Narratives about Genre

Making Pictures Talk: The Journey of Learning a New Genre

By Sarah M. Lushia

"Audio descriptions? Is that really its own genre?" I still remember thinking this as Kathleen Lonbom, a librarian at Illinois State University's Milner library, told me excitedly about new grant-funded project she'd begun working on to digitalize the massive International Collection of Child Art (ICCA), which is housed and cared for by Milner. I had heard her talk about her involvement with this collection and her desire to digitalize it several times, yet I had little idea what she meant by the "audio descriptions" she kept referring to. I felt like I imagine many writers feel when they are first introduced to a new genre—I had no idea what Kathleen was talking about, and initially, I felt too embarrassed to ask her. Eventually, though, I did inquire about how audio descriptions worked and what writing in the genre entailed.

Through conversations with Kathleen, I began to learn about this genre. I discovered that audio descriptions were concise descriptions of visual images, which were created to enable those with vision impairment to have access to visuals such as those in the ICCA. I was fascinated. It made complete sense that describing visuals to those

Sarah Lushia grew up in upstate New York and lived in southern California before moving to Bloomington, IL, for graduate school. Sarah loves to read, camp, go on hikes, spend time with her three wonderful kitties, and ride carousels. She also loves to teach. Sarah will hold a post-doctoral teaching fellowship at Illinois State University in the 2010–2011 academic year, following a long journey to completing her PhD.

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with vision impairment was an important thing to do. As a visual learner I fully understand how vital visuals are to learning, understanding, and retaining information. If visually impaired persons did not have ways through which to access the visuals, they would lose access to a whole mode of communication. Yet it had never occurred to me that a unique genre that had been created to do just this. As someone who has always advocated for the use of visuals and images in all levels of education, I began to get really excited at the prospect of learning more about writing in this genre.

Kathleen had learned about audio descriptions due to a new requirement that government-funded digitalization projects must be made accessible to those with vision impairment. This meant that collections like the ICCA, which contains thousand of images, would likely no longer be eligible for these government-funded grants since it would be near to impossible for the small groups of people who generally work on such projects to create audio descriptions for pieces this numerous. While Kathleen's project had, luckily, already been grandfathered in, this had not stopped her from thinking about the possibility of how this new requirement would impact future grant projects. She had already started to think through some options, one of which was the possibility of tapping into the undergraduate student body to help create audio descriptions. This gave me further motivation to learn how to write in this genre because immediately I envisioned collaborating with Kathleen in my English 101 classes to teach this genre to my students, and potentially engage them in helping to create audio descriptions that Kathleen could use in the ICCA. Kathleen and I had worked together for many years, and a collaborative project in English 101 seemed a natural outcome of our previous work together. I suggested to Kathleen that I create a pilot project for my classes for the Fall 2009 semester to attempt to teach the audio description genre, and if that went well, we could teach it again in the Spring 2010, focusing more closely on the ICCA, and offering students the opportunity to publish their audio descriptions on the Milner website. Kathleen agreed to work with me and my students, and my journey to learning this new genre began.

My first task in this journey was to figure out for myself how to write an audio description. Kathleen suggested I explore the following websites to learn more about audio descriptions: Online Accessibility Training from Art Education for the Blind, *http://www.artbeyondsight.org/handbook/acs-verbalsamples.shtml* and Audio Description Illinois, *http://www.alsaudioillinois.net/.* These websites offer guidelines for the genre as well as plenty of samples and examples. After exploring these sites, I made a list of genre expectations for audio descriptions. These expectations were:

1. Use standard Times New Roman font.
2. The body of the description should focus exclusively on what you see when looking at the image.
3. The description should be short (average of about 2 minutes when read aloud).
4. A thumbnail of the image should appear above the written text.
5. The first sentence of the description follows a standardized format, containing the title of the piece, the artist, the medium, dimensions, and the date and location of creation.
6. Cohesion, organization, and readability are vital to successfully write in this genre.
7. Attention to detail, especially colors, placement, and size are necessary to give the reader/listener the ability to make sense of the description.
8. Additional information about the artist or the event being portrayed is sometimes given at the end of the audio description.
9. The description includes both general statements about what can be seen in the image as well as specific details.

Based on this initial understanding, I began to explore writing in this genre. Unlike any other genre I'd ever learned, my primary purpose for learning about audio descriptions was to teach my students about the genre. This changed both how I learned about the genre and what I focused on as I gained knowledge. It forced me to think beyond my own personal writing process and struggles to how these same struggles might affect other writers as they too learned this genre. For example, as I tried writing audio descriptions myself, one of the first things I noticed about writing them was that not having background information about or familiarity with the image I was trying to describe made the act of describing the image much more difficult. I quickly learned that for each image there was some aspect of the image for which I needed more information to feel as though I had authority as a writer. For instance, when I tried to describe an advertisement for skateboards I had a lot of difficulty because I was unfamiliar with skateboard terminology. After visiting several skateboarding websites I picked up some terminology such as "treks" and "grind" which allowed me to more accurately describe the skateboard advertisement. Not only did this teach me a step that would be necessary in my own process of writing audio descriptions since I was learning this genre both as a writer and a future teacher of the genre, it also made me aware that other writers, such as my students, would also likely need to engage in this type of background, authority-building research as part of their own process when writing audio descriptions.

While I felt like I had learned a great deal about audio descriptions prior to attempting to teach the genre to other writers, teaching this project for the first time taught me so much more. Throughout this process, my students and I learned together. In the spirit of true collaboration and due to my own writerly insecurities that I perhaps still did not understand this genre well enough to teach it, I scheduled my classes to meet at Milner for the first class period of this project and asked Kathleen to co-teach the introduction to the genre. As Kathleen and I described the project and the expectations of the genre, the air was tinged with a mixture of excitement, anxiety, and fear of the unknown. Not a single student in the class had heard of this genre before. I had learned some about the genre but was still very much a novice. And while Kathleen had the most experience as a writer in this genre, this was her first attempt to guide a class of English 101 students and their instructor through the process of writing audio descriptions. Every person in the room had some reason to feel at least a twinge of anxiety or fear. What pleasantly surprised me was that everyone also seemed to have some degree of excitement about this project and the challenge of writing an audio description. When students began to ask questions about the genre, almost immediately I realized how much I still needed to learn about this genre both as a writer and as a teacher. Many of the questions that my students were raising as they considered this genre as writers were focused on aspects of the genre that I had yet to learn or even consider. Thankfully, Kathleen answered their questions, and simultaneously taught all of us more about this genre and lent us insight into how we could become better writers within the genre. Some of the questions students asked that I hadn't yet considered included "How do you describe color to a blind person who has never seen color?" and "How do you describe action?" Kathleen explained in response to the first question that many of the people who use audio descriptions do or have had some degree of vision, and so they had experience seeing colors for themselves. And I suggested that those members of the audience who were born blind have figured out ways of knowing color through their other senses. In terms of describing action, Kathleen shared with us that by explaining the position of people and objects—such as "the man's feet are up off the floor and holds a basketball above his head"—you can give the audience access to this action and the narrative that goes with it.

Leaving the library that day, I was confident that all the writers in the class, including me, had a much stronger grasp of the audio description genre than we'd had prior to talking with Kathleen. While this was true, some questions still arose in the classroom as my students and I worked on writing audio descriptions that caught me off guard as both a teacher and a writer. For instance, a student who was doing an audio description of a sculpture that was in a permanent outdoor installation in New York City asked me if she should focus just on the sculpture or on the entire image—which included skyscrapers, cabs, cars, a subway entrance and numerous people. Since I was not sure of the answer, we thought about this together for a while and listened to a few more audio descriptions from the websites that Kathleen had provided us. What both of us noticed was that while each audio description tended to focus on specific parts of an image in detail, all of them included at least brief mention of the entire contents of the image. So together we learned that yes, she should be describing the whole image, including what surrounded the sculpture. This decision ended up strengthening her description, as she was able to use some of the surrounding details to help her describe the sculpture, such as when she described the height of the sculpture in relation to the height of the people standing near it. It also taught me yet another important idea about both writing audio descriptions and teaching the genre to others.

As we navigated this genre together, my students and I co-created knowledge about this genre and what writing within this genre entails. Since everyone, including me, was a relative novice in this genre, the boundaries between "teacher" and "student" were more often challenged and authority more easily shared within this project. We were all writers being faced with the daunting challenge of learning to write in a new way. I was not the experienced writer passing along what I knew to others. I was instead another person in this learning community who was struggling with and often frustrated by elements of this genre such as its short length and rather rigid structure. I learned as much about this genre during the course of this project as any other writer in the class. This taught me a lesson about the importance of coming to my writing classes as a *writer* who also happens to be a teacher rather than as an instructor *of* writing.

By the time I taught audio descriptions again to the students in my Spring English 101 courses, I felt as though I had gained a much deeper grasp of this genre through my own journey attempting to write within it and through having read and responded to many other audio descriptions that were created in the fall. Also, by the spring, Kathleen was able to give me a detailed set of instructions for how to compose an audio description, complete with examples. These directions helped clarify this genre for me and gave me a sort of template that I could offer my students as a starting point as they became writers in this genre. With this template in hand, I wrote a new set of expectations for writing in the audio description genre. This set of expectations was much more detailed than my first attempt had been and reflected my growth as a writer learning/understanding a new genre. This set of forum expectations for audio descriptions included the following:

1. The description has four parts: introduction, overview, details, and publication note.

2. The introduction is short, usually a single sentence and includes the title of the image, artist, location/date of creation, and dimensions of the piece.

3. The overview consists of 2–3 sentences which give a general description of the overall image. These sentences are intended to help orient the listener.

4. The details section is the longest part of the piece. It includes sentences which give specific details about objects within the image such as color, location, and motion.

5. The publication note is a single, standard sentence which includes the publisher/holder of the image and the current location of the image.

6. Transitioning between the introduction, overview, details, and publication note was essential to creating overall unity and cohesion in the description.

7. Scripts for the description should use 14 pt Times New Roman font.

8. Scripts should be double spaced (to allow for last minute changes in the recording booth).

9. The title of image is italicized.

10. Any artist comments that are included in the description should be in quotes.

11. Description scripts are generally not longer than two pages in length, and take an average of 2 minutes to read aloud.

12. Description scripts must include a thumbnail of the image, centered, above the text.

13. If the image has in identifier number (as ICCA images do) it should appear in bold, left justified font prior to the thumbnail of the image.

14. Effective sentence-level transitions and easily readable word combinations and phrases are vital to overall “readability” and success in this genre.

15. Not everything needs to be described in detail.

16. Your description should be organized in a logical order, following some pattern within the image.

17. You should use clear and concise language so it can be easily understood by a listener.

18. You must choose whether you are describing the image from the point of view of the viewer or from the point of view of a person within the image. Once you make this choice be consistent—especially with things like to the left/right so the listener can follow where specific details are within the larger image.

19. Audio descriptions are ultimately an oral genre. Be sure to read drafts aloud and have them read to you. Change words/phrases that are hard to read/hear or difficult to follow when hearing the piece read aloud.

As my own knowledge about and understanding of this genre grew, I knew that teaching it to students would be less stressful than it had been when I initially was learning the genre in the fall. During the Spring semester, I began the project by sharing the instructions and examples Kathleen had given me with my students. The combination of having a concrete set of basic instructions along with my heightened ability to answer questions with confidence gave the project a solid start. Students seemed excited to learn a new genre and to my delight, many of them chose to work with pieces from the ICCA collection. Since my own understanding of how to write in the genre had grown immensely since the first time I'd taught this genre, I was also able to provide stronger feedback to writers. Instead of general feedback as I had given in the fall such as "You need to find a way to organize your sentences so the ideas in the sentences make logical sense when someone hears them read aloud," I was able to be more specific by saying instead, "Since there are a lot of objects in the image, if you tell the reader that you are beginning in the bottom left hand corner and working clockwise around the image (which is the way the eye tends to move in images in the West), you can lead your audience through the many objects without overwhelming them or confusing them since there will be a logical order."

Teaching a new genre to other writes while learning to write in it myself caused me to be more conscious and aware of the details/expectations of this genre than I normally am when learning to write in a new genre. It also allowed me to add students' questions to my own inquiries, expediting the rate at which I understood this genre. Additionally, my students, drafts and attempts to write in this genre also gave me a massive pool of samples at all levels of development, skill, and quality through which to view this genre that have not been available to me when I have learned other genres in different situations. As a result, for me, this method of learning to write in a new genre has been the most effective, fascinating, and enjoyable method.

1

Section One: Narratives about Genre

Describing *Torches Along Our Beach at Night*: What I Learned about Writing Audio Descriptions

By Patrick Donlan

Editor's Note: While Sarah Lushia's article "Making Pictures Talk: The Journey of Learning a New Genre" narrates genre research from the perspective of someone teaching the genre of audio descriptions to others, Patrick Donlan's article is a narrative of how he learned about the genre and was able to publish his work.

As a student in English 101, the first-year writing class at Illinois State University, I had an instructor who was adamant about assigning projects that allowed us, as students to be independent and to make creative choices. Throughout the course of the semester, we were assigned four different projects, plus portfolio revisions that were used to help us craft our writing to its most superior. Project topics and rhetorical situations allowed us to broaden our writing's horizon and put our words into forums that challenged our intellect and creativity. However, it was in project three that I was introduced to a completely new type of writing style: an audio description. An audio description is exactly what it sounds like, a description of an image.

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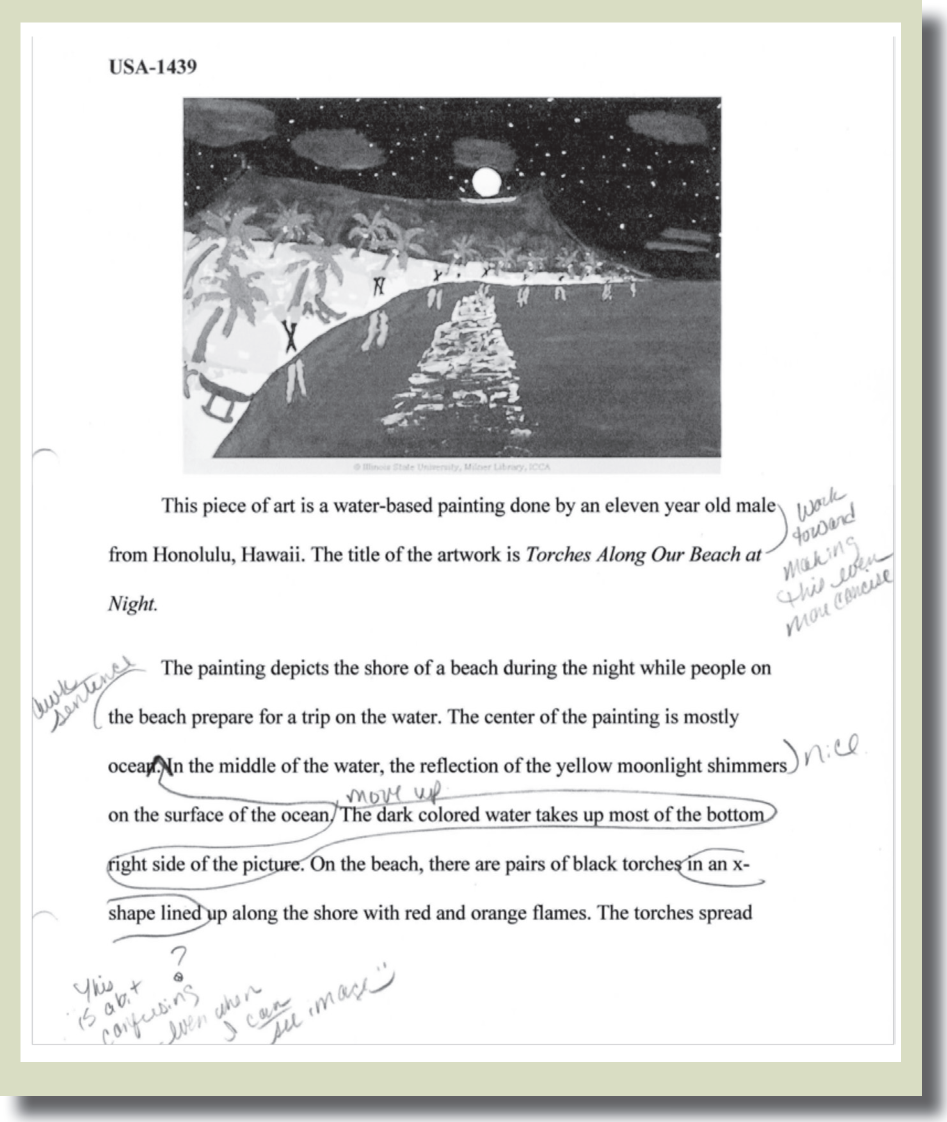
The assignment was to choose an image from a number of photograph search engines such as Flickr, Yahoo! images, etc. and then describe it. If we desired to get published, we could choose to describe an image from Illinois State's International Collection of Child Art (ICCA). If we wrote about an image from the ICCA, there was the possibility that we could record the audio description and have it put on Illinois State's ICCA website for the visually impaired. The program is offered so that the visually impaired could have the option to appreciate and visualize the art. Since ICCA has very few recordings to go with its many collections of child art, the possibilities for an audio description to be recorded was likely. The library would ultimately decide if an audio description could be recorded.

Since this type of writing was new, probably to every student, the learning process had to be clear and detailed so that we could do our best writing for the project. My instructor told us from the beginning that writing this project would require creativity, clarity, and descriptiveness; we should be able to visualize the image in our heads just by reading the description. We were told that not every part of the image needed to be described, but that awkward sentence structures and choppy sentences should be avoided so that the descriptions would flow well. For the first draft, the first thing I had to do was to choose an image that caught my eye and that I would like to describe. The second part was to write the description. The rough draft of the project was written in four sections: introduction, overview, details, and publication notes.

My first draft was turned in to the instructor so that I, as well as the rest of the class, could get a clear idea of what I needed to do to fix my project and all remaining drafts. In my first draft, my opening paragraph, which was used to introduce the picture's artist, lacked conciseness. Here is an example of one my early drafts.



USA-1439

© Illinois State University, Milner Library, ICCA

This piece of art is a water-based painting done by an eleven year old male from Honolulu, Hawaii. The title of the artwork is *Torches Along Our Beach at Night.*

Work toward making this even more concise

The painting depicts the shore of a beach during the night while people on the beach prepare for a trip on the water. The center of the painting is mostly ocean. In the middle of the water, the reflection of the yellow moonlight shimmers on the surface of the ocean. The dark colored water takes up most of the bottom right side of the picture. On the beach, there are pairs of black torches in an x-shape lined up along the shore with red and orange flames. The torches spread

awk sentence

nice

move up

?

This is a bit confusing even when I can see image

Image copyright © International Collection of Child Art, Milner Library, Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois

I was able to make my next drafts more concise by researching the state where my artist was from in order to get a better understanding of why my artist decided to paint what he did. In my case, I had to research Hawaiian art. I discovered that it was a custom for art from the state of Hawaii to encompass an aspect of oceanic and shoreline influence. The rest of my first draft was loaded with organizational issues and poor sentence structure. I had attempted to pay extra attention to detail, but that extra effort took away from my ability to construct a coherent sentence. I also let my habit of creative writing take over in this project. One thing my instructor did not want us to do was to draw a conclusion or sum up the image at the end. It was not my job to create a story to go along with the image, just simply describe the details of the art that was present in the picture. Revisions for the second draft involved polishing the piece to make it sound professional and clear, and to make it descriptive and easy to read.

Peer response for the article was imperative because extra eyes were needed to point out flaws. The first round of peer response was traditional Q & A. For Q & A peer response, I had to generate questions about my draft that I found needed attention. Members of my peer response group read my draft, and then answered my questions to help me improve. For the second round of peer response, I needed to read the image aloud to my partner, and then they would insert comments into my word document. This peer response was extremely beneficial for improving my overall final project and made revisions easy.

Since I had described an image from the ICCA, I could get published. I recorded my image at the Milner Library in the sound booths on the sixth floor. At first, I thought it would be no big challenge; however, I learned that there is a certain way to read the words, punch certain syllables, and make my volume loud enough to be heard. It took about two practices and four recordings before I was able to record the audio description perfectly. I learned that it helped to make hand movements as I spoke to get the words out. Recording the description was probably one of the coolest things I have done for school so far. Here is the final version of my audio description, but you can view the image and hear my description by going to the International Collection of Child Art website (*http://tempest.lib.ilstu.edu/index_icca.php*) and searching for the painting entitled *Torches Along Our Beach at Night*.

> This artwork titled *Torches Along Our Beach at Night* was painted by an eleven year old boy from Honolulu, Hawaii. The painting depicts a nighttime beach scene with torches along a moonlit shore. The dark blue ocean fills most of the center and bottom right side of the image. Just off shore, the reflection of the full yellow moon shimmers on the surface of the ocean. Small huts line the curving shoreline and almost blend in with the sand. Scattered between them are green palm trees. Pairs of flaming black torches stand sentry next to each hut. Arching along the curve of the golden shore, their red and orange flames are reflected in the water. The huts and torches diminish in size as the shoreline meets the horizon. In the lower left foreground, two figures prepare to take a trip on the water in a small boat. The figures are simply painted in bright blue with small faces and red hats. In the background, a large brown mountain towers over the beach. Above the mountain is a black sky that is light with bright stars and a yellow moon that illuminates the entire scene. This image is published by Milner Library at Illinois State University as part of the International Collection of Child Art.

1 Section One: Narratives about Genre

Getting Personal

M. Irene Taylor

A few years ago I was introduced to an art form known as the personal essay. I call it an art form because the genre can elicit emotions and bring about an awareness as real and as moving as any play, painting, or musical composition. Its purpose is an exploration of self written by and for the author, and when done well, engages readers by including them in the journey. Readers identify with the pain or the joy of the piece, and while the author may not find an answer to the question posed, we all find enlightenment from the effort. That to me is art.

My purpose here is not to offer instruction on how to write the personal essay, but instead to examine what the personal essay has taught me about writing. The uniqueness of this genre is that it allows one to explore one's own strengths and foibles, as well as those of society. It requires the author to implicate herself as well as the reader. That is to say, the personal essayist examines how she is responsible for her own dilemma and also what role society plays in shaping that dilemma. As a result, she must be able to walk the fine line between self-pity and the recognition of forces outside one's control.

I find the examination of self and society, regardless of topic, requires a willingness to be honest with myself as well as the audience who

Irene Taylor is currently developing a series of personal essays into a one-woman play, *Reflections on the Semi-Interesting Life of a Middle Aged Woman* and would get much more work done if not for her dog and two cats holding her hostage each evening with their incessant snuggling and purring.

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reads my work. Unless that honesty makes both the reader and myself uncomfortable with its implication of the role we play in our own fate, then I haven't yet met the criteria of the personal essay. That is the real challenge of this genre—a willingness to explore what we'd rather leave alone and to expose readers to what they may not want to see in themselves but find they are ready to consider when it is presented in a fine work of art, the personal essay.

Of Scott Russell Sander's personal essay, "Under the Influence," Phillip Lopate writes:

> His quiet Midwestern modesty and sense of privacy, seemingly at odds with an autobiographical genre that normally attracts flamboyant, self-dramatizing egotists, accounts for some of the essay's tension—as though he would rather not write about himself, but the form demands it. The reflective personal essayist is obliged to dig deep into his psyche and reveal the results, and Sanders shows he is equal to the challenge. (732).

He would rather not write about himself, but the form demands it. This goes to the very essence of the essay. It is a genre that demands writers be willing to write about themselves in a direct, exposed forum, without the cover of the fictional characters and situations one finds in novels or plays.

If I want to discuss what the personal essay has taught me about writing, my inclination is to choose my best work as an example. But it was my essay, "Denial," that opened my eyes to the responsibility that comes with writing. When the personal essayists experience discomfort at starting a piece, they can be well assured they are on the right track. But once you choose a topic, you must be willing to commit yourself completely. If not, your paper becomes a narrative, a recounting of events, and no matter how riveting, it is not a personal essay if you are unwilling, or unable, to explore it in depth.

> I finally let go of the job I had struggled so long to keep. There's something about being a member of the working class and finding yourself among the working poor that puts your life in perspective. You have little time to recognize or even cope with the loss of a job. Your first priority is to meet your financial responsibilities in any manner available to you. When I left my job I had no options for work save the world of temp services—minimum wage, no benefits, and no long-term security.

The recounting of my experience as a victim (yes, VICTIM) of sexual harassment in the work place was little more than a narrative of events. As much as I tried to implicate myself, as much as I wanted to hold accountable the societal norms that allowed harassment to continue, I could not go beneath the surface. Twenty-five years later the wound was too raw to expose, and I failed at meeting the criteria of the genre. Writing is about commitment to your purpose. It's about meeting the expectations of your readers, making them feel it was worth the effort to spend their time with you. There are many avenues I could have used to recall that time in my life, but the personal essay was not the genre I should have chosen because I wasn't willing to dig deep enough into the experience. The time of the reader was ill spent, and the end result was to ask, "Why did I read this?" I know this to be true because I'm the one asking the question three years later.

As a genre of composition, the personal essay is a means by which writers may grow by building trust in themselves. The most polished composition skills will mean little to writers who do not believe that their own views and value system are worthy of expression. I know for me the result of studying this particular genre was a new found trust in my ability to express myself in a clear and coherent manner.

The Personal Essay and Me

I've used the personal essay as a means of exploring my own issues from the loss of a parent, to struggles with self image, and stagnation in the workplace. But the essay goes beyond what one would find in one's personal journal or even in a narrative recalling a particular event. The personal essay considers how issues relate to the reader. It looks at where to take responsibility for our actions as well as looking at how forces outside our control impact the decision-making process. My essay, "Last Week," was more than a recounting of events that took place during the last week of my mother's life. It was an exploration of the guilt I felt for not grieving more, for *not* being devastated by the loss.

> I learned early that death is inevitable, and as a consequence, the thought of my mother's death was with me throughout my life. I believed my life would crumble without her in this world. I imagined the circumstances of our final days and hours together. I would be at her side, holding her hand as she quietly drifted away. I would have "monstrous bruises on my knees from falling on them after I walked into [her] room and first saw her dead" (Strayed 291). The very core of my being would be irrevocably damaged. I would feel this constant physical ache. That's how I expected it to be, how I knew it should be for someone who lost the love of her life. But instead, I was asleep next to my lover, already starting my new life without her.

I wanted to understand my reaction to her death, but I also needed to look at the people around me, what I expected of them, when they met my needs, and when they failed me. This was not a piece about blame; it was about coming to an understanding of the healing process, what it means to grieve, why it is acceptable to expect what you may never receive because society and family, may not, cannot always be there for you.

> I called my brother from work. I could hear my mother moaning in the background. I laughed, not a nervous laugh, certainly not a 'that's so funny' laugh, but a 'now you know' laugh. You're with her now, doing the right thing—filling the role I've filled for the last 15 years. Giving me relief from the responsibility of caring for her, but it's too late. There's a part of me that doesn't want you there. You should have been there before, when she would have known it was you, when she would have known that even if I wasn't with her, someone else who loved her was. And now it's too late for both of us, and so I laugh.

This essay worked because I committed to the piece. I wrote, not just for me, but for the reader as well. I gave readers a reason to spend their time with me.

Drafts and Revisions

Titles are important to me. I find my best work always has come from the title. I should rename this piece "Second Draft."

After reading my first draft, I was given one revision, "Rewrite this. You argue that the personal essay has taught you to trust yourself and then proceed to spend over half of your paper quoting other authors." Although I argued that writing is about more than stringing together quotes and conclusions from published works, the piece ended up being what I thought others would want to read rather than what I wanted to say. Following is an excerpt from my first draft where I expound on the work of Scott Russell Saunders' essay, "Under the Influence."

> Sanders writes, "I do not wish to compete for a trophy in suffering. I am only trying to understand the corrosive mixture of helplessness, responsibility, and shame that I learned to feel as the son of an alcoholic" (734). He doesn't stop with an exploration of his own issues. He implicates the reader as he recalls society's moral condemnations of the evils of drinking as well as its abandonment of alcoholism's victims.
>
> > Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink, wrote Isaiah (737).
> >
> > We saw the bruised children of these fathers clump onto our school bus, we saw the abandoned children huddle in the pews at church, we saw the stunned and battered mothers begging for help at our doors (739).

> Sanders implicates himself when he acknowledges that recognizing his flaws has not meant that he could repair them. He sees his son taking on the same burden and adapting the same behaviors he did at that age in response to his father's addiction. "I write, therefore, to drag into the light what eats at me—the fear, the guilt, the shame—so that my own children may be spared" (744).

While I learned early on the skills I need to write correctly—grammar, punctuation, referencing, I never learned to trust myself as a writer until I was exposed to the personal essay. For all this genre has to offer the reader, its absolute requisite that we trust ourselves as writers is its most valuable contribution to the field of composition. Ironically, I still believed the only way to show the value of the personal essay was to look at an author who had already proven himself. I didn't trust my own skill to make the argument that we as writers must trust ourselves. That changed with this revision. I went back and pulled those quotes from writers such as Pickering and Sanders and replaced them with my own work. (And if you think that was easy, you are over-estimating the size of this person's ego.)

Writing is about risk. It's about trust. It's about our willingness to put our thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions out there for the world to see. The personal essay is a genre that expects, even demands, nothing less than our full and personal commitment to the process.

When I was an acting student, I confessed to my instructor that I had based my performance on the work of the actress who played the role on stage. He commended me saying, "a good actor is one who is willing to take and learn from the great actors." In that vein, here are the works of some of the essayists who had the most profound impact on me as a writer. They include Jo Ann Beard's *The Boys of My Youth*, Lucy Grealy's "Mirrorings: A gaze upon my reconstructed face," Ann Patchett's "Love Sustained," Adam Gopnik's "Bumping Into Mr. Ravioli," and David Sedaris' *Me Talk Pretty One Day*. I encourage you find these authors and revel in their words. From that will come your finest work.

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1 Section One: Narratives about Genre

Rules Are [not always] Rules: How I Learned that Grammar Rules Are Not Universal and What It Means for My Writing

Anjanette Riley

There are no such thing as grammar rules.

And I don't mean only those rules that govern how a sentence is organized. I am not talking just subject, verb, object stuff. Universal punctuation, style, and spelling rules are also little more than a myth.

Even as I wrote that line, memories of red marks on countless English papers flashed in my mind's eye. I distinctly heard Mrs. Mitchell, my 6th grade English teacher, reminding me to never split infinitives. I saw the "rules board" in Mrs. Latham's classroom that displayed LARGE PRINT warnings about what I can only imagine she believed to be the unparalleled dangers of misusing a semicolon. Even a few long-since forgotten episodes of *Schoolhouse Rock!* managed to make their way to the front of my mind before I finished typing.

All of these experiences taught me that grammar rules were like the rules of skydiving. Follow them or perish.

Anjanette Riley can leap small buildings in a single bound, read Aristotle's *Poetics* in its original Greek, and bake the world's best chocolate lava cake. She just chooses not to.

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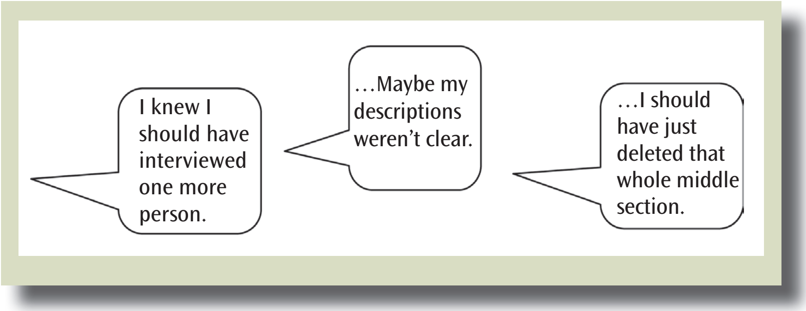
I believed this too. Three years ago I was working as copy-edit intern for the Arizona Secretary of State. I read countless government handbooks and reams and reams of statutes in just a few months. My job? Use the infamous red pen to mark and change all of the grammar "errors" before the texts went to print. A fellow intern one day asked me how I could be so confident with editing, an activity which left her just short of hyperventilating. My advice to her was that she simply memorize the rules—a sort of i-before-e-except-after-c approach to grammar. After all, rules are rules. They do not change.

I was confident, but I was wrong.

You might ask, what was the lesson that taught me to so humbly admit the errors of my ways?

Well, it happened something like this:

I had been working at the Arizona Capitol Times, a newspaper housed in Phoenix, Arizona that reports exclusively on the goings-on at the state capitol, for under a week when my editor called me into his office. I was scared. I wasn't a journalism major, so I was already more than a little out of my element in the face-paced newsroom. As I walked shakily to the large corner office, I tried to guess what about my first story was not up to snuff.


I knew I should have interviewed one more person.
…Maybe my descriptions weren't clear.
…I should have just deleted that whole middle section.

I did a double-take (quite a visible one) when I was finally shown my story. Almost every mark, every circle, every comment was about my grammar use. *This has to be a joke!* was the only thing I could think. *Grammar is my thing. There is no way I got all this wrong.*

It wasn't a joke, but I wasn't wrong either. It turns out that the grammar, punctuation, and style rules I followed in that first paper were right, at least sometimes. They just weren't right for a news article. I spent literally hours sitting in that corner office over the next couple weeks trying to learn this one very hard but important lesson: when it comes to grammar, there is no such thing as *always*. All grammar, punctuation, and style rules are, to some extent, determined by the genre.

Two of the rules I had to re-learn while writing at the newspaper can be found in this article:[1]

> Rep. Kyrsten Sinema will join state lawmakers from across the United States in the coming months to help President Obama reshape the nation's health care policy and reform a system that politicians from both parties say is broken.
>
> The Phoenix Democrat announced June 10 that she is one of 32 lawmakers selected—the only one from Arizona.
>
> "I'm so grateful and honored for this amazing opportunity to truly reform our nation's health care," Sinema stated in a press release. "Our health care system is broken and families and businesses are being crushed by high health care costs. The American people, including right here in Arizona, deserve better."
>
> Sinema and the other state lawmakers were asked to help Obama implement reform measures before the end of the year in an effort to reduce the cost of health care, protect patients' rights and ensure universal access to care.
>
> The 32 lawmakers are expected to hold weekly conference calls with the White House until reform measures are implemented.

One thing that really makes news stories seem so, well, newsie is the style rule that says quotes should be given their own paragraphs. A history professor my freshmen year had "firmly advised" me not to begin sentences with a quotation, much less paragraphs. I followed this rule in my first story and made sure that each quote was comfortably embedded in a sentence. But, as it turns out, journalists do not suffer from the same fear of the dreaded dropped quote. The newspaper genre has a different quotation rule.

And as much as I struggled with quotations, there was one punctuation rule that my ignorance of was the cause of more than one frustrated "reminder" from my editor: how to use a comma. The difference seems small, but it is definitely there. Writers at my newspaper, like many others, are required to *not* include the comma before the "and" in a series. This rule, for me at least, was different from anything I had ever written before. Remembering to include that final comma when I described to my 3rd grade teacher that I ate a sandwich, chips, and a cookie for lunch had been thoroughly drilled into my brain. It took time, and more than one edit, for me to master switching from rule to rule without complications.

---

[1] Riley, Anjanette. "Sinema Asked to Help Reform U.S. Health Care System." Arizona Capitol Times. 10 June 2009. Online.

I shouldn't have been surprised at what I learned from my editor. After all, even I knew that only someone that really doesn't understand the technology (like, say, grandparents) use complete sentences, unabbreviated words, and proper punctuation when texting. And, I can't even remember the last time I had an IM conversation where someone DIDN'T capitalize a word or phrase to make sure that YOU understood that they REALLY meant what they said?

But I still thought it was ungrammatical when I texted "CU later I have work" to my friends. What I didn't consciously realize was that text messaging has its own rules. "OMG i CAN'T believe how much fun friday was!!!" is a **perfectly correct** statement **when it is part of a text or IM conversation to my friends.**

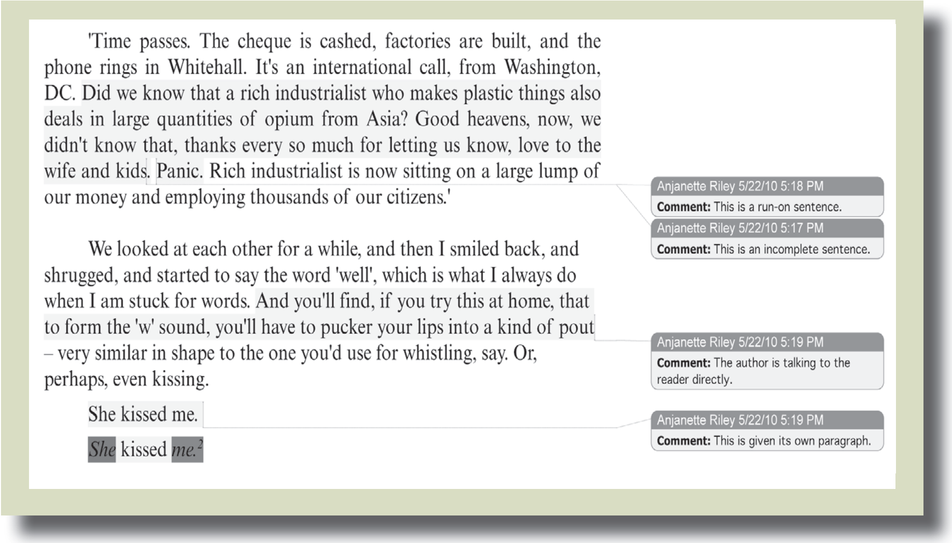
Every genre has its own grammar rules.

So, How Do I Learn the Different Grammar Rules?

I have learned that grammar and punctuation can be a tool. A way to help me say what I want to say. And, like any tool—a screwdriver, a crayon, Google, etc.—the more time I spend getting to know how the tool works, the more I can do with it.

In the two years since my Great Grammar Awakening, I have developed 4 strategies to approach grammar rules in new genres.

1. **Read:**
   Whenever I have to write in a new genre or a new situation, whether it is a research paper, a poem, or a cover letter for a job application, I find several examples of similar writings and read. While I read, I pull out my trusty highlighter and underline, circle, or highlight all the ways the author used grammar differently than I would.



'Time passes. The cheque is cashed, factories are built, and the phone rings in Whitehall. It's an international call, from Washington, DC. Did we know that a rich industrialist who makes plastic things also deals in large quantities of opium from Asia? Good heavens, now, we didn't know that, thanks every so much for letting us know, love to the wife and kids. Panic. Rich industrialist is now sitting on a large lump of our money and employing thousands of our citizens.'

Anjanette Riley 5/22/10 5:18 PM
Comment: This is a run-on sentence.

Anjanette Riley 5/22/10 5:17 PM
Comment: This is an incomplete sentence.

We looked at each other for a while, and then I smiled back, and shrugged, and started to say the word 'well', which is what I always do when I am stuck for words. And you'll find, if you try this at home, that to form the 'w' sound, you'll have to pucker your lips into a kind of pout – very similar in shape to the one you'd use for whistling, say. Or, perhaps, even kissing.

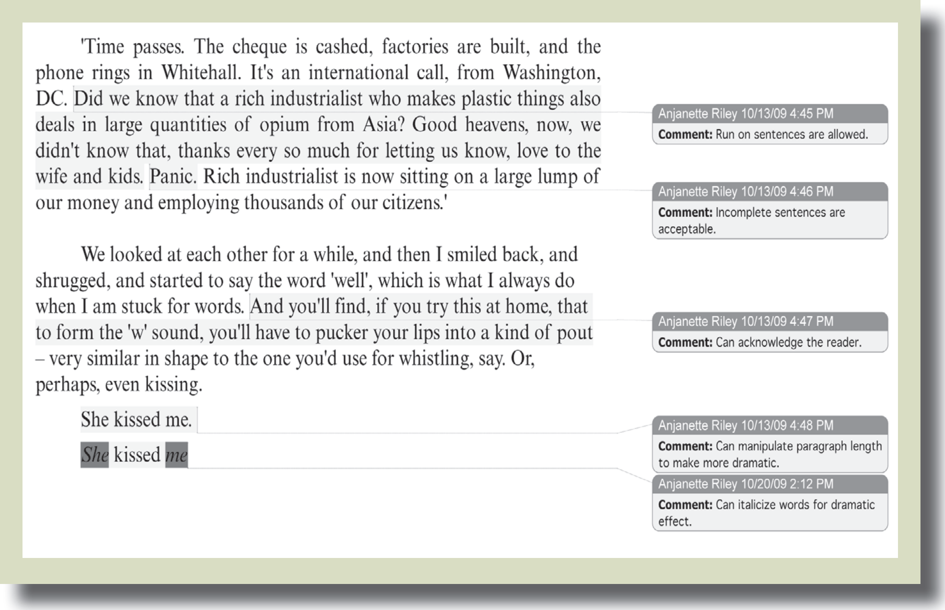
Anjanette Riley 5/22/10 5:19 PM
Comment: The author is talking to the reader directly.

She kissed me.

She kissed *me.*[2]

Anjanette Riley 5/22/10 5:19 PM
Comment: This is given its own paragraph.

2. **Define:**
   When I am done, I try and figure out just what rules this genre might have that allowed the author to write like they did. I use post-it notes, scraps of paper, my notebook, or the margins to work out these rules.



'Time passes. The cheque is cashed, factories are built, and the phone rings in Whitehall. It's an international call, from Washington, DC. Did we know that a rich industrialist who makes plastic things also deals in large quantities of opium from Asia? Good heavens, now, we didn't know that, thanks every so much for letting us know, love to the wife and kids. Panic. Rich industrialist is now sitting on a large lump of our money and employing thousands of our citizens.'

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She kissed me.

She kissed *me*

Anjanette Riley 10/13/09 4:45 PM
Comment: Run on sentences are allowed.

Anjanette Riley 10/13/09 4:46 PM
Comment: Incomplete sentences are acceptable.

Anjanette Riley 10/13/09 4:47 PM
Comment: Can acknowledge the reader.

Anjanette Riley 10/13/09 4:48 PM
Comment: Can manipulate paragraph length to make more dramatic.

Anjanette Riley 10/20/09 2:12 PM
Comment: Can italicize words for dramatic effect.

More examples make it easier to find patterns. And the faster I find patterns, the easier it is to write in the genre without fear of having to be pulled into someone else's office.

3. **Take Evasive Action:**
   When all else fails, I write around the rules. For example, I was stumped for years about whether a sentence in a short story should read "Angela passed by Jack, whom she had known since high school" or "Angela passed by Jack, who she had known since high school," so I manipulated the sentences to avoid the predicament all together. Writing "Angela passed Jack. The two had known each other since high school" ensured that I didn't break the rule, whatever it may be.

4. **Ask:**
   My editor taught me that it is always an option to ask someone who works in a genre what the rules are.

One More Thing

Another embarrassing encounter of the genre kind—the specifics of which I will conveniently ignore—helped me realize that it is dangerous to assume grammar rules will be the same now as they were when I last wrote in the genre. Genres and their grammar rules are constantly changing. Keeping track of these changes can be frustrating, but, sometimes, the new rules are quite a relief.

For example, it was once forbidden to begin a sentence in a research paper with "and," "but," or "because."

But it was often difficult to restructure sentences to avoid those three words.

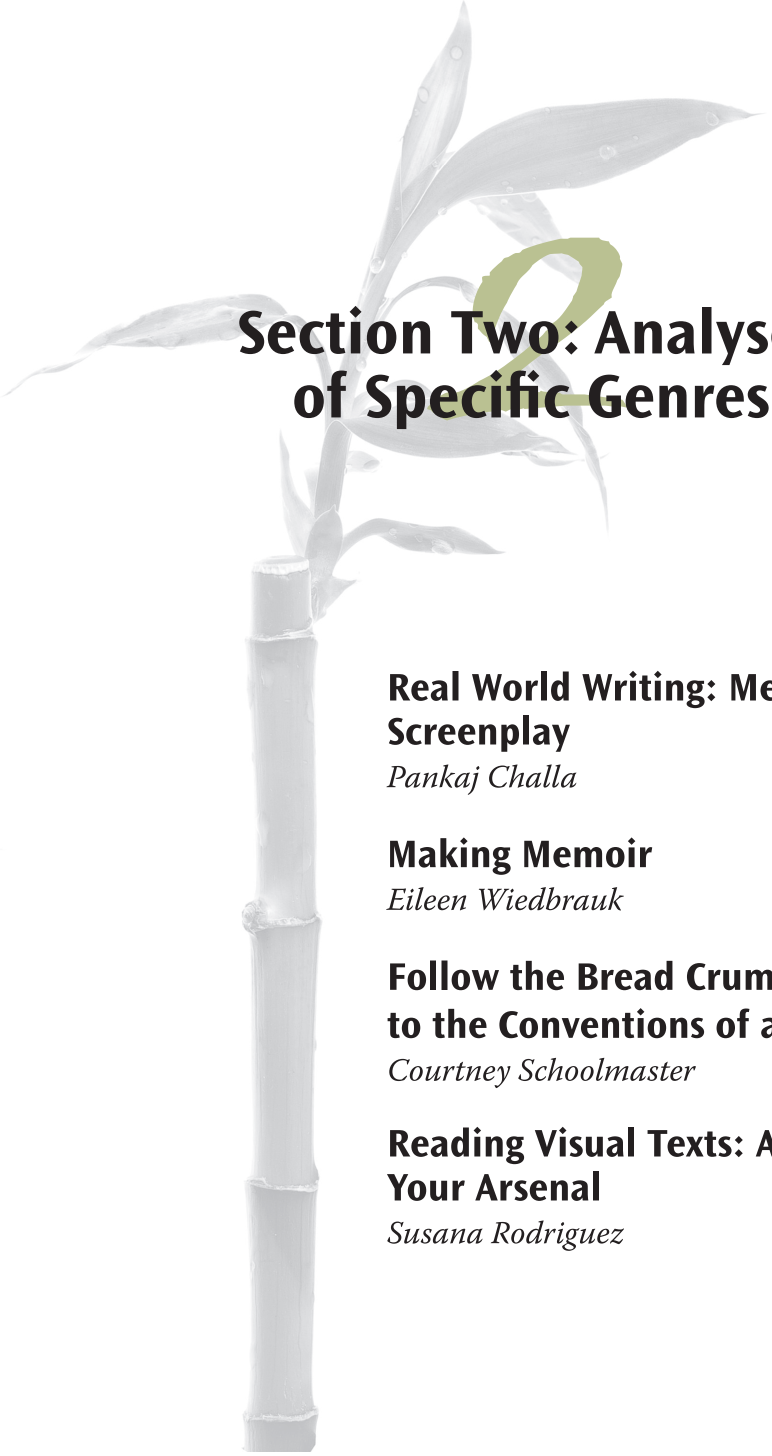
And it was never clear what crime they had committed to be so vigorous kept from the front of the sentence.

But no more.

Because those words have been freed in even the most formal writings.

And it is a good thing to.

Because I quite enjoy them.



2

Section Two: Analyses of Specific Genres

Real World Writing: Meet the Screenplay
Pankaj Challa

Making Memoir
Eileen Wiedbrauk

Follow the Bread Crumbs: Adhering to the Conventions of a Genre
Courtney Schoolmaster

Reading Visual Texts: A Bullet for Your Arsenal
Susana Rodriguez

Section Two: Analyses of Specific Genres

Real World Writing: Meet the Screenplay

Pankaj Challa

Pick the odd one out: Reading. Writing. College. Hollywood.

The answer seems obvious, but it's ironic that the industry we do not normally associate with reading or writing depends so much on a piece of writing: i.e., the screenplay.

As one might expect, screenplays are among the most lucrative examples of writing in the real world: a $2 million price tag for a feature-length script is not that uncommon in Hollywood these days. Never mind an original script: Hollywood studios pay big money to those who can "fix" an already finished, but ailing, screenplay. (Such fixers are called "script doctors," many of whom make as much and sometimes more money than, indeed, a doctor.)

Why do Hollywood Honchos pay all this attention to mere words on plain paper?

Pankaj Challa was trained as an engineer (he holds a B. Tech. in Electrical Engineering from Nagarjuna University, India), and has made independent films and written screenplays. After reading a volume of Chekhov's short stories in late 2005, he has turned seriously to the art of writing. He recently received an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Miami, where he was a James Michener Fellow. He is pursuing a PhD in English/Creative Writing at Illinois State University.

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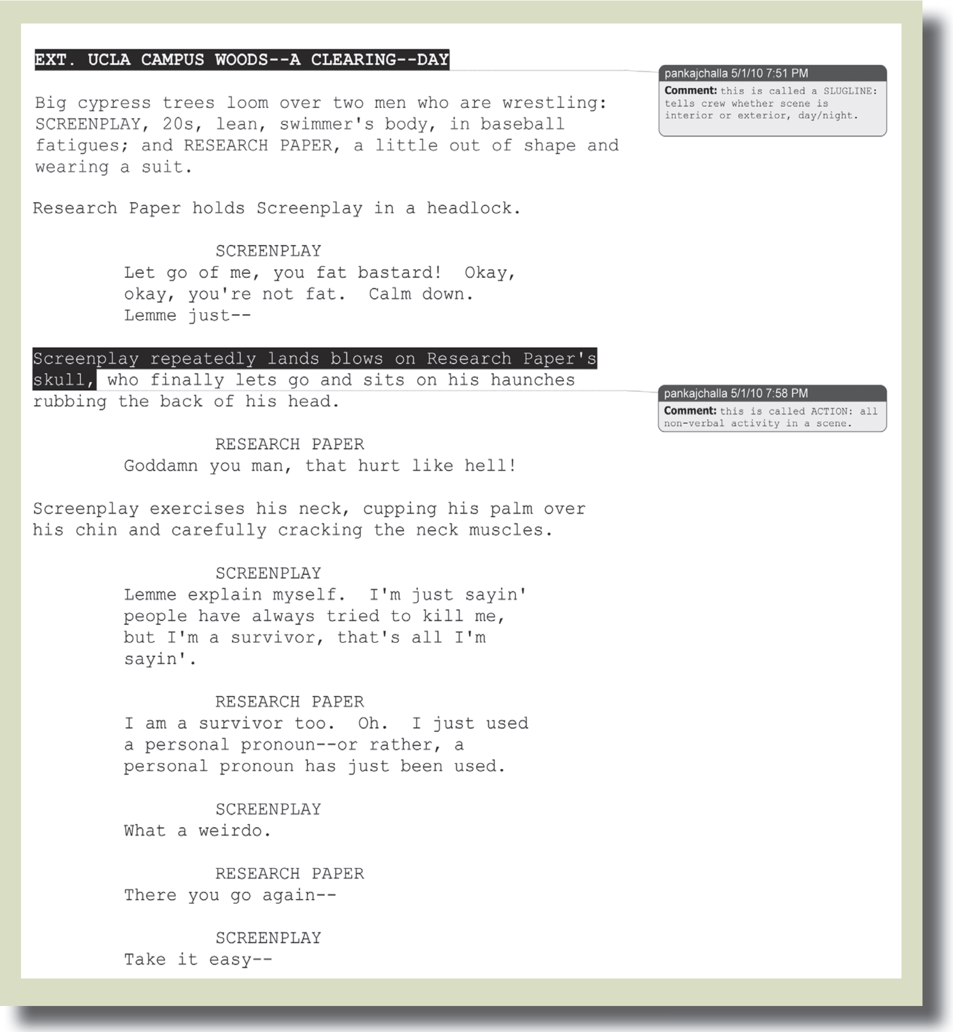
If Hollywood Honchos had a way of getting by without scripts, they might have slashed them long ago.

Like with most genres of writing in the real world, screenplays survive only because there is a strong need for them.

How then, does a screenplay look like? How different is it from a more familiar piece of writing, such as a research paper?

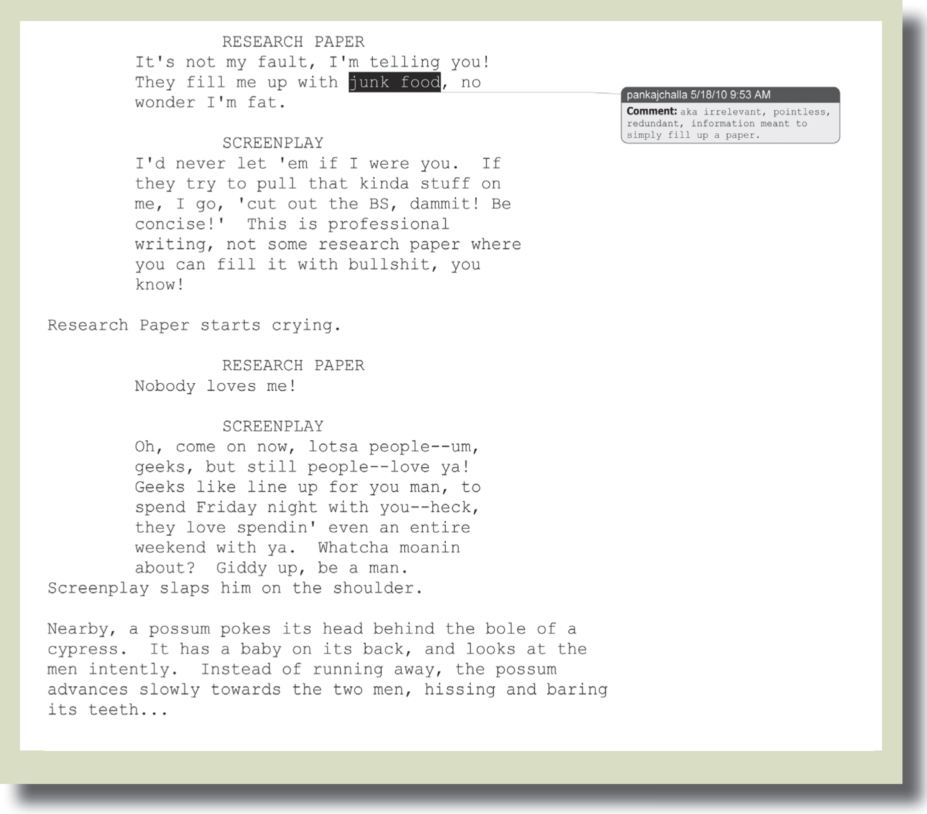
To find out, let's meet a screenplay "in action":



```
EXT. UCLA CAMPUS WOODS--A CLEARING--DAY

Big cypress trees loom over two men who are wrestling:
SCREENPLAY, 20s, lean, swimmer's body, in baseball
fatigues; and RESEARCH PAPER, a little out of shape and
wearing a suit.

Research Paper holds Screenplay in a headlock.

                  SCREENPLAY
         Let go of me, you fat bastard!  Okay,
         okay, you're not fat.  Calm down.
         Lemme just--

Screenplay repeatedly lands blows on Research Paper's
skull, who finally lets go and sits on his haunches
rubbing the back of his head.

                  RESEARCH PAPER
         Goddamn you man, that hurt like hell!

Screenplay exercises his neck, cupping his palm over
his chin and carefully cracking the neck muscles.

                  SCREENPLAY
         Lemme explain myself.  I'm just sayin'
         people have always tried to kill me,
         but I'm a survivor, that's all I'm
         sayin'.

                  RESEARCH PAPER
         I am a survivor too.  Oh.  I just used
         a personal pronoun--or rather, a
         personal pronoun has just been used.

                  SCREENPLAY
         What a weirdo.

                  RESEARCH PAPER
         There you go again--

                  SCREENPLAY
         Take it easy--
```

pankajchalla 5/1/10 7:51 PM
Comment: this is called a SLUGLINE: tells crew whether scene is interior or exterior, day/night.

pankajchalla 5/1/10 7:58 PM
Comment: this is called ACTION: all non-verbal activity in a scene.



RESEARCH PAPER
It's not my fault, I'm telling you!
They fill me up with junk food, no
wonder I'm fat.

pankajchalla 5/18/10 9:53 AM
Comment: aka irrelevant, pointless, redundant, information meant to simply fill up a paper.

SCREENPLAY
I'd never let 'em if I were you. If
they try to pull that kinda stuff on
me, I go, 'cut out the BS, dammit! Be
concise!' This is professional
writing, not some research paper where
you can fill it with bullshit, you
know!

Research Paper starts crying.

RESEARCH PAPER
Nobody loves me!

SCREENPLAY
Oh, come on now, lotsa people--um,
geeks, but still people--love ya!
Geeks like line up for you man, to
spend Friday night with you--heck,
they love spendin' even an entire
weekend with ya. Whatcha moanin
about? Giddy up, be a man.
Screenplay slaps him on the shoulder.

Nearby, a possum pokes its head behind the bole of a
cypress. It has a baby on its back, and looks at the
men intently. Instead of running away, the possum
advances slowly towards the two men, hissing and baring
its teeth...

So: there's an off-the-cuff example of a piece of writing in a screenplay format. What then are the elements of a screenplay: what bricks are used to construct one?

Let's look at a movie clip and work our way backwards to understand the building blocks of film. Copy and paste the following URL into your browser to watch this excerpt from the Coen brothers' film *Miller's Crossing*:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IEet3GLWzs

What you see in the above clip is a short **sequence**: *a series of related scenes.*

How many scenes does this clip have (up to 2:32, the chandelier closeup)? How many shots? (Answers at back.)

The basic building block of film is the shot. (Compare this to language, where words combine to form sentences, paragraphs, and so on. Similarly, in film, shots combine to make scenes, which in turn combine to make the movie.)

What is a shot? *A single unbroken exposure of film is a shot.*

What is a scene? *An event that occurs in one location and one time.* Say you are making scrambled eggs in the kitchen while listening to Led Zeppelin (you've had a long night), and you hear dogs barking outside, in your garden (they are not your dogs). You go out to investigate. If we were to film this, how many scenes would it make?

Yes, that's two.

Scene 1: INT. KITCHEN—NIGHT

Scene 2: EXT. GARDEN—NIGHT

Again, whenever there's a change in location or time, it's a new scene.

A movie is made up of a bunch of scenes. And writing a screenplay involves stringing together several scenes that collectively form a narrative. Let's look at what goes into each scene in a screenplay.

Slugline

The "heading" that identifies a scene. Each scene begins with a slugline. Here's the slugline from the above example again:

INT. KITCHEN—NIGHT

Notably, the slugline includes the following info in the following order: Whether the scene is interior or exterior (INT/EXT); the location of scene (KITCHEN); the time (DAY/NIGHT).

Action

Everything other than dialog is action: gestures, descriptions, explosions, car crashes, fist fights, kisses... you get the picture.

Dialog

All verbal sounds characters make: whether it's in any known language or interjections.

How might one benefit from being exposed to screenwrting though? How does this connect to the sort of writing commonly encountered in college or professional life?

Appearances aside, screenwriting is really not all that different from other, more familiar formats of writing: it is in many ways just a special case of Business Writing.

Screenwriting follows the same principles any piece of Professional Writing must.

Screenwriting is governed by the "7 Cs of Effective Business Communication" as famously laid out by Murphy & Hildebrandt: Conciseness, Concreteness, Completeness, Correctness, Consideration, Clarity, and Courtesy.

In this way, screenwriting is a sort of cousin to the research paper, and they both share the above seven principles with memos, business reports, and virtually all modes of professional writing.

Let's look at these principles as they apply to screenwriting (and by extension, to business writing).

Conciseness

I'll mention just one reason why this principle is crucial in screenwriting: the conventional page-to-screen ratio is 1:1; i.e., one page of script roughly corresponds to one minute on film. The standard length of an industry screenplay is 120 pages (two hours on film). If you follow the principles and correct format of screenwriting, the page-to-screen ratio will take care of itself; overall, it will remain close to 1:1. But if your language is not crisp and you indulge in rhetorical flourishes, the entire crew will want to strangle you not because they abhor your metaphors, but because you are messing with their estimates. (Yes, estimates—of time and film stock. An entire group of people other than the screenwriter—the crew—plans their day and work around the script. They rely on it for answers to such key questions as, "How many rolls of film do we need for today?" and the always momentous, "How many scenes to shoot before we can break for lunch?") In business too, you want to be concise in memos and related messages; otherwise your employees might laugh at you. They might call you wordy William or wordy Wendy.

Concreteness

Concreteness is about being specific. For example, take the case of a screenwriter who envisions a scene taking place in someone's office with a sink in the corner; but this detail is omitted in the scene description. How is the crew supposed to know that there's a sink in the corner unless the script says so? (Especially as a sink is not part of standard office furnishings usually—the crew needs to know in advance so that they can find an office with a sink or install one on set.) In business likewise, concreteness is crucial at almost every step. Say you are a car dealer ordering a shipment of cars. How can the order be done successfully without giving concrete, specific details? How many cars are needed? Make? Model? Year? Color? Miss any of these details and your message is not concrete enough to be fulfilled; you'll get an annoyed email or phone call asking you to resend your order.

Completeness

Completeness in many cases goes hand in hand with concreteness. Here's a key question to ask while checking for completeness: does the message include all the required information at the required level of detail so that it fulfils its purpose?

Take the convention of the Slugline in screenplays. Suppose I write:

INT. FARMHOUSE

That's only two parts of the required info: the slugline above does not specify whether the scene is "DAY" or "NIGHT". The crew member in charge of buying film stock will be annoyed: the film used for "day" scenes and "night" scenes is different, and incomplete sluglines translate to an incomplete shopping list. In the everyday business world too, being complete means not leaving out important information. Assume, for instance, that I must send a message informing colleagues about an upcoming event; if the location happens to be deep in the country or otherwise obscure and no directions are provided, the message might very well be incomplete and unsuccessful. Zero guests. Failed event. Duh, you say? Indeed.

Clarity

In a memo, if the writer's sentences are convoluted, or jump around from idea to idea without no seeming connection, he/she will be made fun of in the break room: Confused Keith or Connie and the rest of it. How to be clear though? Here's one tip that holds true in almost all professional writing: try to limit one idea per sentence. In screenwriting, clarity is achieved by keeping sentences simple, crisp, and using active voice and precise verbs when possible. ("*She comes into the room*" is not clear enough; "*She storms into the room*" suggests mood, speed, dynamism. In this case, the verb "storms" is a more precise descriptor, and hence contributes to greater clarity.)

Consideration

If I needed to send a "bad-news" letter to a client, I'd want to be considerate: if I am turning down a request, I ought to be able to put myself in the client's position, empathize with them. (While refusing a request, it is sound business practice to try and suggest alternatives to the client.) This skill of empathy is implicit in a good screenwriter. Empathy is the key to writing good dialog: to create and develop an effective character, you ought to be able to see the person in your mind's eye, hear them talk, and portray them from the inside out on the page. For this reason, if you are able to write good dialog, usually it means you listen to and understand people well: which in turn points to good interpersonal skills.

Correctness

Being "correct" in this sense means getting facts and figures right: blunders in statistics (or data) in reports, errors in meeting times/locations in memos, all have potentially disastrous consequences. Likewise, in film, if your scene is set in San Francisco and you are using local color, get the facts right about the local jargon. For example, natives of the bay area almost never refer to San Francisco as "Frisco"; terms such as "the City" or "San Fran" are more representative of correct local usage.

Courtesy

It goes without saying that the tone in business writing should never even tend towards the rude/disrespectful. The same principle applies in screenwriting, although in a less visible way: while inter-character dialog and action follow the roughness of real life, behind the scenes, a good screenwriter still approaches each scene with due respect to all characters, trying to understand and portray them as faithfully as possible. Susannah Grant could not have written such a successful screenplay about a single-mom paralegal with a racy dress code (Erin Brockovich) if she was entertaining dismissive thoughts about such people while writing.

Now that we have laid down the rationale for screenwriting, here's the process, in a nutshell, of writing a short screenplay or a short sequence:

I. **Read one or two (or a few) screenplays** to get a better sense of the genre: look below for resources.

II. **Use a screenplay template** (assuming you don't have access to professional scriptwriting software such as Final Draft): There are scores of such templates for Word available online, but many are inaccurate. A template made available for free public educational use on the following website is reasonably close to the standard format:

http://www.keithloh.com/writing/filmscript/templates.html

The webpage includes a template file, invites visitors to "use it, change it," and provides instructions for setting it up in Word.

III. **Prepare a step outline**: Once you have an idea for your short screenplay or sequence, prepare a list of your scenes: specify the "where and when" of each scene, who's in it, and in a line or two, summarize what happens. This is known as a "step outline" and looks something like this:

EXT. GOLF COURSE—DAY

While they finish up on the last hole, Nick and Tom see Andrea driving up towards them on a golf cart, yelling and waving a golf club menacingly. Nick legs it down the fairway and Andrea chases him.

INT. CLUBHOUSE—DAY

Andrea gives Nick a good talking-to while he tries his best to defend himself.

IV. **Develop your step-outline into full-fledged scenes**: Give a moment-to-moment description of what happens in each scene, with action and dialog.

Use the following tips/pointers as you expand your step-outline into a full screenplay:

1. **Scene**
    - a. select locations that are varied in texture if at all possible: locations that are interesting audio-visually; ask yourself if you are varying locations/settings between some common dualities: INT/EXT? DAY/NIGHT? Quiet/noisy? Solitary/crowd? Public places/private? Spacious surroundings/more confined spaces? Dark/Bright? Sunny/rainy (snowy)? You are not required to vary scenes in this way necessarily, but depending on your story, explore opportunities to do so.
    - b. limit phone scenes as much as possible, as they are visually confining.
2. **Action**
    - a. write only what we can "see and hear" (as Epstein often reminds us).
    - b. use simple sentences, active voice, present tense, and keep descriptions sharp and concise.
    - c. no more than 4/5 lines per para.
    - d. the first time you introduce a character in a scene, do this: capitalize their name, and describe them in a way that gives us a sense of their physical appearance and age. Eg, "*JOE sits alone at the table. He is a short, stocky man in his 50s with a prominent scar across his cheek.*"
    - e. first line following slugline should almost always be action.

3. **Dialog**

    a. keep it concise: no more than 4/5 lines in one dialog block.

    b. for longish speeches by a single character: punctuate their speech with action.

    c. read your dialog out loud: is it essayistic dialog/spoken dialog? Real speech has a more haphazard syntax: eg, fragments, elisions.

    d. fit speech to characters: age, occupation, personality, diction. (Although sometimes you can play with irony here—as when a child speaks with a surprisingly mature diction.)

    e. keep dialog significant & purposeful, linked indirectly or directly to character goals; avoid commonplaces such as hi, hello (unless they are clearly acting as subtext).

    f. be conscious of "inside words/outside words": avoid putting character thoughts/motivations into external dialog: a character might think something ("inside words") but will usually say something more indirect ("outside words").

    g. the best dialog is rich with subtext.

4. **Anatomy of a scene**

    Last but not least, every scene should have **conflict** of some kind: a scene usually is the product of conflict between at least two opposing forces. Character A wants something: and B is someone or something obstructing that.

A<-------->B

The scene then becomes about how A tries to overcome the obstacle. The scene ends when A achieves the goal or has to give up to return at some other time/approach the problem from some other angle.

That's it, we're done. "**Fin**."

Selected Resources

Epstein, Alex. *Crafty Screenwriting*. New York: Henry Holt, 2002. (*Perhaps the most pioneering and "standard" screenwriting book is* Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting *by Syd Field; he is the sage of screenwriting, but Epstein is more up-to-date and accessible.*)

Grant, Susannah. *Erin Brockovich*. Screenplay. New York: New Market Press, 2001.

Hildebrandt, Herbert W., and Herta Murphy. *Effective Business Communication*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1997. (*Look here for a more detailed discussion of the 7 Cs.*)

Wachowski, Larry, and Andy Wachowski. *The Matrix*. Screenplay. New York: New Market Press, 2002.

Daily Script—Movie Scripts and Movie Screenplays. <http://www.daily-script.com/movie.html> (*Take these free scripts online with a pinch of salt. A more reliable source for screenplays is a good university library: most carry a few scripts from the popular "Newmarket Shooting Script Series" label, such as the example scripts from the series I've included above.*)

* * *

And by the way, that *Miller's Crossing* film clip up to 2:32 has, if I'm counting right, 55 shots and 6 scenes (downstairs room, living room/stairwell, hallway/corridor, Leo's bedroom, room overlooking garden, and garden outside window).

Section Two: Analyses of Specific Genres

Making Memoir

Eileen Wiedbrauk

Memoir writing floats around our lives, settling itself in different places, taking on different names and shapes, letting us glance at it, experience it and engage in making it—sometimes without even recognizing that what we're making is memoir. Some of the more obvious places to find memoirs are, well, in books labeled *memoir*, or in literary magazines that label stories as *creative non-fiction*.

Other places in real life to find memoir or memoir-based texts:

- Humor columns in magazines or newspapers
- Political opinion pieces
- Facebook note phenomena "25 Things"
- Personal blogs
- Dating website profiles
- Stand up comic's routines

Despite having undoubtedly come in contact with some of the above aspects of memoir at some point in our lives, most of us freeze when we are asked to create memoir in a classroom writing setting. *Whaddaya mean 'memoir?' Nothing interesting enough's happened to me to*

Eileen Wiedbrauk is the editor of creative non-fiction for *Third Coast* Magazine. She likes to write unclassifiable little stories that people tend to classify as fantasy, science fiction, or magical realism. Occasionally, she writes about real life, books, cats, coffee and the antics of her idiot neighbors—most of which ends up on her blog, SpeakCoffeeToMe.blogspot.com.

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make a memoir. But really, an assignment called memoir—often titled the less scary but still ambiguous "personal narrative"—is just an essay about the subject matter we know the best: ourselves.

> *Describe an experience that had meaning or significance to you …*
>
> *Focus on a person, place, object or event that is important to you and tell me a story from your life …*
>
> *Choose a significant moment from your life that took place in ten minutes or less; try to choose a moment that was not obviously life-altering…*

All of these statements have made their way into descriptions of memoir assignments at one time or another.[1] Many—okay, I'd say most—of the wordings lend themselves to writing about *one thing* that *happened*. Since the implication is that there has to be *action*, we start thinking about events. Writing about an event seems like a good idea because we're guaranteed that something will have changed by the end of the story, that there will be action—and our instructors want essays with action. And describing a single event seems like a good notion for a paper that's going to be somewhere between three and seven pages (length varies by instructor). So keep it simple, right? But what constitutes an event?

When we boil our lives down to update emails or phone calls back home—better yet, a phone call to the grandparents—we tend to highlight the big stuff.

> I graduated this weekend. The ceremony was really boring but I decorated my cap to look really cool…My spring break trip was awesome. First the cruise ship stopped at St. Johns, then Key Largo, and then we went parasailing.

But "events" don't necessarily have to be something momentous, or something you'd even bother to tell your grandmother, they can be completely mundane. Opening my toothpaste cap this morning was an event. I don't think anything was directly connected to it, but it could have been the event that made me late and set off the worst day ever. Going to the Animal Rescue the day I got my kitten is an event. Not a major one—a day slightly out of the ordinary, yes, but certainly not the kind of essay with a long list of events/steps to narrate.

→ What does this mean anyway? **WORD: Narrate (v)**. In its most basic form **narrating** is describing, building the world in words … narrating is the difference between telling and storytelling.

It's also not the kind of writing that lends itself to a cheesy summation in the final line such as *it was one of the most wonderful days of my life*, or ~~*I've learned so much from my kitten*~~, *my kitten and I have learned so* *much from each other*… The truth is that I've only had her for two weeks and the most I've learned is to watch where I step (she is constantly underfoot) and she's learned that meowing long enough will produce someone with opposable thumbs to pour more kibble. And the *truth* is much more interesting. But the even bigger, brighter truth is that our instructor isn't looking for a ~~neat~~, ~~clean~~, tidy "end line," she's looking for a thoughtful narrative. →

There I go again using that term.

WORD: **Narrative (n)**. A **narrative** is not a mere retelling of facts. A narrative is a story. It is narrated (see above) by a narrator (you).

It's a story about you.

It's you as a story.

It's a story like "hey, tell me a story about yourself" … except more ***thoughtful***,

…and by ***thoughtful*** I mean it's a story with a **focus**.

Part One: Thesis vs. Focus

Here's where the notion of a memoir as a personal essay gets tricky: **it doesn't need a thesis → it needs a focus.**

↓

Real World Example: In Geeta Kothari's "If You Are What You Eat, Then What Am I?" Kothari focuses on food to tell her narrative. In fact, each of her numbered sections are about food in one way or another—and she uses these anecdotes, this string of mini-stories, to describe her social awkwardness as an immigrant to the United States and her false sense of security as a visitor to her parents' native India. Though Kothari never gives us a thesis statement that says ~~*this is an essay on food, family and culture*~~, *this essay will demonstrate the difficulties of living in a non-native culture as proven through the differing uses of food*, we fully understand that she has shown us exactly that by narrowing her focus to food.

She opens the entire memoir by leaping directly in to one of her food mini-stories:

> The first time my mother and I open a can of tuna, I am nine years old. We stand in the doorway of the kitchen, in semi-darkness, the can tilted toward daylight. I want to eat what the kids at school eat: bologna, hot dogs, salami—foods my parents find repugnant because they contain pork and meat by-products, crushed bone and hair glued together by chemicals and fat. Although she has never been able to tolerate the smell of fish, my mother buys the tuna, hoping to satisfy my longing for American food.

And then, in a one line paragraph, Kothari hits us with the main conflict of her entire piece, the single fact that gives her memoir tension *and* focus:

> Indians, of course, do not eat such things.

(So) if we need a focus, not a thesis, writing down the step-by-step actions of a single event would be a bad idea. Example of a bad idea:

< ---- STEP BY STEP ACTION----> →
(**Action 1**) I put on my gown and cap. (**Action 2**) Outside the auditorium my friends and I took lots of pictures. (**Action 3**) Then my parents had to go inside to get seats while I lined up with the rest of the graduating seniors. (**Action 4**) We processed into the auditorium. (Add subjective detail) It was really hot inside. (**Action 5**) The ceremony took over an hour but I can't remember anything the speaker said, I was too anxious to walk across the stage and get my diploma.
< ---- I THINK THIS ONE'S OUT[2] ---- >

This example is packed with step-by-step telling (it would be step-by-step ***narration*** if the author described more physical and emotional details and explained their importance in the context of the scene), but there is no **theme** or **focus** ... unless this turns into a memoir about someone with memory loss problems, then it's a little better.

Consider: What makes facts boring and stories interesting?

(So) if we can't just jot down the events in chronological order, how are we ever going to come up with 3–7 pages to turn in? I suggest **starting with detail**, and allowing ourselves the chance to have detail lead us to everything else we need.

[Take freewrite time in class to jot down things you remember in detail]

Let's say I'm writing about a time when I was sixteen and I get to a point where I write: *We got into the car*.

What about that sentence is narration? Yes, it is a listing, in written form—but is it narration? Does it give the reader any insight into my life at the time? Does it let the reader see what I saw? Does it tell show the feelings produced by getting into the car?

A specific, useful detail will paint a picture for the reader. It means that if you put the reader down in the time and place of the actual story, they wouldn't be disoriented. So what if we broke it down to give the reader more detail…

Part Two: Detail

Let's say we start by thinking of an event, and the start of that event involves getting into a car and driving someplace. We write *We got into the car*. Yes, that's what we did, but what a boring sentence! Why is it boring? There's absolutely nothing interesting being told to the reader. There's no detail. To be more interesting we need to elaborate.

Detail Elaboration:

We got into the car.

The car we got into was my first car.
→ **unhelpful detail**

Unhelpful detail: The car is described, "my first" provides more detail than simply "the". *However*, that description means something to the writer and NOTHING to the reader How would anyone else know what my first car looked like if I didn't tell them?

the maroon car → generic detail

Generic detail: Well, at least color is something the reader can visualize, but it's still not much to help the reader see it—we can do better

a maroon 1986 Dodge Dynasty → **specific** = yes
→ **useful** = not really

The detail about the year is good...but it's relative to something we don't yet know. The meaning of a "1986 Dodge Dynasty" changes drastically if I received the car in 1986 or in 2006... I'll need to then give my reader a reference point in the text if I want this to have any useful meaning

My first car was a 1986 maroon Dodge Dynasty that had rolled off the production line back when I was still in diapers. I never did call it the Dynasty, although it was a huge boxy, beast that could easily be compared to an ancient empire, I called it the 'ynasty because the D had fallen off the driver's side decal. I'd been taught in driver's ed. to adjust the seat to see over the wheel, reach the peddles and feel comfortable, but there was no doing that in the 'ynasty. It had one long, maroon bench seat that didn't slide, didn't tilt, just sported a depression worn in by other drivers over the past fourteen years. Instead of adjusting the seat, I had to ask my grandmother for a pillow to prop behind my back to drive it home. My grandfather gave it to me free and clear once he realized I was about to turn sixteen. He was the kind of man who always had extra cars sitting around. The kind of man who thought if he held onto enough stuff he could buy, sell or trade his way to the better deal.

Woah! now that's detailed! I can see it, as a reader, I really know what I'm dealing with!

→ detail level = happiness

But we're not done yet.

I've written down a lot of specific, descriptive details here, but to what end? What's the point? All of the things I've written are good details – but just because something really was a certain way doesn't mean it's important to my memoir.

Items that are important to my memoir should somehow relate to my focus. Is the bit about my grandfather being *the kind of man who always had extra cars lying around* a **useful detail or a digression** that would lead the reader away from the main focus of my essay? That depends on what my focus is.

In the description of my car I have two things going on:

(1) the physical description of the car

(2) my grandfather giving me the car.

Which is important?

This is where editing the first draft comes into play. I can walk away from this description and come back to it in a few days or a few hours and after rereading I can ask myself what it is that I want to develop this memoir into. Remember, we're letting the details lead us into something bigger. I can look at all the details I have lined up and decide if the memoir going to be about:

(1) me and the cars I've owned and driven, perhaps the road trips that the car(s) have seen me through?

(2) myself, my car and my grandfather?

If my focus is my first car, then the detail about my grandfather's habits becomes an unnecessary digression that leads the reader away from the focus of the ~~story~~ narrative: experiences with my car. A focus should be just that: something to focus the reader's attention on.

But what if this isn't an essay focused on my first car? What if this is really an essay about my relationship with my grandfather as focused through cars?

Describing a relationship as focused through cars is extremely impersonal, mechanical even. Consider the difference between telling a story through cars and telling a story through puppies we raised together or baseball games that he coached me through. Except, in this case, using something impersonal is perfect. He never raised puppies or coached baseball. He wasn't that kind of man. And he and I were never close.

I think we stumbled on something brilliant here.

Idea in hand, I start jotting down notes, thinking of all the car stories I've heard about my grandfather (there are lots):

- Taxi service he owned
- Tour bus company…the only successful business he ever had
- Car he gave to me

CONSIDER: What am I willing to share about my personal life? This piece is going to be read by the instructor and most likely by other students if there is a peer review session

- That the sheriff issued him a driver's license when he was 14 because they knew he and his twin brother were driving without one and wanted at least one of them to be legal
- The year that he drove a riding mower because he'd had his license suspended for putting his car up on the rail of the 9th Street Bridge on the way home from the bar ↓

CONSIDER: Am I revealing something that is going to make me uncomfortable? In my case, the whole town knew—both about the riding mower and the drinking problem even if they didn't call it that—and now my family jokes about the stupidity of it so I'm okay with including it in my memoir.

CONSIDER: Names as details. Specific names tell the reader more than you might think. Consider if I had just said "bridge" – we wouldn't know if it was a covered bridge or the Golden Gate Bridge. Using specific given names instead of generic names has an amazing way of *placing* the reader even if the reader has never been there before.

Part Three: Order

↓

So what about the order? Do I make the events chronological and start with my grandfather at fourteen? Or do I relay the anecdotes to the reader in the same order they were relayed to me by my family?

In this case, I think the second option suits my purpose better (check out the lists on the next page to see how order changes the feel of a story). I'll start with my car, then why he had cars lying about

→ they were old taxis.
→ taxi business to charter bus business
→ then other stories anecdotes
→ car stories
→ then...?

My plan seems to have a good start, but now it's getting ambiguous. Where do I go from here?

↓

Perhaps I'll write each story separately and then make sense of where they go after they're written.

↓

I need to keep in mind what will grab an audience's attention. →

- exotic detail
- shock value (scandal)
- witty phrasing (comedy)
- tugging on heartstrings (puppies)

There are a couple different ways to organize these small anecdotes into one long memoir. I’ve jotted down some notes to compare how two different orders affect the overall feeling of my memoir.

Chronological Order

Start with first event that happened

- At 14, my grandfather and his twin roared down the country roads without a license. The Sheriff knew it was going on and came to talk to their father; might as well make one of them legal.
- He’d lose that license but he’d never give up driving.
- 20 years later he put the car up on the side of a bridge while drunk
- Another 20 years pass and thanks to the AA he’s not losing his license anymore, he’s driving taxi in his own business
- It turns into a bus business
- He still has extra cars in his yard because they’re left over taxis when he realized I’m about to turn 16 and gives me one.
- The car is a piece. I describe in detail why it’s so crappy.

After reading my rough outline for a chronological order I’m not very satisfied. By this account I know *what happened* but they’re just events. I don’t get the chance to tell the events in a sequence that would make meaning. They’re just events. They don’t relate to each other, instead they’re connected only by the person that lived them. There’s no emotion. As a reader, there’s nothing I can take away from it. I’m bored with this order and I’m the one telling the story! If I’m bored now there’s no hope for my audience staying awake.

Flowing from one detail to another

Start with descriptive, personal detail

- My grandfather had a gritty, phlegmy laugh. “You’re turning 16, eh?” He laughed. “Want a car?”
- I was floored. Of course I did!
- Describe car...finish with: the car was left over from the taxi business
- The taxi started because there wasn’t one in Alpena at the time. It turned into a bus and a courier service.
- Bridge incident.
- Riding lawn mower. He was gonna show them. They couldn’t keep him from driving. And they couldn’t. They didn’t. No one ever did show him.

This order lets me link the events together as I see fit. The sequence (order) of events allows me to further develop certain details that would have been hard to do in a chronological version. It also allows me to withhold information until later to produce a dramatic finish.

Don't bore the reader!

The **purpose** of memoir is usually to entertain or instruct the **audience**, not to reiterate your vacation itinerary or the year-by-year account of my grandfather’s life.

CONSIDER: A long series of “and then ...and then...next...then...” might bore the reader. Try to find ways of connecting that are *more* than just chronological.

CONSIDER: How can one detailed event connect to the next without “and then”?

CONSIDER: Which events need to be cut because they’re too mundane?

But I still don't have an **introduction**.

↓

Part Four: Writing the Introduction

I tend to see two methods to opening a memoir.

(1) A generic "ramping up" method

Ex: *Blueberry, Casper the friendly white car, Katerina, Phoenix, Sparkle and the Black Devil who leaked carbon-monoxide through the air conditioner. These are the names of all my cars.*[3]

The "ramping up" method tends to produce a thesis-like statement at the end of the paragraph:

The author builds up the reader with a generic list of items (car names) to give the reader a general sense that this will be about cars without actually touching on any of the specifics of the actual memoir.

↓

which is sad because we like specifics

They've taught me that no matter what's happened before, the next car will have its own adventure in store.

Given this "ramping up" followed by a thesis-like statement, we can assume that this memoir would look like an extremely traditional essay and deliver the adventure(s) experienced in the narrator's car(s).

(2) The "diving right in" method

Often starts with:

ACTION → *My grandfather put the keys in my hand and I couldn't believe it: my own car.*

-OR

SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF A PLACE/OBJECT/PERSON → *He had a course, gritty laugh that sounded like a combination of being an old man and a smoker. I'd never heard of him smoking, though he'd certainly spent enough time in the VFW bar to accumulate all the health problems of a smoker.*

This method reads more like a *story* than an essay.

Both methods work. They both get things started with detail. Since I want my memoir to be a story told in a series of anecdotes

→ **WORD: ANECDOTE (n.)**
a short account of a particular incident or event of an interesting or amusing nature, often biographical.

of which I am a main character, I'm going to go with the action driven second option of "diving right in" and completely ignore the "ramping up" before the thesis statement because I don't need or want a thesis statement; I want a focus.

Part Five: Trajectory

↓

So we've got a memoir, but where is it going to go? The memoir itself—the document you made—that can go as far as you like, places are publishing memoirs all the time under the term "creative non-fiction." However, that's not the only path for these skills and ideas, almost all of them can be used to your advantage when writing in other genres.

Specific, useful details are necessary in any form of writing that hopes to be clear and concise. Can you imagine writing a "for sale" ad about your car without using specific detail? Or a police report? A crime scene investigation? What if you just told your tattoo artist you wanted "a bird"? Would you get a fighting eagle or a cartoon canary? Using specific, helpful details is always important.

Deliberate order is equally important. We should consider (re)ordering everything we write because how it occurs to us isn't necessarily the clearest way of understanding. Sometimes, an alternative order is clearer than a chronological one. Since there's no cut and dry rule for order we will always have to develop a reasonable order for our thoughts every time we write.

Appreciating the audience may just be the biggest concept we can take away from writing memoir. →

Appreciating the audience means giving them specific details that they can wrap their minds around and concrete terms to sink their teeth in to. Appreciating the audience means constructing an order that fits the audience's need for clarity and understanding not our own. It means keeping them engaged and making them want to read more. It means dropping boring, redundant parts that don't add to the meaning or story. It means telling the story in a tone that makes them empathize with us or laugh with us. It means doing everything right to connect with someone else.

→ Such a big concept that it didn't get its own section; instead, it underscored every part of our memoir writing.

END NOTES

1. Assignments from real classes provided courtesy of Amy Newday, Amanda Stearns and Eileen Wiedbrauk.

2. Advanced Skills: This type of "retelling of step-by-step action" *could* be part of a good narrative. You could intentionally try to create a staccato rhythm because you want to make the reader sleepy-bored and then spring a BIG event on the reader that they didn't see coming. This would be a way of using rhythm and pacing to create "shock

value," not unlike when a movie gets very tense and quite and then all of a sudden the camera cuts to a ringing phone and everyone in the audience jumps.

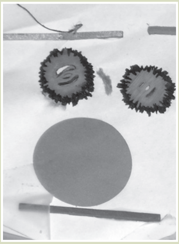
3. List of names and details graciously provided by Katheryn Dyall Nicely for this article. Mrs. Nicely has actually owned all those crazy cars.

2

Section Two: Analyses of Specific Genres

Follow the Bread Crumbs: Adhering to the Conventions of a Genre

Courtney Schoolmaster



Courtney Schoolmaster has an MA in English Literature and a passion for Ms. Piggy quotes. In fact, like her idol, she plans "to write more books whenever (she) can find the appropriate writing attire and color-coordinated pen."

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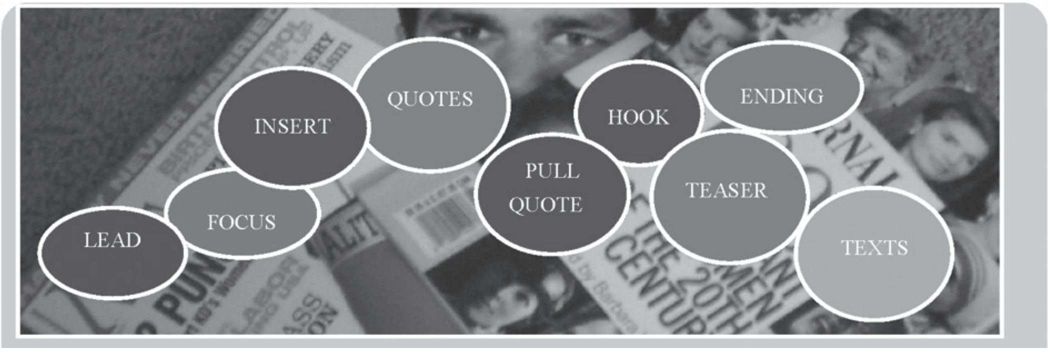
FOLLOW THE BREAD CRUMBS



ADHERING TO THE CONVENTIONS OF A GENRE

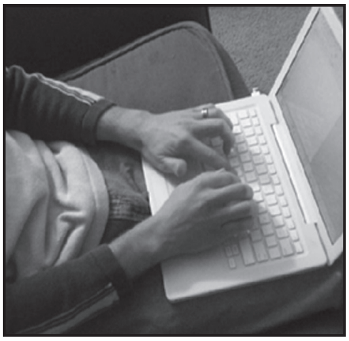
Courtney W. Schoolmaster

As I write and rewrite and delete and write and get frustrated, I want to give up. I can't do this. No, I will do this. I will force myself to sit in this cafe, and write until I finally compose something that will catch your attention. UUGH! It's not working again.

I know how it needs to look. I have studied feature articles, those articles in magazines and newspapers that take an in-depth look at a subject; I have even read articles on how to write feature articles. Step One: Write an attention grabbing lead (feature articles don't refer to the opening paragraph as an introduction-the second paragraph of the essay gets that distinction) that packs a punch and "hooks the reader hard." Step Two: Write an introduction that explains the focus/angle (thesis) of the article.

After that point Kim Kavin author of *The Everything Guide to Writing* states, "Your task becomes maintaining their interest throughout the rest of the story, by packing in solidly reported information and interesting word choices, of course but perhaps, by using a technique that some writers refer to as leaving a trail of bread crumbs."

I know the steps. Well, they aren't really steps, they're conventions: loose guidelines that direct how the genre looks, sounds, acts and interacts using the elements of writing.



Well they aren't really steps, they're conventions: loose guidelines that direct how the genre looks, sounds, acts and interacts using the elements of writing.

The problem is that while most writing uses the same elements, thesis, introduction, conclusion, etc., the way in which they are used differs. And that is not easy. Not only do I need to find a topic, conduct research and write the article, I need to place the article in a context and explore how that context affects my decisions. And right now I am failing at a key convention of the feature article: a solid, brief, catching lead.

Take a look at this March 2, 2008 feature article written by Michael Grunwald, a freelance writer for *Time* Magazine, "The Green Mountain State was once an independent republic, and it still goes its own way; a 2007 statewide poll found 13% support for secession. Vermont was the only state to support the Anti-Masonic ticket in 1832 the only state except Utah to go for President Taft in 1912, the only state except nearby Maine to oppose President Roosevelt in 1936. No one has ever claimed that as Vermont goes, so goes the nation. So on Tuesday, when Vermont's voters go to the polls, the world will be watching—Texas and Ohio."

Did you see how he did that? Grunwald gives you all of these obscure facts about Vermont and builds intrigue knowing that the Vermont primary is in two days and with such a close race, Vermont may finally lead the way. And whoosh, he rips the rug out from under us. Yet, with those 92 well crafted words we dangle like a fish from a rod—hooked with no escape. He intrigues us and makes us want to read on and more than likely we never noticed it happen. Brilliant.

But, as you can see, I am not doing that. Well, at least I don't think I am. Then again, if you are still reading this then maybe I have achieved my first goal.

Feature articles cite in a completely different way than a policy piece for a political science class. They don't use MLA or APA.

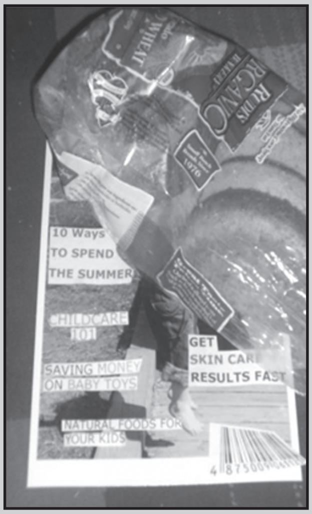
Tell me, you can be honest—am I intriguing you? Just a little?

Ok, let's say I have and move on to another key feature.

No one does fun like we do.
sought
Where ... are Crea

MAGAZINE & NEWSPAPER GENRES

News Stories
Features
Op-eds
Editorials
Columns/
Departments
Reviews
Comics
Obituaries
Political Cartoons
Classifieds
Letters to the Editor
Horoscopes
Advertisements


10 Ways TO SPEND THE SUMMER
CHILDCARE 101
SAVING MONEY ON BABY TOYS
NATURAL FOODS FOR YOUR KIDS
GET SKIN CARE RESULTS FAST

CONVENTIONS

LEAD/INTRODUCTION
- Hook
- Catchy Title
- Focus
- Who, What, Where, Why

CONTENT
- Anecdotes & Examples
- Frequently Cite Authorities
- Examines a Subject in a New Way or Relates to A Current Event Surrounding the Subject Leads the Reader Where The Author Wants Them to Go
- Answers all the Reader's ?'s
- Provides Solid Information
- Illuminates the Subject

STRUCTURE
- Short Sentences
- Brief Paragraphs
- Active Voice
- Defines Jargon
- Suited to Magazine/ Newspaper FORMAT
- Single Spaced
- Inserts & Pull Quotes
- Headings & Subheadings
- Large Title, Byline
- Lots of Pictures with Captions

ENDING
- Gives Your Article Sense of Completion
- Complements the Entire Article but does not Overwhelm It

Step Two has me introducing the focus of my essay. This is a little trickier. According to the Writer's Digest Handbook on Magazine Writing, many writers "mistakenly believe that their focus is the same as their topic."

Though another convention of feature articles is sometimes I can rely on my title and teaser (a brief opening that gives readers a glimpse of the content) to help achieve this goal. So, maybe I don't need a stated focus sentence in the essay. Watch this. I am going to tab up to the top of my essay and write a brilliant title with a teaser that makes everything clear.

Now that I have you hanging on my every word and we have introduced the topic and focus, we can work on Step Three, the body of the article. "The body (of the essay should) aim for a spicy mix of facts, direct quotes, paraphrases, reported information—all play(ing) key roles in keeping the reader from nodding off while the story unfolds" (Corrigan 14).

Wait. Wait. Wait. I can't do that. Don't you understand? What was I thinking? This is a feature article. Feature articles cite a completely different way than a policy piece for a political science class.

They don't use MLA or APA. Feature article cite an authority by name and give you the authorities' credentials and then they quote or paraphrase the authority. I can't just ignore how the genre uses a convention.

Now that I have realized my mistake this seems like a good place to start my next paragraph. I know that feature articles have short, concise paragraphs that convey one piece of information before moving on to the next and I know that my next paragraph can continue to talk about the subject of my last paragraph.

I know that features article use lots of examples and anecdotes to support their paragraphs and frequently cite authorities to prove their points. They often write from a personal perspective and attempt to make an emotional connection with the audience. Writers of feature articles often wrestle with time questions and use time as a transitional device says Harvard Extension Professor, John Lenger. They have short sentences and active verbs and rely heavily on the visual side of the medium to assist in making the article audience friendly.

Wait. Wait. Wait. I am doing it again. I am failing to stay true to my genre's conventions. You see, the audience of a feature article is looking for short sentences and complex ideas presented simply. I can't just throw in a paragraph that is one long list of conventions.

I hear the page turning already—now their reading an article on Six Ways to Writing Success. Not only have I bored them, but I more than likely lost them as a reader. Along with that, I need to remember another basic rule of writing: keep a unified tone throughout the article. Nothing about that last paragraph shouts unity.

Ok, so here is what we are going to do. We are going to strike the last paragraph from the essay. It's gone. Adios. See you later. Don't let the backspace key miss you on the way out the door.

Now that we have settled that little faux pas, how are we going to present that information?

Think…What do I know about the conventions of feature articles. You know it might help if you provided a little assistance here?

I have it. Instead of listing the conventions in the essay we can make them an insert in the article—you know those cute little boxes that break up the text and serve this exact purpose. Now that we have sidestepped that mine perhaps I can stop all of this foolishness and get back to business.

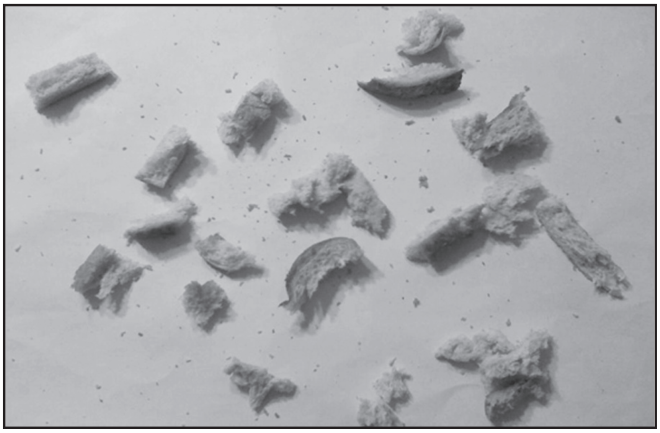
Oh but wait, I haven't even touched on the way feature articles make use of visuals to add coherence, unity and appeal. And then there is the use of white space.

Ok, calm down. We can do this. Yes, it seems overwhelming at first, but as Hansel said to Gretel "Wait, when the moon comes up I will be able to see the crumbs of bread that I scattered, and they will show us the way back home."

Texts leave bread crumbs too. And it turns out that following those bread crumbs, understanding how they function and adhering to them, not only produces a successful text but it gets you home a lot faster.

Did you see that? Brilliant.

Absolutely Brilliant.



2 Section Two: Analyses of Specific Genres

Reading Visual Texts: A Bullet for Your Arsenal

Susana Rodriguez

I like those iPod ad banners. The ones almost every other city skyscraper's wallpapered with in a screaming rainbow of neon colored backgrounds and silhouettes of people rocking out to their music collections like it's 1999. In fact, I really like those silhouettes because they let me pretend I'm cool and can totally tear up my own imaginary dance floor without anyone silently judging just how awkward and out of time my steps actually are. Through Apple, I can be queen—no, *empress* of my own personal disco and no one can say anything against my benign, indie-folk-electro-pop dictatorship. That's what's beautiful about Apple's ad campaign: me, my dog, *anyone* can be those silhouettes—just visually fill in the blanks.

But what are these blanks Apple wants consumers to fill? I can't even tell who those people are or what they're listening to, except that they're some of the hippest kids with their hoodies and fedoras, dreads and pompadours, and is it just me or do they have personal trainers on speed dial because there's definitely less than five to eight percent body fat on all of those torsos. I don't know about Apple's corporate heads but I most definitely do *not* fit into these candy colored squares they've drawn out as their idealized customer. I have never been and probably never will be a single digit size thanks to my natural, gene-coded Latina curviness and my crippling, hip-splosive love for all things sugar dusted, malted, and whole milked. But I'll be damned if

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my iPod doesn't make me look like a baller, bobbing my head along to Pitchfork's latest editorial darlings from behind my ten-dollar wayfarer knockoffs. I Pod, therefore I am a lean, mean, dancing machine. I paid through the nose for it, so by definition it should magically envelop me in pure, unadulterated cool.

It's all part of an advertisement's core function: to sell something, be that product or fantasy or, ideally, *both*. What Apple's trying to sell me here isn't just a glorified portable hard drive with a delightful clicking wheel to sort through thousands of songs I might never get the chance to hear in their entirety. They're trying to sell me "cool," "hip," "stylish," and "edgy"—dime store descriptors for Madison Avenue concepts of street fashion couture—neatly packaged with their contemporary handheld boom boxes.

Almost everything people are meant to look at—advertisements, movie posters, even family vacation photos—is a carefully constructed package meant to deliver a controlled idea and meaning to an audience: the viewer. (I know my mom stink-eyed me into smiling very wide and standing very still next to some poor teen sweating for pocket money inside of a Robin Hood costume for our Disney World vacation photos: a composed image of summer Floridian family fun when all I wanted was to ride the teacups again and again to see if I really could throw-up like Cousin Paul said I would. Absolute lies—lies I would only condone by standing still.) Every last commercial, movie, even music video wants a viewer to take something away from it—something that a team of people sat down and discussed, storyboarded, designed, edited, and delivered to the viewer, its passive audience, for consumption. (My mom wanted everyone to "see" we had a grand old time at Disney World, and that never once was she mortified by my six-year old self flailing on the ground in screaming, crying, snot-faced rebellion against posing for pictures. By the power of Kodak, we sure as hell were going to look like a nice family having a nice time at the happiest place on earth, so help us Instamatic.)

I try to figure out what exactly that Anonymous Team of Designers (read: Shadowy Corporate Organization with Infinite, Personal, Monetary Gain[1]) had in mind for me by taking apart an image layer by layer: the subject, iconography (if there is any), colors and how they interact with each other, and composition, especially layout and perspective.

First, I consider what's the subject of an image: who or what is being focused on, like the noun of a sentence? A subject can turn into a proper noun for me depending on whether or not there's iconography—signs and symbols, icons, referencing or alluding to other subjects, places, or things—that give it a deeper meaning or specific identity. I see the iPod ad banners as having two subjects—the iPod and the dancing silhouettes—with the iPod itself becoming an iconographic element because of how much attention it's given compared to the anonymous silhouette: it's a symbol of contemporary, luxurious, music technology. The anonymous silhouette holding the iPod then becomes the symbolic proprietor of the icon and the meanings associated with it: modernity, taste, a privileged social class. As a consumer, my owning an iPod associates me with this select group, or at least helps me *look* like I belong.

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[1] This isn't to say Apple itself is a shadowy corporate organization with infinite, personal monetary gain but they do have bills to pay, I'm sure.

Next, I think about colors and how they work to get a good handle on what these ATD's (SCO's with IPMG) want me to see/read. Remember the color wheel, and how neatly it shows how to mix the primary colors—red, yellow, and blue—to make secondary colors like orange, green, and purple to fill in coloring books with the whole rainbow, not just bits of it? Yeah, *that's* the rose-colored lens way I thought about it for years because I was a trusting, unassuming, gullible kindergartener when they got to me. But not anymore—at least not now that I've learned how advertisers turn it into something much more evil.

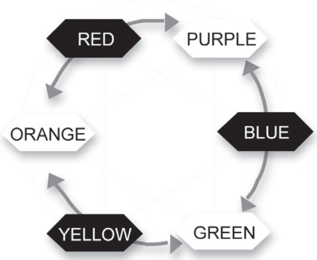

Fig. 1. An innocent, helpful color wheel.

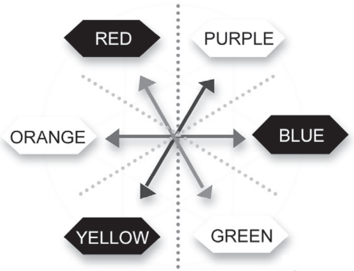

Fig. 2. A sinister color wheel of DOOM.

Clearly this color wheel is only slightly evil as it's a budget friendly black-and-white wheel.

On the left is a standard color wheel with helpful arrows showing how to get from the primaries to the secondaries. On the right is a sinister color wheel revealing hidden design secrets that advertisers have guarded for centuries—*dun-dun-DUUUUUN*! The dotted line cutting into the middle separates the warm colors—red, orange, and yellow—on the left from the cool colors—purple, blue, and green—on the right. The dotted line also helps show analogous color groups: colors next to each other that match easily without clashing. The warm and cool trios make up two simple analogous sets, but really any three colors side by side can make up a new set like the fainter diagonal crossbars show: red, purple, and blue match as well as orange, yellow, and green do.

Advertisers use this knowledge not only to make visually appealing images but to make loud ones by using complementary contrasts—the colors directly across from each other on the color wheel—to draw a lot of attention in the middle of, usually, an analogously composed background. Apple's early iPod ads skipped all this foreplay and stuck to solid, neon-colored backgrounds that do enough yelling on their own to grab consumer attention, using the silhouettes to highlight the one articulated image in their ads: the iPod with its patented, serpentine earbuds. But sometimes they would stack and grid a bunch of these seemingly simple iPod ads and the solid backgrounds would start playing off of each other to grab consumer attention: a bright pink background next to a lime green one that reinforced each other's loudness, or an ad grid made up of mostly red, purple, and blue backgrounds with a bright yellow background ad in the middle of them all drawing the most attention to itself based on its proximity to the purple background.

Conspiracy? Not quite. (Yet.)

Apple's ATD's have gotten really sneaky lately, using this not-particularly-forbidden color knowledge to play with consumer emotions and perceptions. The newer iPod ads have amped up the colors, using swirling chromatics to visually italicize, bold, and underline just how hard the silhouettes are jamming to their handheld idols. An ad could have a nice, warm, inviting color palette with sunshiney yellows, soft pale pinks, and citrusy oranges all splashing around together to entice the senses, leading a viewer's eye from the edges of the banner towards the middle where they're wrapping themselves around *WHAM*—a bright, cool lavender silhouette smack in the middle of this calculated color symphony, harshing its orchestrated Zen with a purposely "clashing" dancing figure to tap into baser, consumerist want-need-must-buy-buy-buy-NOW instincts.

This controlled clashing is something I've noticed Apple's ATD's have turned into a science: combining two or more analogous colors and offsetting them with the one complementary contrast to another in the original set to draw the most attention. They never use more than one set of complementary contrasts in one ad, playing it safe and tasteful by concentrating their efforts on the one combination: either yellow and purple, orange and blue, or red and green together, but never yellow and purple *and* orange and blue or red and green together—that would be tacky. I call this the Lakers/Gators/Christmas Paradox to both remember which ones go together and why two or more should never be in the same picture: it's like trying to watch a Lakers or Gators game or *both* during the holidays—not gonna happen. It's near impossible because the yellow and purple together will scream for my attention as loud as orange and blue will, while red and green will demand I ignore both sets and make me have a slice of Gran's fruitcake whether I want to or not.[2]

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[2] Not that Gran's fruitcake is a bad thing—I love fruitcake! It's delicious! Please don't stop sending me care fruitcakes packages with pocket money to help me buy groceries every month! I love you, Gran!

Almost lastly, I look at an image's composition, or layout—how figures and objects are placed to make up the picture—to help develop even more meaning. I think about how a story can be told through where things are placed either up close in the foreground, in the midground, or background of an image to illustrate the scene: is the focus on the subject or where the subject's placed, and does that focus on the setting say something more about the subject than the subject alone can? Other things I consider are the angles and patterns created through object placement: does everything fall into a horizontal line to create a connection between elements, are there vertical lines created to draw my attention up or down to other things I'm supposed to notice (or not) within the image, or are there diagonal lines made to communicate action or movement? Apple keeps it simple by drawing consumer eyes in with the loud neon colored backgrounds that their dancing silhouettes are contrasted against, which in turn draws attention to the more often than not diagonal lines created by the dancing figures to bring the most attention to the foreground where the iPod's placed ever so closest to the image's heart and, not coincidentally, the viewer, i.e. my shriveling savings account.

Accident? My pockets think not.

Lastly-lastly, I look at perspective—where the viewer stands in relation to an image—and how it can create an imaginary relationship between the ATD's fantasy and my reality. Angles that make a viewer look up at a subject—whether created within the image's composition or its placement high up on a wall far and away from my blinding little eyes—create a visual metaphor of admiration on the viewer's part while angles looking down on the image emphasize the viewer's superiority or advantage over the subject's placement. Eye level perspectives, where the viewer and image stand on even ground, create a (false) sense of equality between the subject and observer.

Depending where I've seen Apple's iconic iPod ads, the perspective can shift dramatically. In magazine print ads, I'm usually eye-to-eye with the images, making an intimate "I'm just like you, you should totally own an iPod too because we're just as cool as each other" connection between us. Even in stores the ads tend to be viewer-sized and viewer-leveled to highlight that friendly connection between image and viewer, giving me more reason to steer clear of Apple stores at the mall so I don't fall into abject poverty sooner than my college education would like.

But it's out on the town where I've seen it gets to be two very different kinds of weird that can be funny (or scary) when looking at street level paste-up ads and building-sized banners. The street level paste-up ads tend to be stuck up on the sides of a building wall at pedestrian level, but the fact that they're often pasted up and around and on top of each other to form a grid makes the ads look like they tower over the viewer, which tends to work against me and my slight-but-usually-almost-totally-negligible fear of people, places, and things trying to sell me things by subjecting their self-imposed taste-authority over my freedom to choose what I like and buy for myself, thank you very much Apple.[3] The building-sized banners do this too, although it seems by accident: they're usually placed on buildings by highways to be seen from cars, and from inside a car at a distance away they seem viewer-sized when I'm zipping by. But on the street from a pedestrian's perspective, the building-sized banners are massive and high up from the sidewalk, making the street-level viewer crane their neck to look up at the giant dancing silhouettes above them. It makes me end up feeling like the tiniest, insignificant little thing meant to worship the two-dimensional technology gods high up above me.

Poorly thought out ad placement that interrupts a friendly, equalizing, eye level perspective pattern? Or, maybe,[4] another attempt by Apple's ATDs to suck my pockets dryer than a Hoover?

Maybe.

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Applie iPod ad, silhouette and tri-color background: http://admintell.napco.com/ee/images/uploads/appletell/iTunesAd.png

Apple iPod ad, pink and green jumper over city block: http://images.macrumors.com/article/2008/09/06/223039-banners.jpg

Apple iPod ad, blue and white jammer over city plaza: http://www.blogcdn.com/www.bloggingstocks.com/media/2006/06/ipod_billboard_christianwatzke.jpg

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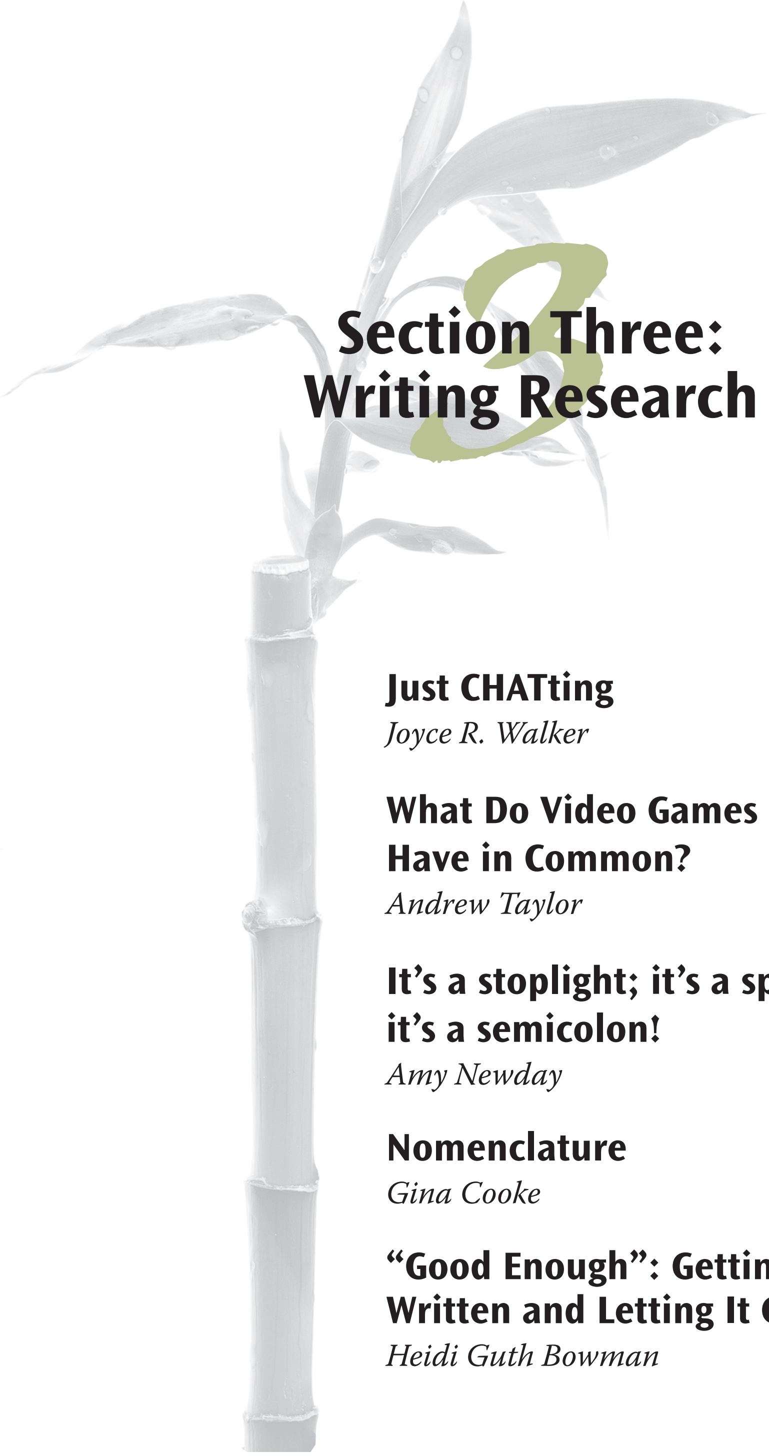
[3] Who am I kidding?

[4] MAYBE!



Section Three: Writing Research

Just CHATting
Joyce R. Walker

What Do Video Games and Writing Have in Common?
Andrew Taylor

It's a stoplight; it's a spring; it's a semicolon!
Amy Newday

Nomenclature
Gina Cooke

"Good Enough": Getting the Writing Written and Letting It Go
Heidi Guth Bowman

Section Three: Writing Research

Just CHATting

Joyce Walker

Q: What are we chatting about?

A: CHAT

Q: I know, but what about?

The acronym CHAT refers to the term *Cultural-Historical-Activity-Theory*. It's an important acronym for our writing program, because it refers to a set of theories about rhetorical activity (how people act and

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communicate in the world—specifically through the production of all kinds of texts), that help us look at the how/why/what of writing practices. CHAT is useful because it's a more complicated and interesting way to look at writing, but it's also a challenge (because it's complicated). In a lot of traditional writing classes, we aren't really taught to see writing in complicated ways. Instead, we are mostly taught a set of generalized "rules" about writing, usually within the context of some kind of essay-style writing.[1]

Now, breaking down a particular genre into its component parts to discover its boundaries and key features is a great idea. We do this kind of work in our Writing Program courses at ISU, as do writers engaged in many different writing tasks in a wide variety of professions. The problem really comes in when we don't spend enough time and effort to really understand the genre we're working in. We just try to follow the "rules" we're given, making assumptions about how we can use what we already know about writing (or about the genre). This isn't always very successful. For example, we assume that because we've written a school essay we'll be fine in our upper-level psych course, but then we find out that the requirements for writing a "case study" (one of the genres the discipline of Psychology uses frequently) are really different than the writing we've done on our generalized "school essays." The only thing that can really combat this inability to see a genre clearly is to step back—to learn to see all the details of a particular situation in which writing happens. We then usually have to spend some time making our own recipe for the writing task, or adapting a generalized recipe to our specific needs. This research and analysis is often the step we skip when we first start working in a new genre or writing situation. But a more complex and complete understanding of a new genre allows two things: (1) We can create a "recipe" or adapt an existing template more successfully, because we've analyzed closely how the genre works, and (2) we can better see the gaps or discrepancies between our first drafts of a text in a new genre and the models we've used. The usefulness of CHAT as a framework is that it can help us to investigate a writing activity from a lot of different perspectives. For our purposes, CHAT isn't really useful as a way of doing large writing-research projects (like Writing Studies scholars do), which might mean looking at a writing situation through every one of the following categories. Instead, we use specific categories from the CHAT framework to help us understand a genre in practical ways that will impact our writing.

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[1] For a much more in-depth critique of generalized writing instruction, see Russel, David. (1995). Activity theory and its implications for writing instruction. In Joseph Petraglia, Ed. *Reconceiving writing, rethinking writing instruction*. (pp. 51–78). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Step One: The Journey Begins (However Reluctantly)

I want to begin by quoting a fairly large block of text from a text titled, "Re-situating and Re-mediating the Canons: A Cultural-historical Remapping of Rhetorical Activity":

> We turn here to *cultural-historical activity theory*…CHAT argues that activity is *situated* in concrete interactions that are simultaneously *improvised* locally and *mediated* by historically-provided tools and practices, which range from machines, made-objects, semiotic means (e.g., languages, genres, iconographies), and institutions to structured environments, domesticated animals and plants, and indeed, people themselves. Mediated activity means that action and cognition are *distributed* over time and space and among people, artifacts, and environments and thus also *laminated*, as multiple frames of field co-exist in any situated act. In activity, people are *socialized* (brought into alignment with others) as they *appropriate* cultural resources, but also *individuated* as their particular appropriations historically accumulate to form a particular individual. Through appropriation and individuation, socialization also opens up a space for cultural change, for a *personalization* of the social. Cultural-historical activity theory points to a concrete, historical rhetoric…a cultural-historical approach asks how people, institutions, and artifacts are made in history (p. 18).[2]

What?

This quotation illustrates that the production of texts is indeed a lot more complicated than any of us might think when we flip open our cell phone and fire off a text message to find out where our friend wants to meet us. We don't, when we do it, think about the complicated space that is created…

- We understand text messaging, as a genre, in relation to a whole bunch of other genres, like email, telephoning, letter-writing, and speaking.

- We understand the situations in which it's appropriate to textmessage based on all of these connected genres, but also through media representations of text-messaging and our awareness of how other people use text-messaging. (For example, think of that series of commercials where the mom gets frustrated by her family "speaking" in texting language—IMHO, LOL, my BFF—and then think about why the joke is that the grandmother can also use the jargon.)[3]

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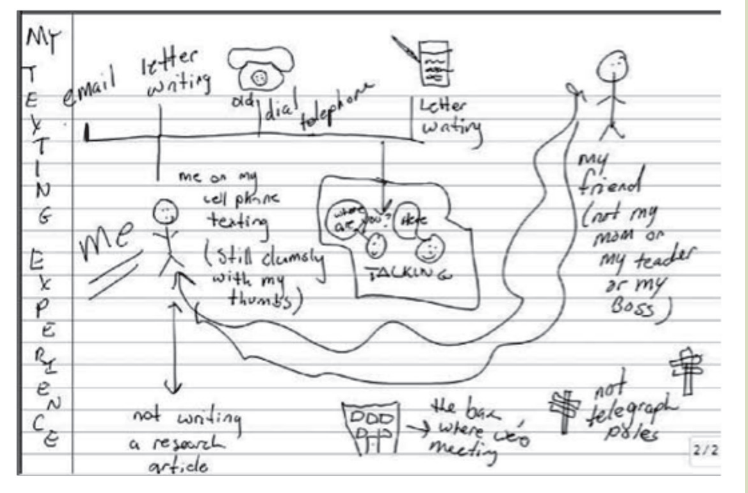
[2] This excerpt and the concept described in the following chart are drawn from "Re-situating and Re-mediating the Canons: A Cultural-historical Remapping of Rhetorical Activity: A Collaborative Webtext." With Paul Prior, Janine Solberg, Patrick Berry, Hannah Bellowar, Bill Chewning, Karen Lunsford, Liz Rohan, Kevin Roozen, Mary Sheridan-Rabideau, Jody Shipka, and Derek Van Ittersum (2007). *Kairos*, 11.3, May 2007.

[3] A Cingular/AT&T advertisement—see http://www.metacafe.com/watch/795294/idk_my_bff_rose_new_at_t_ad/

- Even the simple act of pushing the buttons on the phone shapes how we text in important ways (no caps because it takes too much time, also use word shortcuts whenever possible).

- Texting in some ways remediates the genre of the telegram, in that they are both genres that value short messages where abbreviations are used to save text space.


MY TEXTING EXPERIENCE
email
letter writing
old dial telephone
Letter writing
me on my cell phone texting (still clumsly with my thumbs)
me
where are you? here
TALKING
my friend (not my mom or my teacher or my Boss)
not writing a research article
the bar where we're meeting
not telegraph poles
2/2

You don't really need to know these things to send a text message to your friend, but your success as a writer in a world where writing genres are changing quickly and employers expect employees to be able to write well in a variety of different writing situations may depend on your ability to think about acts of writing in more complicated ways.

Literate Activity

The following terms can be used to help researchers investigate the complicated factors that impact what/how/when/why we write. I have adapted this information from Paul Prior's article, "Re-situating and Re-mediating the Canons" (see footnote #3). It is generally a summary with my own examples added, but occasionally I have used the exact text from the article (which I helped to write).

> **Production**: Production deals with the means through which a text is produced. This includes both tools (say, using a computer to produce a text vs. using a cell phone to produce a text) and practices (for example, the physical practices for using a computer vs. using a cell phone have some similarities, but also many differences). Production also considers the genres and structures that can contribute to and even "pre-shape" our ability to produce text (think of filling out a job application form—the form directly controls the kind of

information we can produce, and consequently, the kind of image of ourselves we can project to potential employers). If we got to make a video instead of filling out the paper form, we could create a very different self-representation.

When thinking about or investigating production for a specific text, an author is really trying to uncover how individuals and groups create texts under specific conditions, using specific tools, and following certain practices. Researchers looking at *production* investigate how the intentions of the producer (what he/she intends the text to do) are negotiated, and how the contexts, tools, texts, and other issues affect that negotiation.

Representation: The term "representation" highlights issues related to the way that the people who produce a text conceptualize and plan it (how they think about it, how they talk about it), as well as all the activities and materials that help to shape how people do this. Do they have meetings, do they pass the text around to other readers, do they draw outlines, create maps, write proposals, etc.? NOTE: Representations can include things we do (have a meeting to talk about a text or ride the bus to visit a library), things we say or think (the ways we talk about the text or the plans we make in our heads), the things we use (the media or technologies used to produce something), and the larger frameworks that shape how we understand what we're doing when we produce a text (for example, in school settings, the idea of "research" is represented in certain ways that shape how we even begin to think about what might be possible to write). We know, for instance, that research in college doesn't usually mean "go stand at the corner and ask people what they think," although it could mean that in a particular setting like a newspaper story.

Distribution: Distribution involves the consideration of who a text is given to, for what purposes, using what kinds of distribution tools. For example, is it a printed text, a handwritten text, an electronic text, cell phone message, etc? Is it a letter sent through the mail or tucked under someone's car windshield? Is it put up on a flyer or written in chalk on the sidewalk?

Reception: Reception deals with how a text is taken up and used by others. Reception is not just who will read a text, but takes into account the ways people might use or re-purpose a text (sometimes in ways the author may not have anticipated or intended). To cite a recent controversial example, think of pedophiles using *Friendster* or *Facebook* to meet children. The creators of the site certainly did not intend for the site to be used by these people in these ways, and now they must retroactively "re-write" the site (controlling access or monitoring pages) to try to exclude people from this kind of use.

Socialization: Socialization describes the interactions of people and institutions as they produce, distribute and use texts. When people engage with texts, they are also (consciously and unconsciously) engaged in the practice of representing and transforming different kinds of social and cultural practices (think of filling out a tax return—or writing a standard 5 paragraph essay for that matter! These activities are "writing," but they also have a lot of social implications about who we are, what we do, what we know, etc.).A text like the 5-paragraph essay is highly socialized—this means that when a teacher assigns this kind of essay, he/she is (conceptually) interacting with a whole set of ideas and beliefs about what this essay is and what it does. These interactions are "made up of" the ways people have discussed and used the 5-paragraph essay over time.

Activity: Activity is a term that encompasses the actual practices that people engage in as they create text (writing, drawing, walking across the hall to ask someone else what they think, getting peer review, etc.). Thinking about activity allows us to focus on the actions that are involved in producing texts (which we often forget to think about, because we're caught up in thinking about all of the issues mentioned above). It's important to remember that these processes and activities can include conflict (attempts to disrupt or stop a text from being produced) or indifference (the refusal to participate) as well as cooperative activities.

Ecology: Ecology points to what we usually think of as a mere backdrop for our purposeful activities in creating texts—the physical, biological forces that exist beyond the boundaries of any text we are producing. However, these environmental factors can become very active in some situations in shaping or interacting with our textual productions (think of putting on a play outdoors when it's raining, or think of the people of New Orleans using the internet to find family members after Hurricane Katrina). Think also of the ecological cost of producing paper, or the history of (and ecological ramifications of) using lights as a part of Holiday displays. Ecology can be a practical part of an actual production (i.e., make sure we have a tent for our play or an alternate venue in case of rain), or it can lead to philosophical considerations (i.e., deciding to put texts online rather than printing them out).

An investigator might wish to consider a literate act through any one or combination of these perspectives. In a practical sense, it's often true that one or a few of these categories are more relevant than others for a particular writing situation. For example, in the cell phone texting production map, the cell phone as a tool could be considered from the perspective of **production** (e.g., the effects of little bitty keyboards and a tiny screen on the number of typographical mistakes in text messages). But that same technology could also be considered in terms of **socialization** (the decade-long process of negotiation in attitudes about when and where it's appropriate to use one's cell phone—i.e., texting might be o.k. in the movies, where talking on the phone wouldn't be, while talking works better when walking across campus). So which of these categories is most interesting depends on what we're trying to figure out. It also depends on what, exactly, we need to know about a writing situation or genre in order to produce a successful text. For example, in a situation such as sending an email to one's instructor, an understanding of **reception** and **socialization** becomes important (what the instructor will expect to see, how he/she will respond to what he/she actually sees). Understanding that "email," as a genre, might include a different set of expectations for the reader/author who is connecting it to a formal letter than the reader/author who is connecting it to texting could be important in a practical way.

A Practical Example of the Value of Research into Complex Literate Activities

This section tries to provide a more extended example to help show how this kind of study of literate activity might be useful for the kinds of texts we produce every day. Why not just write that history paper and forget about it? Why not just send that email off quickly and get it out of the way? Because there are times (especially when we are writing in an unfamiliar situation and/ or genre) when thinking critically about these kinds of issues can help us make decisions about what to do, how to write, how to engage with the texts of others, how to situate a text for a reader, and many other issues. Consider the following diagrams related to the production of a research paper assignment:

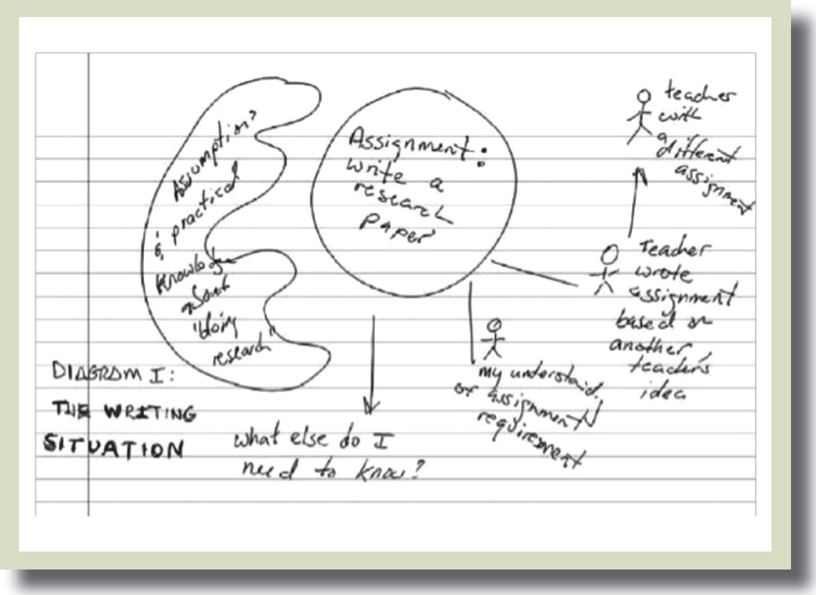
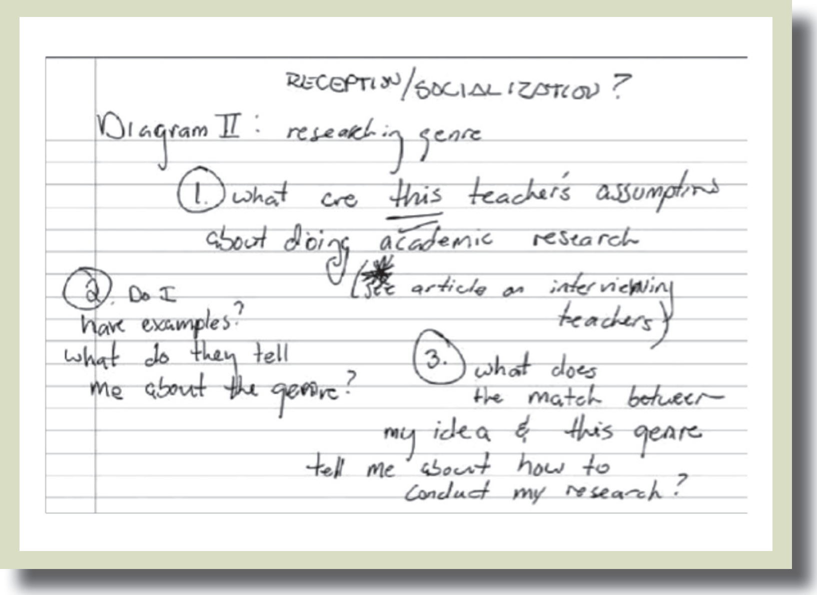

Assumption? & practical knowledge about "doing research"
Assignment: write a research paper
teacher with a different assignment
Teacher wrote assignment based on another teacher's idea
my understanding or assignment requirement
what else do I need to know?
DIAGRAM I:
THE WRITING
SITUATION

Diagram I: The Writing Situation



RECEPTION/SOCIALIZATION?

Diagram II: researching genre

① what are this teacher's assumptions about doing academic research (see article on interviewing teachers)

② Do I have examples? what do they tell me about the genre?

③ what does the match between my idea & this genre tell me about how to conduct my research?

Diagram II: In thinking about how to learn about the research project, I was thinking both about how the teacher's reception of the text might be influenced by a range of factors, and how I might use examples of research papers written in that class to help me understand the instructor's expectations, etc.

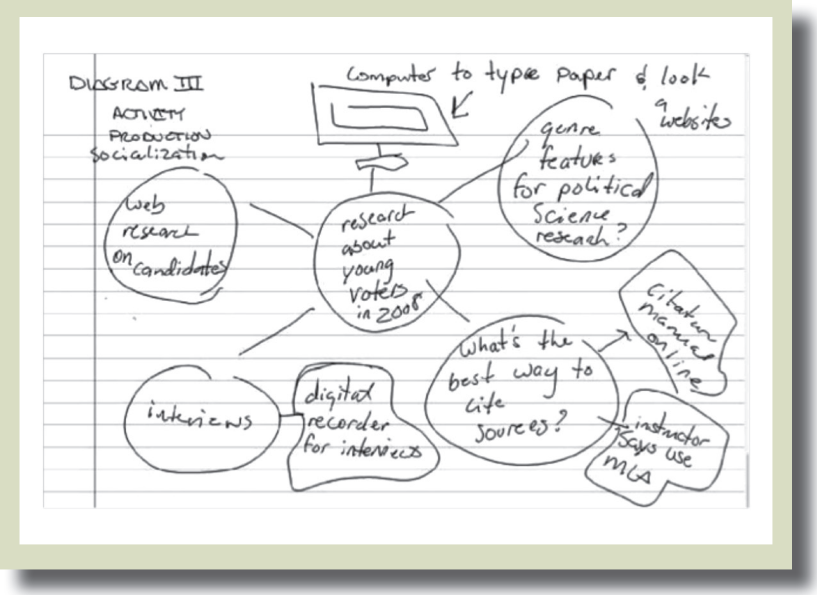


DIAGRAM III
ACTIVITY
PRODUCTION
Socialization
Computer to type paper & look a websites
genre features for political Science research?
web research on candidates
research about young voters in 2008
citation manuals online
interviews
digital recorder for interviews
what's the best way to cite sources?
instructor says use MLA

Diagram IV: I'm thinking here about the expectations of various audiences will have for the text (and all the ideas and information that might be influencing them), and also thinking through how somebody may take up my text and use it for some other purpose.

There is no "right" way to use these categories to consider literate activity. When using the categories for thinking about writing situations, some categories may be more interesting than others—because they specifically relate to the aspect of the activity you want (or need) to learn about. For example, if I am asked to create a PowerPoint presentation on problem drinking that will reach college-age students, I might think about the following issues:

- How might the tool (and the perception of PowerPoint as a kind of cheesy, school-based tool for presenting information) actually negatively impact how my audience will take up and use the text(Production/Reception/Socialization)?
- Practically, how might audiences use the text? If I put the PowerPoint up on the web then people will be able to access it, but the text won't have the cachet or usability that a video would have (Distribution/Reception).

In the end, I might suggest that a YouTube video would be a more appropriate genre for this message, based on my analysis.

SUMMARY

In many of the situations we encounter as writers—in school and out of school—we are asked to write without a clear understanding of all of the elements that might help us to be perfectly clear about how to produce an effective text. Often this is not intentional. Those asking us to produce writing may not even be aware themselves of some of the complicated nuances of the kind of writing they want or need to see. So we're asked to write a paper, or write an article, or write an email, and we do it, guessing, on-the-fly, making complicated choices in the time it takes to hit delete a couple of times and replace our text with some new idea. The suggestion I am making with this article is not that we need to become writing researchers in the sense that we should all begin to study and produce research projects about writing practices (although, as a writing researcher I think that would be great). Rather, I'm suggesting that we are all ALREADY writing researchers—in a practical sense. However, we aren't usually trained to observe our own research processes, and this is a problem. We are researchers, but we are unaware of what we've discovered, unable to make it visible to ourselves. We move by intuition and make adaptations and changes to our practices based on clues we don't even realize we've uncovered. My suggestion, finally, is that we might find that we can improve as writers and readers (especially in situations where we find ourselves at a loss regarding how to proceed) if we learn to uncover what we know, and what we need to know, in order to understand more fully the complicated nuances of writing in different situations. And I'm suggesting that we do this by learning to take time—to observe our own practices, and to study the nuances of the kinds of writing we encounter each day.

3

Section Three: Writing Research

What Do Video Games and Writing Have in Common?

Andrew Taylor

Whether or not you've stormed Bowser's castle as Mario, faced off against an army of Covenant soldiers as Master Chief, or rolled the world up into a katamari as The Prince of All Cosmos, you likely know that video games speak in a language all their own. To those initiated into their worlds, video games blossom at the touch of a button into a realm of possibilities. But to many others, they seem a baffling prospect. I have often heard my relatives and friends, unpracticed in the art of playing video games, comment on how games have gotten too complicated these days, with all their buttons and confusing objectives. "I like *Super Mario Bros.*," they often say with a sigh. "*That* game was fun." When I ask for specific reasons why *Super Mario Bros.* is considered the pinnacle of gaming achievement, the answer I receive most often is "there's only three buttons to press." So is that it? The captivating world of our most interactive medium barred to millions because of a complex control scheme? They just don't care enough to learn, that's all.

Andrew graduated with an MA in literature from Western Michigan University and plans to pursue doctoral study in the near future. When he's not writing or working diligently, he's probably playing some form of video game. He's convinced that electronic media hold untapped storytelling potential and will continue to hold his breath in anticipation for the next big breakthrough. His primary research interests are Anglo-Saxon languages and literature, new media, and their intersection, medievalism. Andrew currently resides happily in Kalamazoo, Michigan, with his wife and his two cats.

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Or so I thought. Over the years I have pondered the answers I have received upon asking this question, and slowly built what I consider to be a major reason why the world I love so much is inaccessible to so many. My wife is responsible for a great deal of my revelations in this area. When we first started dating she began playing a particularly favorite game of mine. She could not, however, progress beyond the very beginning; she kept dying. I tried to coach her, reassure her that it takes time, but she simply could not jump in time, could not swing her sword fast enough, could not shield herself before her enemies' blows landed. Tentatively, I asked her what was wrong. She responded, "I just can't press the buttons fast enough. I take too long thinking about it." There it was—an answer I had been looking for.

I would ask a favor of you, dear reader. Raise your right arm for a moment. Go on; just raise your right arm and then let it fall…thank you. Now let me ask, how exactly did you raise your arm? Did you think, "Well, first I have to send a motor impulse racing down the nerves into my arm, flex and relax certain muscles, then hold those muscles steady for a moment before relaxing my arm and letting it fall gently to my side"? Of course you didn't. Most of us have spent our entire lives manipulating muscles in very complicated ways to the point where we don't have to direct ourselves mentally—we simply do it subconsciously. Now, return to my wife's statement. Since she was so new at video games, she had to essentially follow that laborious path I just described in order to jump:

> "Okay, so now I need to jump."
>
> "Let's see, to jump I need to press the X button."
>
> "Where is the X button?"
>
> "Right here."
>
> "Okay, so now I need to press it."
>
> *press*

Alas, by the time this complicated scheme has played out in the space of a mere second, the blow has landed, the opportunity has been missed, and my wife is dead.

I, on the other hand, have had a lifetime of practice. I received my first Nintendo Entertainment System on my 5th Christmas, and since then have grown on a diet of increasingly complicated demands on my neural circuitry.[1] Now think about how you raised your arm. You just did it without thinking, right? A person who began playing video games at a very young age will do the very same thing. When playing the same game as my wife, I don't follow that lengthy mental process; when I have to jump, my mind does all the work for me, moving my thumb a bit down and to the side from neutral position and pressing. It's simply how you jump. Why think about it?

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[1] Steven Johnson's book *Everything Bad is Good for You* argues that the complicated demands modern popular culture places on our brains are actually making us smarter. It's an interesting theory that runs counter to traditional thought on modern television and video games.

"So, what does this have to do with writing?" some of you may be asking. It provides an example for considering how our brains can become so amazingly adjusted to a specific task that we no longer have to think about it. It becomes engrained into the way our minds function and makes our work easier, particularly if that work is something we do regularly.

But this feature of our brain is a double-edged sword. It's wonderful that our minds can adapt so readily to a specific action or way of thinking, but what happens when that action or way of thinking is changed? How will the brain respond? I'll illustrate, again, with a video game. Let's say, for example, I've just finished playing through the game previously mentioned. I've spent approximately 30 hours over the course of a few weeks existing in this world where you press X to jump, O to raise your shield, and square to attack. These motor functions are now firmly embedded in my brain. But now I'm finished with the game, so I move on to a new one. In this new world, however, the X button is assigned to 'attack' and the square button is assigned to 'jump'; the O button only brings up the menu. It is during the first hour or so of gameplay that I have the most difficulty; often I will jump when I want to attack, or I will accidentally bring up the menu when an enemy is about to strike. My brain, so entrenched in the old ways of doing things, needs time to adjust to this new method of acting. Fortunately, my long years of practice have also conditioned me for this process, and I am able to switch between control schemes with relative ease.

It might be helpful to look at our writing in a similar way, especially if we've been writing in pretty much the same way for most of our lives. Think of how many times average college freshmen had to write an essay in junior high and high school. It's very likely that the essay format accounted for almost all of their formal writing during that time. And so its conventions have been burned into their heads to where they use them at a nearly subconscious level. So what happens when an instructor asks students to write a formal argumentative letter? While some make the transition successfully, the majority of students retain some or all of the conventions of an essay as they learned them: headers consisting of name, class, instructor, and date, overly large paragraphs, rhetorical thesis statements, etc. While these features work well within the genre of essay (as hazily defined as that genre may be), they seem out of place in an argumentative letter. I don't suggest this is because of some deficiency on students' part; a seasoned newspaper editor of 30 years would very likely struggle if she tried to write poetry for the first time. It would probably sound a lot like journalism. In fact, in writing this article

I struggled to ensure that it didn't sound like literary criticism, a genre that I've been writing for most of my time as an post-secondary student. Every writer can easily get wrapped up in familiar genres.

Luckily for us, our brains don't become so hardwired that we *can't* get out of our familiar ways of doing things. Just as seasoned gamers can switch between control schemes with a little fiddling, so too can a writer learn how to transition more smoothly between writing genres. There are two things that you can do to streamline this process. The first is a simple knowledge that there are many, MANY ways of writing that reach far beyond what most people have encountered. Understanding that there will be times when you will need to switch genres and knowing that you're going to meet with resistance from your brain is the first step in this process. The second step is a bit more complicated, and so I will turn again to video games for an example.

There is another reason why I am better at video games than my wife. I have learned, through my years of playing, that in order to be successful in any game I had to learn what I was capable of doing in each particular game world. Generally, video games present the player with a great many obstacles, all which must be overcome to progress to the end of the game. Sometimes these obstacles are simply internalizing the controls to the degree where the player's movements become fluid enough to defeat certain enemies or other players; some require a great deal of tactical planning; others involve solving puzzles to reach the end. But in every one of these games, the player will increase her odds of completion greatly if she takes the time early on to explore the boundaries of that particular game world. She must ascertain what she can and can't do there and define her repertoire of interaction. She must ask, "In what ways can I interact within this particular game?" When the player knows what tools are at her disposal and how she is allowed to use them, her odds of success are greatly increased, while her odds of frustrated confusion and inability to progress are lessened. So, to illustrate, by knowing all the ways in which you can interact with blocks in a puzzle game, the player will be less likely to overlook the solution and will solve it more quickly. She knows that he cannot act outside of the preconditions of the game, and so modifies her problem-solving process to only include what is possible.

Though the boundaries of writing are much more hazily defined and open-ended, it is helpful to consider a similar process when approaching an unfamiliar genre. By knowing what your intended purpose is, what tools are at your disposal, and how people expect the genre to look, you can eliminate a great deal of uncertainty from your writing tasks. Why go through all the mental strain considering possibilities that are not feasible when you could narrow your options and choose what you think will work the best? Of course, bounding yourself in should not always be your plan—after you've gained some familiarity with a certain genre and understand well its governing conventions, you might decide to start pushing on the boundaries you've previously established and see where you might take it. Actually utilizing this process in writing is, admittedly, far more difficult than in video games. In writing, there is not some developer who keeps you boxed in. Your options are limitless, and so there are many paths open to you that will lead to confusion on the part of your reader.

There are, nevertheless, steps you can take to write successfully by exploring your options. The first is simply knowing that not all writing is produced in the same way. Understanding that you may need to approach the task in front of you differently than previous writing projects will help you stay on your toes and analyze the expected genre critically. Then, you could ask yourself a number of questions to start building the boundaries of your writing project:

1. "Who am I writing to?"—Think carefully about your intended audience. The characteristics of that audience can give you vital clues in how to structure your work and guidelines for word-choice and phrasing. You would write a letter to your 6-year-old niece differently than you would a prospective employer. And writing terminology can be tricky; the term 'memoir,' for example, might mean different things to others (like your teachers) than it means to you. If possible, try to figure out what is expected of you instead of simply assuming that your idea of a genre is shared by others.

2. "How have others written in this genre?"—Odds are *someone* will have written a successful example of your genre. It may help to see how the author wrote, how she organized her information, how she appealed to the reader, and a host of other undefinables. You're not alone in writing, so don't hesitate to learn from others.

3. "What do I hope to accomplish?"—Successful writers rarely just sit down and write masterpieces. It is immensely helpful to have a plan in mind before jumping into composition. Think about what you want to include and exclude, what ideas and feelings you want to impart to your reader. Having this type of information in advance keeps your writing focused and limits rambling.

These are just a few of the many questions you could ask yourself to set up boundaries. This way you won't be overwhelmed by the limitless possibilities, but you'll still have room to move. Also, by consistently thinking about your writing task critically, as the questions above make you do, you'll increase your flexibility when faced with new writing tasks. There is always the danger of forming a new cognitive rut, as I experience with a new video game and *all* writers experience with new forms of writing. But as you spend more time carefully considering your writing choices, you'll be able to move from genre to genre with greater ease.

Section Three: Writing Research

It's a stoplight; it's a spring; it's a semicolon!

Amy Newday

I hate grammar! I hate punctuation! Okay, that's not entirely true. As a poet, I spend a lot of time fiddling with punctuation and word choices, trying to get the words and symbols in exactly the right places to convey my meaning. But explain comma rules? Diagram a sentence? I don't even want to think about it. Recently in fact, I reviewed a friend's paper and told him confidently that he was using semicolons incorrectly. The phrases on each side of a semicolon had to be able to stand alone, I said, otherwise you should use a comma. Imagine my embarrassment when, in doing research for this article, I found this sentence: "Use semicolons to separate items in a series when there's already a comma in one or more of the items" (O'Conner 139). Oops, that was exactly what my friend was doing.

For years I never used semicolons because I wasn't really sure what they were for. Why take chances on a semicolon when I could just use a period and have two sentences I was pretty sure were correct? Even now, I feel anxiety around semicolons and rarely use them. But I know that learning to use them effectively could help me add variety and

At age seven, Amy Newday wrote her first poem for her pet Holstein calf, Misty. Since then she has written in many different genres, for both business and pleasure. Currently, she's pursuing her MFA in poetry at Western Michigan University and teaching in WMU's First-Year Writing program. She lives in an old house in the country with an old dog, a young cat, and the occasional milk snake. If she's not inside writing, you might find her barefoot in her garden, where she grows monstrously delicious tomatoes and ruffled red lettuce.

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complexity to my sentences, which could help me communicate more successfully.

In the past, my approach to grammar and punctuation has been to go with "what sounds right." Sometimes my "sounds right" approach has resulted in effective writing; sometimes it hasn't. (Did I use the semicolon correctly here? I'm not sure. I think my meaning is clear, but even if I'm getting my point across, I feel nervous. I don't want my readers to think I'm an idiot who can't use punctuation correctly.) Recently, I decided that I needed a new approach. Perhaps if I learned some semicolon rules, I could use them without fear of embarrassing myself.

I have a few friends who teach English, so I asked them for suggestions. One told me that she teaches her students to proof-read by ear as they read their work aloud. She has them listen to where they pause in their reading to figure out where punctuation like commas, semicolons, and periods should go. But another teacher told me that punctuating by ear doesn't work. According to her, it is necessary to look at sentence structure and meaning to figure out where to put punctuation. Hmm. I could see how both methods could be useful, but which one was right? I needed a more definitive solution to my semicolon dilemma. I went to the library, checked out several grammar handbooks and dove into the semicolon sections.

The Right Handbook gave me a historical perspective on punctuation:

> Back in the sixteenth century, when printers first became interested in formulating rules about the use of various punctuation marks so that the printing industry would have some standards, one authority compared punctuation marks to symbols used in music. He equated a period with a full rest, a colon with a three-quarters rest, a semicolon with a half rest, and a comma with a quarter rest (Belanoff 97).

So that would fit with the idea of punctuating by ear, and putting semicolons in places where you pause longer than a comma but shorter than a period. But don't different people have different speech patterns? Wouldn't people pause in different places or for different lengths of time when reading the same passage? How can I tell whether my pauses are the correct ones?

Self-proclaimed grammar stickler Lynne Truss disagrees with this system entirely. She writes,

> Expectation is what these stops are about; expectation and elastic energy. Like internal springs, they propel you forward in a sentence towards more information, and the essential difference between them is that while the semicolon lightly propels you in any direction related to the foregoing ("Whee! Surprise me!"), the colon nudges you along lines already subtly laid down (144).

Expectation and elastic energy, huh? I like the idea of the semicolon as a propellant, almost like an arrow pointing from one phrase to the next.

I read on and found another semicolon metaphor in Patricia O'Conner's *Woe is I*: "If a comma is a yellow light and a period is a red light, the semicolon is a flashing red—one of those lights you drive through after a brief pause" (139). So maybe I can think of the semicolon as a signal to my reader to pause, look around, and then push forward into the next phrase. How do I determine where to put those flashing red lights, though? I don't want my reader to have to stop at every street corner.

I turned to *Pinckert's Practical Grammar*:

> People think of it as a kind of heavy comma, but that's all wrong—it's a period. Think of it as a light period. It definitely represents the period sound. The difference between the semicolon and the period is that after the semicolon you don't pause as long as after the period (Pinckert 64).

So, the semicolon is a musical rest, an internal spring, a flashing red light, and—a period? I was not feeling less confused or more confident in my ability to use semicolons correctly. I pulled out my laptop, googled "semicolon," and found myself at Purdue University's Online Writing Lab. Their website listed three basic ways to use semicolons and gave examples:

“Use a semicolon to join 2 independent clauses when the second clause restates the first or when the two clauses are of equal emphasis.

> Road construction in Dallas has hindered travel around town; streets have become covered with bulldozers, trucks, and cones.

Use a semicolon to join 2 independent clauses when the second clause begins with a conjunctive adverb (however, therefore, moreover, furthermore, thus, meanwhile, nonetheless, otherwise) or a transition (in fact, for example, that is, for instance, in addition, in other words, on the other hand, even so).

> Terrorism in the United States has become a recent concern; in fact, the concern for America’s safety has led to an awareness of global terrorism.

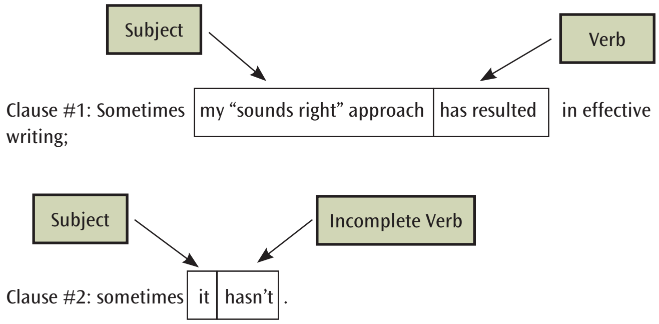
Use a semicolon to join elements of a series when individual items of the series already include commas.

> Recent sites of the Olympic Games include Athens, Greece; Salt Lake City, Utah; Sydney, Australia; Nagano, Japan.”

—From the Purdue Online Writing Lab, <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>

When I reviewed the grammar handbooks, they all seemed to agree with these basic rules. But, embarrassing as it is to admit, I wasn’t entirely sure what they meant by an “independent clause.” To my relief, the Purdue OWL offered a definition: “a clause that has a subject and a verb and can stand alone; a complete sentence.” Oh, so the words on each side of the semicolon should be able to form a complete sentence—that I can understand! Let me take another look at the sentence in which I used a semicolon in the second paragraph of this article:

Sentence: Sometimes my “sounds right” approach has resulted in effective writing; sometimes it hasn’t.



Well, my first clause could be a complete sentence because it has a subject and a verb and would make sense if I read it by itself. But the verb in my second clause is incomplete. There's nothing in that clause to tell me what "hasn't" is referring to and it wouldn't make sense if it wasn't connected to the first clause. So I guess it would be more correct if I wrote: "Sometimes my "sounds right" approach has resulted in effective writing; I've also made embarrassing mistakes using this method." Both of those clauses could stand alone, but the sentence sounds kind of stiff. I don't know that I've made my meaning any clearer by making the sentence technically grammatical. Just as it can be effective to use sentence fragments sometimes, perhaps it can be okay to use fragmented clauses with semicolons, as long as my meaning comes across clearly. Even Truss the grammar stickler does this, in the first sentence of the passage I quoted earlier.

The other use of a semicolon mentioned in the Purdue OWL and in the handbooks is to manage lists in long sentences that get unwieldy. In my friend's paper, he was trying to describe all of the teaching experiences that he'd had in one long sentence. I don't remember the exact wording of his sentence, so I'll make one up: "The diversity of my teaching experience includes teaching yoga, meditation, and movement therapy to senior citizens; teaching English to children, teenagers, and construction workers in Thailand; giving physics presentations and teaching electronics classes in elementary school classrooms across the Eastern United States; and teaching woodworking to inner city youth." Wow, that's quite a sentence. Let me break it down:

Clause #1: The diversity of my teaching experience includes teaching yoga, meditation, and movement therapy to senior citizens;

- This clause introduces the subject of the sentence ("The diversity of my teaching experience") and the verb ("includes"). Then, it begins to describe the different types of teaching the author has done with a list, separated by commas, of the subjects he's taught to senior citizens.

Clause #2: teaching English to children, teenagers, and construction workers in Thailand;

- This clause encompasses all of the author's teaching in Thailand.

Clause #3: giving physics presentations and teaching electronics classes in elementary school classrooms across the Eastern United States;

- This clause describes the types of programs and classes the author has given in US elementary schools.

Clause #4: and teaching woodworking to inner city youth.

- Finally, this last clause describes the author's experience working with inner city youth.

Each clause, set apart by semicolons, describes a different aspect of the author's teaching experience. I do see how it is useful to use semicolons to separate each clause so that it is clear what the author taught to whom, and where. If commas were used in between clauses, this could become confusing.

I'm feeling more comfortable around the semicolon now that I've done some research and practiced a bit; however, I think it will take more practice before I can use it with complete confidence, without double-checking my sentences and referring back to the grammar handbooks. I'm going to play with it though; I'm feeling excited about experimenting with this piece of punctuation and about the new kinds of sentences I'll be able to create using it.

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3

Section Three: Writing Research

Nomenclature

Gina Cooke

Gina Cooke is a linguist in education and a PhD student at Illinois State University. She has taught about reading and writing from preschool to grad school, and thinks that spelling is cool.

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Language for Language Instruction

NOMENCLATURE

by Gina Cooke

COMING TO TERMS
WITH WRITING
That's the Ticket!
HISTORY
Of English
WORDS
And Meanings

Textual Terminologies

TALKING ABOUT WRITING: ENGLISH 101 AND BEYOND

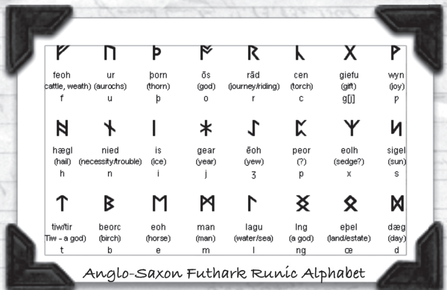
Part of learning about any subject is learning its terminology, and learning about writing is no exception. But no one learns much about words or what they really mean from reading a list of definitions. Instead, let's consider written language as a journey, and words—the terminology of text—as the currency that pays our way.

LEARNING TO WRITE

As a scholar of English, I do a fair amount of reading and writing about reading and writing. I am keenly interested in how teachers teach and how learners learn the workings of written language. After all, one of the most important tasks of schooling is literacy. We all remember aspects of learning to read and write as kids: flash cards, reading groups, spelling tests, book reports. If we're growing up in a literate community, then learning—and using—written language comes with the territory.

It's been that way ever since humans first invented text: for more than 8,000 years, from Mesopotamia to Main Street, young people have been schooled in forming characters, building words, and composing texts. Wealthy Egyptian boys learned to write hieroglyphs on papyrus. Sumerian students were beaten with a cane if they failed to copy cuneiform texts carefully. Greek children copied and memorized passages of Homer's *Odyssey*, and Roman children scratched the alphabet into wax tablets.

In the modern world, modern technologies help us navigate our writing ventures. Computer labs language classrooms, and entire courses are conducted online. But text remains the topic: through changing media and methods over thousands of years, teachers still teach and learners still learn how the written word works.

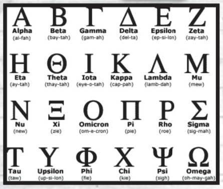


ᚠ	ᚢ	ᚦ	ᚩ	ᚱ	ᚳ	ᚷ	ᚹ
feoh	ur	þorn	ōs	rād	cen	giefu	wyn
(cattle, weath)	(aurochs)	(thorn)	(god)	(journey/riding)	(torch)	(gift)	(joy)
f	u	þ	o	r	c	g[j]	ƿ
ᚻ	ᚾ	ᛁ	ᛄ	ᛇ	ᛈ	ᛉ	ᛋ
hægl	nied	is	gear	ēoh	peor	eolh	sigel
(hail)	(necessity/trouble)	(ice)	(year)	(yew)	(?)	(sedge?)	(sun)
h	n	i	j	ʒ	p	x	s
ᛏ	ᛒ	ᛖ	ᛗ	ᛚ	ᛝ	ᛟ	ᛞ
tiw/tir	beorc	eoh	man	lagu	Ing	eþel	dæg
(Tiw – a god)	(birch)	(horse)	(man)	(water/sea)	(a god)	(land/estate)	(day)
t	b	e	m	l	ng	œ	d

Anglo-Saxon Futhark Runic Alphabet

CLAVDIVS·M
R·MAGQ·ETA·E
VR ARBITRAT
ARGVRIMAIORIS

Ancient Roman Inscription



Α	Β	Γ	Δ	Ε	Ζ
Alpha	**Beta**	**Gamma**	**Delta**	**Epsilon**	**Zeta**
(al-fah)	(bay-tah)	(gam-ah)	(del-ta)	(ep-si-lon)	(zay-tah)
Η	Θ	Ι	Κ	Λ	Μ
Eta	**Theta**	**Iota**	**Kappa**	**Lambda**	**Mu**
(ay-tah)	(thay-tah)	(eye-o-tah)	(cap-pah)	(lamb-dah)	(mew)
Ν	Ξ	Ο	Π	Ρ	Σ
Nu	**Xi**	**Omicron**	**Pi**	**Rho**	**Sigma**
(new)	(zie)	(om-e-cron)	(pie)	(roe)	(sig-mah)
Τ	Υ	Φ	Χ	Ψ	Ω
Tau	**Upsilon**	**Phi**	**Chi**	**Psi**	**Omega**
(taw)	(up-si-lon)	(fie)	(kie)	(sigh)	(oh-may-gah)

Ancient Greek alphabet

Anglo-Saxon (Old English), Latin, and Greek form the backbone of the Modern English language.

NOMENCLATURE

LANGUAGE FOR LEARNING

When we study in any academic discipline, we have to learn its vocabulary. Every subject area has a set of words to name, describe, and explain the concepts being taught. In biology classes, scientists speak unabashedly about *photosynthesis* and *chromosomes*; in math, *integers* and *decimals* share the page with *digits* and *sums*. No one tries to understand history without learning and using words like *democracy* or *monarch*.

Writing as an academic discipline is no exception to this rule. Most young children learning a writing system acquire an instructional vocabulary to guide their learning: *vowel, syllable, suffix, cursive, adjective,* and *phrase* are all names for things we learned along the way as our writing skills emerged and evolved.

Just as travelers need a road map and a compass (or perhaps a GPS), writers also need navigational tools for their explorations: pen and paper (or a hard drive and a keyboard), a curious mind, and a common vocabulary.

In my own journey as a writer, it seems that the demands on my language skills are continually increasing. So too is the need for a deeper understanding of a shared writers' vocabulary. The common terminology—the nomenclature—that we use to learn about writing can help us navigate our continued learning.

LANGUAGE FOR WRITING

On the pages that follow, I'll share my research into some high-frequency terms within a writers' vocabulary. Using sources like the *Dictionary of Word Origins,* the *Oxford English Dictionary,* and the *Online Etymology Dictionary,* I'll consider the terms' historical origins, their modern meanings, and what they can tell us about the work of teaching and learning about writing.

A Timeline for English

- 5th Century: The Angles, Saxons and Jutes establish a presence on the British Isles, bringing their Germanic language with them.
- 8th Century: After Viking incursions into Britain, the Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse languages merge into 'Englisc,' or Old English.
- 11th Century: In 1066, the Norman invasion brings the French language and French scribes to Britain, rapidly influencing the local language and marking the beginning of Middle English.
- 15th Century: The Great Vowel Shift and William Caxton's printing press cause radical changes in English speech and writing. Shakespeare is born in the 16th century and writes in Modern English.
- 18th Century: Neoclassicism's renewed interest in ancient Greece and Rome bring countless new Greek and Latin words into the English language.
- 21st Century: English is a global language, used worldwide for commerce, aviation, education, science, research, entertainment, law, and diplomacy.

Europe

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BARBARIA

ENGLAND in 550
Picts
East Angles
South Saxons
I. of Wight

England

NOMENCLATURE

A New Angle on Old English

THE WRITE START

ANGLO-SAXON: BEGINNINGS

The story of English begins with the Anglo-Saxons, who inhabited the British Isles from the 5th century on. Ruddy and earthy, these Germanic people didn't leave behind a huge body of literature; they are best known for the epic verse *Beowulf*, which has a lasting presence in today's English classrooms and textbooks. In the language, too, Anglo-Saxon has had a lasting presence: the words that remain from the Anglo-Saxon or Old English era are often our most common, basic words, the starting place for speaking and writing.

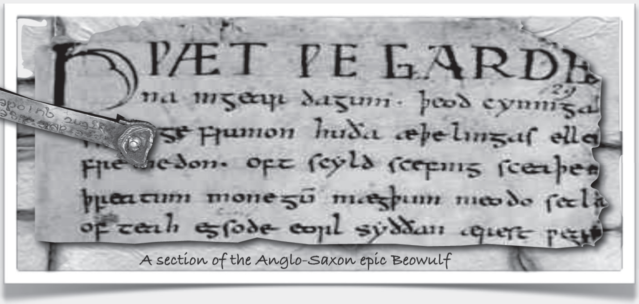
ROUGHING IT

When we write, we never begin with a finished product. Usually, we don't even begin with a complete thesis or central point. Most often, good writing begins as an exploration—basic words and basic ideas.

Some writers are fortunate to learn early on the value of a 'rough draft.' Truth be told, my every first draft is rough. It's unfinished, sketchy, even crude. Sometimes, a rough draft doesn't even *look* like real writing. It may not even have complete sentences. Maybe just phrases. Or words.

But what exactly is a draft? It turns out that a draft's imperfect nature is in keeping with the historical meaning of the word. The Old English word meant 'to pull' or 'to draw.' Originally spelled <dræht>, it still appears in British English as <draught>. In this spelling, we can see the word's semantic connections to its conceptual partners, *drag* and *draw*. So, in investigating the word's origins, we can better understand what a draft actually *is* when we write.

A draft is often something *dragged* out of us or something *pulled* together to meet a looming deadline. Frequently, our drafts are *drawn* more than they are written; outlines, word webs, charts, and other graphic organizers can literally help us *draw* out our initial writing ideas. Over time, as we revisit our drafts, we *pull* in more or better information, and we *draw* clearer word pictures to better convey our meaning.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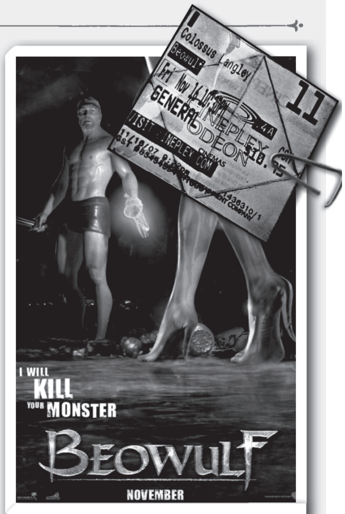
A section of the Anglo-Saxon epic Beowulf



A 2007 movie depicted the monster-killing Anglo-Saxon hero

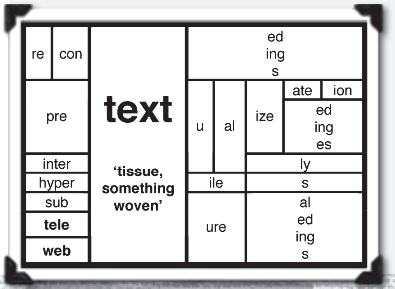
The word *draft* can also refer to concepts other than writing. A draft of air, for example, can be bracing or chilling, much like effective writing. Draft beer—beer drawn from a tap—can be lively and flavorful, just like a good text. Ultimately, a draft is the first breath of writing. It's sometimes refreshing, sometimes stale. A draft is something sketched, something unformed, something with promise.

Once we sketch out our basic ideas, it's time to move forward on our writing timeline. After a draft or two, we want to begin to polish our craft. Structure, style, and word choice can change significantly over the writing process. While we can't write at all without a basic (Anglo-Saxon) vocabulary, we also can't stop there. Let's consider where our drafts might draw us next.

NOMENCLATURE

When in Rome, Do as the Romans

OR, WHAT WILLIAM CONQUERED



In my research, I use word matrices like the one above to show how we can build many words from a single base. The base <text> derives from the Latin *texere*, 'to weave;' its original meaning is still preserved in words such as *textile* and *texture*. But the meaning has also broadened to refer to written documents, spoken words, and understanding. The word *context*, for example, may refer to written or oral language, to experiences, or to situations. A *pretext* is a reason given, often deceptively.

The most modern meanings for text reflect today's technology: *webtext* and *hypertext* refer to computerized documents and their embedded links to other texts, images or information. Although it was a noun for centuries, *text* has also recently become a verb: *I texted my friend*.

But perhaps the contemporary notion of text as writing is not so very different from the ancient notion of text as weaving:

> "An ancient metaphor: thought is a thread, and the raconteur is a spinner of yarns—but the true storyteller, the poet, is a weaver. The scribes made this old and audible abstraction into a new and visible fact. After long practice, their work took on such an even, flexible texture that they called the written page a textus, which means cloth."
>
> ~Robert Bringhurst
>
> *The Elements of Typographic Style*

LATIN: ENGLISH GROWS UP

Over the centuries, English has been profoundly influenced by various Romance languages. In fact, it's often considered to be the most Latin of all the Germanic languages. First, Julius Caesar and his Roman henchmen invaded Britain in 55 BCE, but they didn't leave much of their Latin lexicon behind. The Roman Catholic Church also established a presence in England in the 6th century, likewise without lasting linguistic effects.

The first major infusion of Romance words into the English language began in 1066, when William, the Duke of Normandy (or William the Conqueror) decided that the English throne really belonged to him. The Battle of Hastings ensued, bringing Norman French royalty, nobility, scribes, customs and, of course, language into Britain. New words were adopted, adapted and argued about over hundreds of years.

Centuries later, during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, Greek and Roman classical studies were rediscovered throughout Europe. In order to establish a common vocabulary, scholars and writers made way for another influx of Romance words into English.

Whereas Old English was the language of a hale, down-to-earth people, French and Latin were the languages of art, science, religion, and scholarship. They brought more complex words into English, words with prefixes and suffixes, words with rich, nuanced meanings. Hence, understanding the Latin layer of the English language can increase a writer's level of sophistication. Whereas an Anglo-Saxon vocabulary might proclaim writing to be *good* or *right*, a Romance-based vocabulary could deem it to be *excellent, brilliant, superlative*, or *incomparable*.

COMPOSE YOURSELF

Like the English language itself, our own individual language changes over time, through the writing process. After roughly sketching out our thoughts, we want to help our draft mature into a well-structured, well-articulated piece. This is where knowing about some important Latin words can help us.

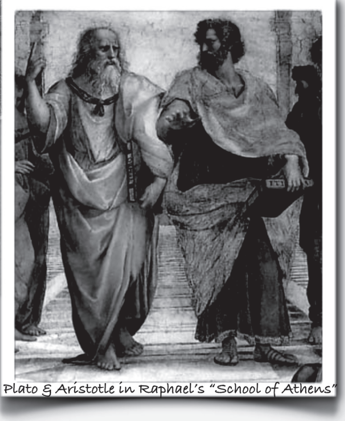
First, we *revise*. When we revise our writing, we're literally having another look at it. To <re> + <vise> means to 'see again'; <vise> is the same Latin base that appears in words like *visual, visor, vision*, and *visit*, all words that have to do with seeing. All polished writing needs a fresh perspective. It's often helpful to get a second or third set of eyes on our work, to have our peers take a look-see as well. Our final product, after all, cannot stay at the draft stage; it needs to grow up into a full-blown composition.

Many of us think of a *composition* as a particular kind of writing assignment, but if we study the word, we see that it goes farther than that. The words *compose* and *composition* come from Latin too (the <ion> at the end is a dead giveaway). To <pose> something means to 'put' it or 'place' it in a certain way; add the prefix <com>, which means 'together,' and we get a better picture of what writing is: a composition is something thoughtfully put together. It's a draft that's all grown up.

NOMENCLATURE

It's All Greek to Me!

RHETORICAL QUESTIONS



Plato & Aristotle in Raphael's "School of Athens"

GREEK: THAT'S CLASSIC

In modern writing studies, composition and rhetoric walk hand in hand. But in its origins, the academic field of rhetoric lies in the classical world and was originally independent of written text. What I first studied rhetoric, I learned that the term comes from the an ancient Greek word rhḗtōr, meaning 'orator' or 'public *speaker*,' and the word rhḗtōr in turn is derived from rhêma, which means '*spoken* word.' So the first rhetoricians were not writers at all.

In the 4th century BCE, the Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote a treatise called *Rhetoric* in which he examined the art of speaking persuasively. Verbal prowess was highly valued, and public debates were commonplace in the educated community. Of course, the discipline of rhetoric has changed over the past 2,500 years, but Aristotle's original framework retains a powerful influence in writing studies, literature, philosophy, and education today.

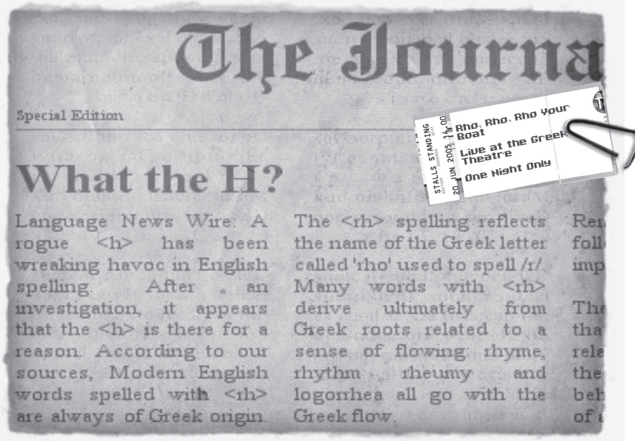
The study of classical philosophers such as Aristotle, his teacher, Plato, and *his* teacher, Socrates, was revived in the 18th century during the Enlightenment, when new domains of study arose in the arts and sciences. Thousands of new words entered the English language, borrowed and adapted from ancient Greek, to meet the demands of new ways of thinking and learning.

Old words also began to be used in new ways in academic life: the study of *rhetoric* changed from being primarily about persuasive speech to primarily about reading and writing (Horner 1990: 325). A new class of readers—a literate community—grew up amidst expanding print technologies, creating a need and desire for the work of writers. Along with neoclassicism, then, came new opportunities and a new vocabulary for writers.

MASTERS OF OUR DOMAIN

Over the centuries, rhetoric has been redefined by countless authors, speakers, and thinkers. Some people use 'rhetoric' synonymously with 'doublespeak' or 'lip service,' as in *The politicians' rhetoric about healthcare reform won't cure sick people.* For university-level writers, however, rhetoric means carefully considering one's appeal, one's argument, and one's audience.

When we write, we try to observe the conventions of the domain in which we're operating. The rhetoric we use—the available means of persuasion—will be different for a personal narrative than it will be for a research paper and different still for a journal article or a website. Beyond just composing, attention to rhetoric gives us integrity in our writing. With skilled rhetoric, our point and our perspective are clear and compelling. A classical art, then, helps make for classic writing abilities.



The Journa

Special Edition

What the H?

Language News Wire: A rogue <h> has been wreaking havoc in English spelling. After an investigation, it appears that the <h> is there for a reason. According to our sources, Modern English words spelled with <rh> are always of Greek origin.

The <rh> spelling reflects the name of the Greek letter called 'rho' used to spell /r/. Many words with <rh> derive ultimately from Greek roots related to a sense of flowing: rhyme, rhythm, rheumy and logorrhea all go with the Greek flow.

NOMENCLATURE

Interminable Terminologies

WORDS WITHOUT END

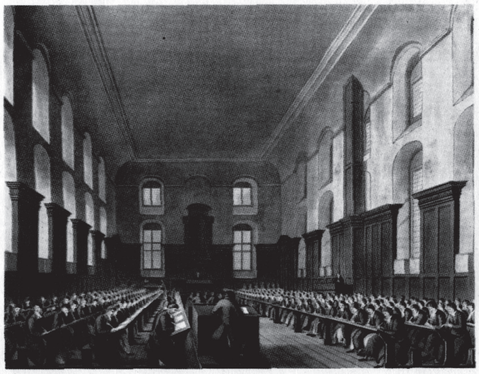
LEARNING ABOUT WRITING

Many people would argue that students need to learn 'how to write,' whatever that means. What's more important, and more interesting, is that we need to learn *about* writing (Wardle 2009). To write, we need to be scholars of writing. That means reading, to be sure; university courses bring an increased reading load no matter one's field. But being a scholar of writing—learning about writing—also means learning about its terminology, its structure, and its past.

Everyone knows that stories are made of words, but my research also teaches me that words are made up of stories. Understanding the story of words and the story of writing helps me to better understand my job as a writer, in a community of writers and in various writing situations. Having a nomenclature as a departure place is critical to successfully navigating the turbulent waters of writing.

Writing instruction is an ancient and ever-changing tradition. We witness language—and the demands on language—changing all the time, throughout history and in the present day. Spoken language changes, and written language changes. Along the way, writing and studying writing also shift in their meaning, in their form, and in their function.

Wherever we are on our writing journey, let's make sure that among the souvenirs we've collected, we've included the necessary tools for our travel. Literacy has played an indispensable role in human history; it has accompanied every war, every court, every major religion, and every formal education for the past 8,000 years. The story of literacy *is* the story of the world, and understanding the history of a discipline better equips us to shape its future.



WRITING SCHOOL, CHRIST'S HOSPITAL
Coloured aquatint by J. Stadler after F. Mackenzie, 1816

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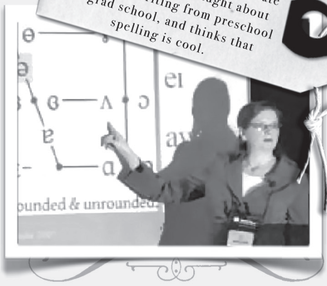
Gina Cooke is a linguist in education and a PhD student at Illinois State University. She has taught about reading and writing from preschool to grad school, and thinks that spelling is cool.



3 Section Three: Writing Research

"Good Enough": Getting the Writing Written and Letting It Go

Heidi Guth Bowman

I wish I was my cat Marvin right now, sitting there with his chin on the table, sniffing in the direction of my husband Eric's plate. Marvin puts his front paws on the table and stands up on his back legs, sitting back down immediately when Eric scolds him. Marvin is content, as he resettles his chin on the table, to wait. Sure enough, in a few minutes Eric is tossing scraps on the floor for him, and Marvin is happy. Marvin, unlike me, doesn't have to *do* anything, besides jump down from the chair and chew. He doesn't have to write not one, but two papers. *Oh, but you love writing*, part of me pipes up. *Okay*, another part says, *I do, but why do I just wish I was a cat right now, with no writing on my plate*?

And that is the question I face tonight, as Marvin ambles by my feet and cheerfully searches for more food on the floor. What is the deal with my love-hate relationship with writing? Why do I dread something I desire to do? I know the answer is twisted up in the tangles of perfectionism, procrastination, and, as I think when I am not being nice to myself, good ol' laziness. But it's not just an aimless wish to hang out on the couch with Marv that keeps me from creating. I think I don't want to start writing because I know it will never be finished. It will never be perfect. It will pin me to the chair, and kill me, as I agonize over every word, even when I have entered the tick-tock of the last minute. Perfectionism, in fact, paralyzed me for a few

Heidi Guth Bowman is working toward her master's in literature at ISU. She enjoys writing in the wee hours of the morning, reading like a banshee, meeting her husband's eyes when their kids yet again say something ridiculous, naming cats, drinking diet pop, and singing off-key.

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moments in the paragraph above this one. I have re-worded and re-worked my descriptions of Marvin (who couldn't care less which words I choose to portray him and his endless appetite) several times, and I am still bothered by my three uses of the phrase "on the table." But, being the procrastinator I am, I have continually delayed this writing, and I don't have time to continue wondering if there is a suitable noun that could replace "table." I want to try to turn this writing into "written." I want to try to get this job done.

Some things that I never wrote haunt me to this day. I write beautifully in my head, while I am scooping the cat litter or driving to the library, but I wait around and wait around to start the actual writing, whether it is for a class assignment or a letter to an old friend. I put so much performance pressure on myself that the on-paper writing, which is never perfect, sometimes has never happened. I'm in my thirties, and I still regret that I never took the time to write my high school graduation thank you cards, because the prospect of writing them in the perfect voice, the voice of the grateful, excited teenager on the verge of college, just seemed like too much to handle. Worse yet are the timely letters to the editor of the local paper that I have let burn to ash inside me. Rather than risk saying something imperfectly, I chose to say nothing at all. What a bunch of crap. I have learned, as I try to write in this little house full of living distractions, both feline and human, that if I want to be a writer, I had better start writing, or else my words of gratitude, my words of rage, my words of reflection, will just never get said.

Knowing I need to start the writing and doing it are two different things, however. This article, for example, has been following me for several weeks. I know it's there, hiding behind a corner, while I dump out and organize drawers that have been cluttered for months and ponder which colors to paint the house that has needed painted for years. I know I am avoiding the writing, as I am afraid to throw my energy into it. But now that I am here, actually in the writing moment, it's not so bad. I don't even want to be a cat at the moment. I can't escape and I don't want to escape, as I know if I do wriggle free of my writing responsibilities, the freedom won't be worth the guilt of my unwritten words. It's a matter of getting to the writing, of turning to the article behind the door, and saying, quite warmly, "Oh, come in already. I know you're not going away. My family has been asleep for hours, but here, come and sit with me and a few of my cats. This is Marvin. This is Sugar. This is George. Yes, come in, article, and let's get comfortable. Let's get cracking."

Some of the best advice I have gotten on "getting cracking" on my writing came from Anne Lamott's book *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. She tells us to allow ourselves the freedom of a "shitty first draft." She says it's okay to throw some things out on paper, make a mess, and clean it up later. Sometimes I feel like my writing is just layer upon layer of shitty first drafts, but somehow, once the words are out, they seem to find a way to come together, eventually, in a semi-cohesive final piece. The shitty first draft idea has liberated me, to face the writing, get started and get moving. The time I hauled my lawn chair and laptop into the cat yard remains one of my favorite writing memories. The sun hammered down on me while I typed away about the animals within a Kundera novel, surrounded by animals of my own. I usually compose on a laptop, but once I decided to scribble out some of my research paper in a spiral notebook while I was sitting and waiting at the eye doctor's. I later ripped out my scrawled pages and typed some of them into the draft on the computer. I often feel my writing is like weaving. I piece together a scrap of an idea here, or sew in a sentence there. Lamott says to take things "bird by bird," or step by step, or even, for us feline aficionados, cat by cat. I am not going to get my whole research paper finished today. Maybe I can write about one point. Maybe I can expand on one quotation. Maybe I can play with one idea. It's a process, and it's actually pretty fun.

In my Introduction to Graduate Studies class, I got more good advice from my professor and my peers when I openly discussed (or possibly even just whined) about my problems with writing papers. "Will it ever change? Will it always be a mad dash to the finish? Does it ever get better?" I wanted to get better. I was sick of racing breathlessly across the quad, hoping the instructor didn't really mean it when she said you could not drop it off even two minutes after the scheduled time. My professor and classmates were encouraging. They told me to set small goals for myself. They told me to try different methods, like timed writing. They also told me to give up the perfectionism, or nit-picking, as the professor called it. "Who needs perfect," she said, "when you've got damn good?" My mind instantly rang with my boss at work's frequent expression: "Good enough!" I used to wonder if his chirpy "Good enough!"'s were just an invitation to let us off the hook, to let us be sloppy and do substandard work. But no. He says "Good enough!" because, most of the time, it is good enough and it's time to let it go.

In the same class, we studied Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This novel is generally considered an American classic, a timeless tale of a boy who has to learn to listen to his own heart when it comes to morality. I was surprised to realize that this book is not perfect. It's pretty clear that at the end of the book Twain just wasn't sure what to do with Tom Sawyer. But he kept writing. He kept writing, and we have a wonderful, messed-up book. It isn't perfect. Writing never will be. But it's a classic! And he's Mark Twain! If Mark Twain wasn't perfect, why should I expect to be?

If I am going to finish the writing, I have to start it. I realize I will never finish it, not completely, as writing is always a forward motion, a work in progress. I will always want to re-write sentences and change things around. But I have learned to let things go. And sometimes, while I am doing it, the world will toss me a scrap and I will realize, quite cheerfully, that there is really nowhere else I'd like to be.

As for Marvin, I swear on Mark Twain that he is, at this moment, on my lap, purring, pushing his paws into my legs while I type.

Good enough.*

*My cat Macaroni would like to add that *he* is the cat on my lap for my final draft, as we all know the original draft is long buried under revisions and rearrangements. Marvin has been too busy bug-hunting in the living room to be of any moral support for me tonight. Mac, however, has been very encouraging for this writing go-round, purring peacefully on my lap and occasionally looking up to bite me, somewhat gently, on the nose.

The ISU Writing Research Annual 2011:
In Media Res

In our inaugural issue, we solicited work from a diverse group of authors, writing from a range of different perspectives about their experience with writing. For the 2011 project, we are hoping to collect work from a similarly diverse group of authors, but focusing more narrowly on some specific writing research projects, which are described below. We are encouraging and will accept proposals for articles from individuals throughout the ISU and Bloomington-Normal communities, as well as from scholars in Writing Studies and related fields.

In Fall 2010, we will be soliciting authors interested in producing articles on the following list of research topics; these research topics will also be integrated with our Writing Program courses in the Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 semesters and will be facilitated by the Center for Writing Research and Pedagogy. If you are interested in participating in one of these research projects, please visit the Center for Writing Research & Pedagogy website, where you will find more information about these projects, instructions on how to submit proposals, and sample texts and examples.

Research Projects for the ISU Writing Research Annual 2011

1) We Do it ↱ This Way

The focus of this project is to promote research that helps us to understand the sneaky ways that genres[1] (different types of writing in different situations) can become invisible, and what we can (and must) do to make them visible again. Once we learn, or think we've learned, to create a certain kind of writing in a particular situation, we often begin to believe that "this is just the way it's done." The process through which we learned, and the rules, conventions, and expectations that shaped how and what we learned, become invisible to us. However, the act of producing a certain kind of texts, in response to certain kinds of situations, involving particular events, institutions, groups of people, etc., can be enormously complicated – and sometimes we can find ourselves on the outside of a genre of writing, looking in. When this happens, we realize that we don't really know what we thought we knew about writing. For this ongoing research project, we are soliciting articles from writers and researchers who are interested in documenting either their own learning process (how they learned to create a certain kind of text or to work with certain genres), or in researching how other people (or groups of people) learn in these situations.

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[1] When we use the word "genre" here, we don't mean just literary genres, like fiction, poetry, lyric poetry, etc. Instead, we're talking about any kind of text or group of texts that can be, even momentarily, defined by certain parameters, rules, conventions, audience expectations, etc. Genres are not "stable," because they don't stay the same over time, or in different situations, just like an email to a professor or a work supervisor is not controlled by the same "rules" that would control the email we'd send to our best friend, or to our child, or our parent. These are all "emails," but the conventions (and expectations) of these texts change depending on the context of the [writing] event.

2) Researching Research Practices

It's possible to broadly define the word "research" as any activity through which an individual or group searches for information needed in order to complete another (or a series of) activit(ies); like building a nuclear bomb, trying to find a cheap plane ticket, or understanding the environmental impact of sulphide-mining. In collaboration with the Milner Library, the Center for Writing Research and Pedagogy is soliciting authors interested in investigating research activities at Illinois State University. Who does it? For what purposes? And most importantly, how do we learn how to do the activities of "research" that are commonly valued by university communities?

3) Investigating Writing Instruction

If only the process that stretches from learning the alphabet to composing a Magnum Opus could move smoothly and without interruptions or frustration. If only…

But since literacies of all kinds are complicated and difficult to learn, we find ways to teach them, through apprenticeship, self-instruction, or explicit classroom teaching. At ISU, many of us (faculty and students alike) are interested in learning how to teach others to compose: from sentences, to term papers, to graphic novels, to digital archives and databases. In collaboration with the Center for Teaching and Learning and the Julia N. Visor Center, The Center for Writing Research and Pedagogy is working to create an archive of teaching practices related to the teaching of composition. We are soliciting both instructors willing to investigate their own teaching practices, and researchers willing to participate in the ethnographic research of writing instruction here at ISU.

4) Writing in Action: A Multimedia Project

Photographic/video essays are a narrative form, in which images tell a story. The Center for Writing Research and Pedagogy is soliciting researchers, designers, and artists who are interested in creating multimodal essays[2] that narrate writing-in-action. These projects can focus on, but need not be limited to, the traditional sense of writing or composing a print text, but might also include a wide range of other composing activities, such as building websites, writing/arranging music, producing and manufacturing print books, shooting video, etc. Interested authors will work to collect a database of images, and then compose their own texts (digital articles, print books, etc.) that reflect on or analyze the activities of composing.

5) Reviewing and Remixing the ISU Writing Research Annual

Each year, beginning in 2011, archived copies of the Writing Research Annual will be available to public audiences via the Center for Writing Research and Pedagogy online archives. Our goal is for these texts to continue to evolve and evoke responses in readers beyond this print edition. As a result, the ISU Writing Program is soliciting reviews and remixes of the 2010 WRA articles. Authors participating in this project may choose to complete a traditional review of a current article, but "remixes" (which might rearrange, revise, and/or riff off of the original articles) will also be considered.

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[2] Essays can be digital or print-based, using still photography or video, and can include, but should not be limited to alphabetic text.