

GRASSROOTS WRITING RESEARCH JOURNAL

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Department of English, Illinois State University

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Stevenson Hall 133
Illinois State University
Campus Box 4240
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Director: Tara Reeser

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From the Editors

Sarah Hercula

The *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* ushers in its fourth year of publication with this, our 4.1 issue. The journal has grown in its scope and sophistication over these four years, and as a result, we are happy to present in this issue twelve brand new articles, comprising a mixture of some more “traditional” *Grassroots* articles along with some new twists on the genre, all of which offer readers complex investigations of writing research, genre studies, and/or Cultural Historical Activity Theory.

In keeping with our grassroots research theme, we begin the issue with **Michael Soares’** behind-the-scenes research on the genre of the cereal box, exploring which boxes make it from the grocery store shelf to our kitchen tables and why. Similarly, **Laurenn Jarema** investigates a common and yet intriguing genre, the greeting card, exploring intersections between genre history and trajectory. Jarema’s article includes a unique timeline, spanning the lifetime of the greeting card from its origin to its modern uses. Next, **Eric Longfellow’s** complex explorations of sexuality, power, and identity are situated in his analysis of sexting, an explicit and yet fascinating genre. We then zoom in to the level of the sentence with **Abbie O’Ryan’s** investigation of some common writing “rules,” questioning in which genres and writing situations these rules apply.

The next three articles were written by our 2012 recipients of the ISU Writing Program Undergraduate Writing Research Scholarship, starting with **Joey Lauren Jiracek’s** report of her empirical research into the writing habits and attitudes of first-year college student writers at ISU. Throughout the article, **Jiracek** also reflects on her experience writing in the genre of the survey, her data collection instrument, as a way to reflect on her own writing experiences in the context of each of her survey questions. Next, **Miles Maggio** illustrates his experience of writing a memoir to investigate his past, using it to examine his tendencies and alter his future actions. He prompts his readers to do the same, finding a genre that allows them to do this same creative and reflective work. Our final Undergraduate Writing Research scholar, **Brandon Stark**, conducts an analysis of screenplays, offering examples of his own writing practices and work in this genre.

Our next three authors explore some unique genres, beginning with **Kate Browne** who traces her experimentation with genre subversion in the context of food journals, a genre that failed her until she learned how to bend its conventions. **Francesco Levato’s** creative piece relates his comical adventures in researching

how to survive the impending zombie apocalypse. And returning author **Adriana Gradea's** new piece investigates the complex cultural considerations involved when a genre is transformed and transferred to new spaces and audiences.

The penultimate piece by **Cayla Eagon** adopts Cultural Historical Activity Theory as its framework to explore a common writing situation: a college-level writing assignment. **Eagon's** multi-narrative piece includes both her internal monologue and her analytical observations as she reflects on the implications of her writing habits. The final article is **Michael Gibson Wollitz's** fictional interview in which the interviewer becomes infuriated by the impossible writing and research practices of the "famous" writer he interviews.

As we look to the future of the journal, we plan to continue increasing the quality and depth of the articles we publish, prompting our authors to think deeply about writing research in- and outside the classroom. We hope to expand the number of articles we publish that investigate workplace genres and genres "in the wild," and we look forward to welcoming in a broader author base and readership as we continue to make space for writers who are working outside academia. Our final article, "Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*," illustrates these hopes for the future of the journal, providing guidelines and prompts for our future authors. Happy reading and, of course, writing!

Eating Genre for Breakfast: The Cereal Box Experience

Michael Soares

From the store aisle to your bowl, the seemingly innocuous journey of breakfast cereal is in fact fraught with implication for genre studies. Placement of the box on the shelf as well as the information on that box is a case study of marketing in overdrive as companies compete to get their cereal into your shopping cart. The popular cereals are those who successfully anticipate consumer uptake, ranging from colorful cartoon mascots placed eye-level for children to “healthy” cereals placed above the fray for conscientious, if not unsuspecting, adults. Masters of multi-modality and context, cereal companies use tools such as the practical (if not dystopian) planograms as well as the cereal box itself to zero in on potential customers, targeting not only their children but their own childhoods, effectively placing genres on the breakfast table in the “Cereal Box Experience.”

“The truth is, all of us look forward to cereal for excitement and fun. Deep down, everyone is cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs and every other breakfast Cereal.”—Chuck McGann, original voice of “Sonny” the Cocoa Puffs cuckoo bird.



Figure 1. Big Brother is watching you buy cereal.

Abbie pushed by her brothers and ran to the Cinnabon cereal. “This is the one I want, Daddy!”

“Why do you want this box, sweetheart?”

“Because they look delicious.”

Choosing cereal is an experience that evolves throughout one’s life. As a child, the process was almost ceremonial, the perfect selection a rapturous, quasi-religious event. Childhood memories of stalking the cereal aisle are a shared experience which come flooding back to us as we enter its familiar domain. Predictably, and perhaps unfortunately, when we “grow up” the tricks are not for kids anymore. The older we grow, our motivations change and the cereal aisle is revealed as a dystopian nightmare of competing propaganda. Despite this, no matter one’s view, what is not in dispute is cereal’s enduring popularity and mystique. Merely typing the words “cereal box” into eBay’s search engine results in thousands of auctions featuring relics from one of everyone’s favorite childhood traditions. Cereal is in your face as it jockeys to get into your bowl. Forget about the prize inside the box: the real surprise is what is found *outside*, both printed on the box itself as well as the forces leading the buyer to it. As a genre, the cereal box warrants serious interrogation, from *what* is on the box and *why* someone is buying it, to *how* the cereal box gets to its specific location on the shelf and *who* decides which cereal goes where.

Cereals are fighting for the consumer’s attention starting with the design of the box to placement of the product on the shelf. Interrogating the cereal box genre transforms a walk down the cereal aisle into an exercise of inquiry. Which cereals are placed for adults? Children? The health conscious? How do consumers read the box in the aisle and what effect does it have on their purchasing decisions? What are the antecedent genres (those genres we already understand and draw upon to help us understand new ones) which lead us to how we read and act upon that reading? Analyzing the placement of the product as an activity system (all the elements involved in an activity and how they function together) reveals boundaries of the cereal box genre that most people may never consider. The array of information on a cereal box, as well as store circulars showcasing cereal bargains, creates a sea of text through which a buyer must wade before making a purchase based upon his or her “reading.” Other documents, such as “planograms” showing where cereal boxes are placed on grocery store shelves, illustrate a hierarchy of power and demonstrate the complexity of cereal box-related genres and their profound effect on us in the grocery aisle.

I clearly remember the excitement of the cereal box experience as a child, and now I am the purchasing power behind my children’s cereal

choices. From the perspective of a parent, my understanding of this genre is immensely more immediate and relevant. Accordingly, in order to study the cereal box as a genre, I devised an experiment in three parts. First, I recruited my wife to send a Facebook message to all her “mom” friends requesting a variety of cereal boxes, several dozen of which promptly arrived and were spread out on the kitchen floor for close study. Next, I interviewed local grocery store managers and researched the cereal box phenomenon on-line and in the library. Finally, I took my three children to the grocery store to allow them the one-time opportunity to choose any box of cereal they wanted. What follows are the kid tested, father approved results.

Breakfast of Champions: The Triumph of Multi-modality

Abbie hoists the cereal box triumphantly and I do not interfere with her decision, but I ask her again—out of all the cereal boxes in this aisle, why did you choose this one? She turns the box over and shows me the back. Recently, Abbie has watched parts of the 2012 Olympics on TV, and the back of the Cinnabon box features pictures of the athletes, effectively equating sugary cereal with Olympic greatness. So begins the story of *my* cereal buying experiment, but as it turns out, the story began long before my children, or I, were born. As far back as the early 1900s, cereal makers were conniving to draw attention to their products, creating iconic imagery and generation-transcending catch phrases, all in effort to strong-arm and maneuver their products in the marketplace. According to Scott and Crawford, authors of *Cerealizing America: The Unsweetened Story of American Breakfast Cereal*, “the originators of the ready-to-eat breakfast cereal industry were crusading eccentrics, men who mixed philosophy with food technology to create a breakfast revolution” (90). In short, cereal has been a serious business for a long time and continues to be so. The successful use of multi-modality, when the text is dependent upon input from the reader, is demonstrated in the cereal box experience by the industry’s careful orchestration of the many elements influencing the buyer to purchase the box that makes it to the breakfast table.



Figure 2. Abbie—future Olympian.

Reading the back of the cereal box is a breakfast tradition, so it is not a stretch to consider the cereal box as text with six sides, each carefully designed for a purpose. Of course, the front side is the workhorse because the reader's first contact with the box is a large visually appealing picture, which is a prominent feature of the genre. Although there is usually a glorified photo of the actual cereal product, often accompanied by fruit in the bowl that is not actually inside the box, more often than not, the front features a cartoon character, especially for the boxes at children's eye-levels. Depending on the buyer, a cartoon leprechaun, tiger, bumblebee, or sea captain is all it takes to make a purchasing decision; one does not even need to read the cereal name to know what is being bought. The average cereal box measures 7-8 inches by 10-11 inches with the "name" brands tending to run larger, perhaps using their box size to demonstrate their supposed superiority. The average graphic, including the cereal photo and/or cartoon mascot, measures from 5 to almost 8 inches long, while the average cereal name "title" measures anywhere from a few inches to nearly seven across. Frequently one will observe a small chart near the top of the box, encapsulating information about calories, fat, sodium, and other nutrients such as calcium or vitamin D. The genius of this feature is that it distracts the customer from the more explicit yet mystifying "Nutritional Facts" box located on the side panel, listing the inclusion of such inauspicious-sounding ingredients as "Trisodium Phosphate" and "BHT" which is "added to preserve freshness." Ultimately, the most consistent bit of additional information on the front of the boxes is the nutritional value "blurb" hawking the benefits of the particular cereal. Out of several dozen cereal boxes spread across my kitchen floor, at least two-thirds of them featured the words "Whole Grain" splayed gratuitously across the front cover. According to CNN correspondent Alexandra Sifferlin, unless the cereal claims "100% Whole Grain," one should assume the grain is refined which, I take it, is undesirable. The most fascinating aspect of the "grain claim" is that despite the fact that I work in an academic setting, not one person I know can actually tell me what the difference is between a whole or refined grain, yet that lack of knowledge does not stop us from agreeing that "Whole Grain" is somehow very appealing.

Catcher in the Rice Krispies: Audience and Context

Isaac walked down the aisle, carefully considering every box. Closing in on six feet tall, he towered above the gimmicky cereals and stared directly into the sea of "healthy" cereal choices. However, Isaac is no fool—he knows an opportunity when he sees one. Occasionally, he picked up a cereal box, inspected it, and then set it back down, each time glancing incredulously

back towards me, waiting for a reaction. He received none. Finally, after much contemplation and with a defiant look in his eye, Isaac handed me the box of *Chocolate* Lucky Charms. Isaac will be fifteen in a few months. He is a high school freshman who firmly and erroneously thinks he is getting his driver's license the day he turns sixteen. As he pushes towards adulthood, Isaac is also pushing the boundaries of authority, making bold choices and testing limits. When it comes to choosing cereal, it does not get much bolder than a chocolatized version of one of breakfast's most sugary cereals. Isaac read the cereal box and then made his brazen selection, obeying a primal adolescent urge to go against his progenitors.

Like the angsty Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher in the Rye*, wandering the streets of New York and sorting out his adolescent detachment, Isaac wanders the cereal aisle, reading the *Bildungsroman* of text. What Isaac does not realize is that the cereal industry is light years ahead of him, subtly and not so subtly manipulating his choice by directing not just how he reads a cereal box, but also how he reads the entire cereal aisle. He responds to this particular cereal box because he is a teenager, and although he *thinks* he is following his nose, he is actually being led by it.

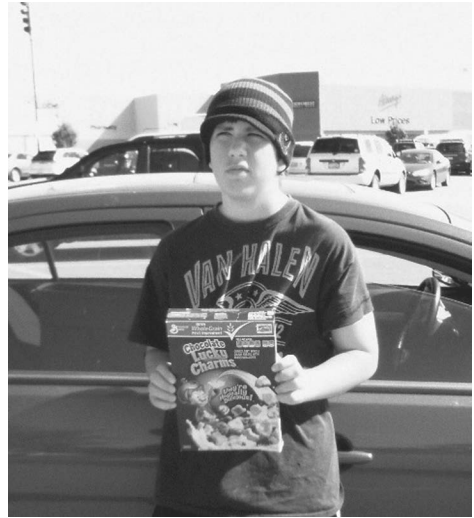


Figure 3. Isaac—against the grain.

My Grain Headache: Activity System and Power Hierarchy

An activity system coordinates multiple functions to create meaning and the cereal industry means to sell you its products, the process beginning with the circular ad, which reaches consumers long before they even set foot into the store. According to Aaron Miller, customer service manager at a local grocery store (and my former student), even in the community of Bloomington/Normal competition is fierce. With at least fourteen competitor grocery stores, “This puts great importance on our weekly ad, which breaks on Mondays. Cereal is a great draw for our weekly ad because everybody eats it. A lot of the time it is on the front page, and if it is a hot enough price bargain shoppers will come in just for it.” Large cereal corporations such as Kellogg™ possess what is called “expert power,” which is derived from “knowledge, experience, and reputation,” exerted to “obtain preferential treatment” in the marketplace, including “distribution access and...setting

prices and margins for its products” (Harris 65). Flexing power as such establishes a particular brand in the hierarchy of the cereal aisle and impacts the activity system of grocery store managers mediating/negotiating between producers and consumers.

Artifacts produced by the activity system are impacted as well. Among the genres I encountered during my research, none were as foreign and interesting to me as the “planogram.” I discovered the existence of this genre artifact when the guy stocking cereal at Dollar General told me that he had no control over what goes where on the shelf. He said that they have to follow “whatever corporate sends us on the computer, dude. On a planogram.” The planogram is a document that instructs stockers *exactly* where to place the products. In fact, there are “planogram specialists” who are trained in merchandising. Kellogg™ even offers a planogram on its corporate website. Planograms are extremely detailed, sometimes secretive documents created at the corporate level, which demonstrates how much power is inherent in product placement. Miller explains: “Inside the grocery store the cereal aisle is like Marketing 101. Give the consumer what they want. The kids’ cereals with all the colorful characters are on the bottom shelves for a reason: so the kids can see them.” Abbie is 45 inches tall. Average planograms start with a 6-inch gap from floor to bottom shelf, then five shelves in 14- or 15-inch increments, shooting all the way up past 80 inches. Of course, the first three shelves are reserved for enticingly colorful and correspondingly sugary cereals which place the Flintstones and Tony the Tiger at eye level for Abbie.

According to Mike Rees, another grocery store manager (and my neighbor), planograms are also color-coded to show that certain products, often premium cereals for example, are meant to be emphasized on the shelf. At Rees’s store, they use black and white planograms with various shades of gray to denote hierarchy. Rees tells me that planograms are very expensive, and the black and white versions are significantly cheaper, especially since his store prints them out to hand to stockers. A great many of the planograms I was able to locate online featured vivid colors, but there was one feature that most if not all of the planograms shared: the dire copyright warning. Planograms are serious documents outlining serious placement strategies for which companies have paid out serious money. One particularly cranky document contends that its contents are strictly confidential and that infringement is punishable under the law. So as to not bring out the tiger in a planogram specialist scorned, I created my own faux-planogram, a synthesis of the many authentic ones I observed, pictured in Figure 4.

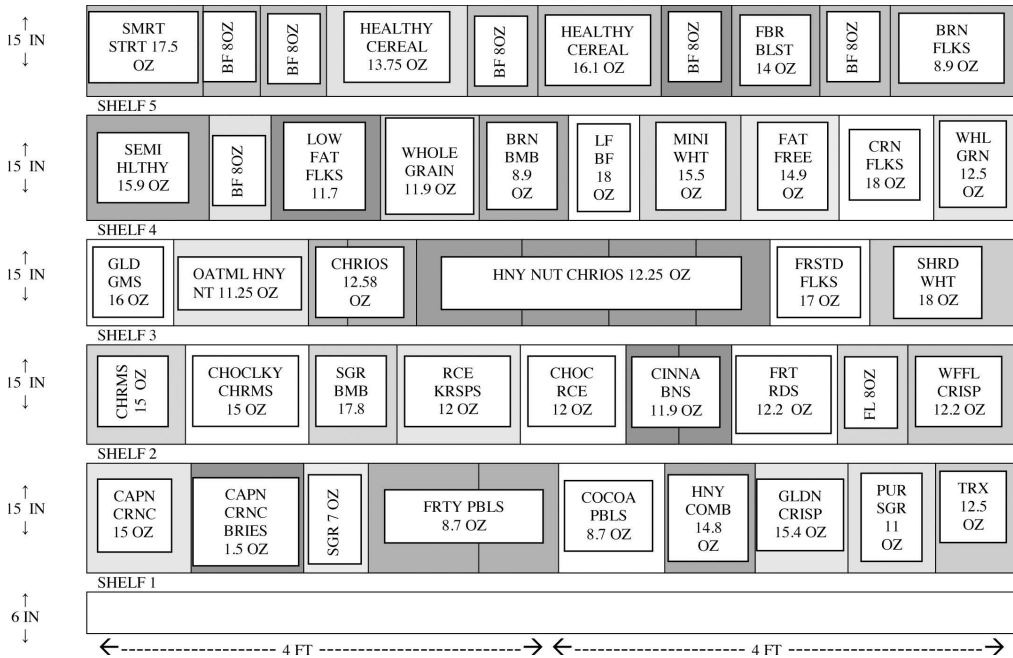


Figure 4. Model planogram—a “real” planogram would include Stock Keeping Unit (SKU) numbers, Universal Product Codes (UPCs), and product dimensions.

Familiarity and Nostalgia: Magically Delicious Antecedent Genres

Alexander snapped, crackled and popped down the aisle, resituating his glasses on his face and peering excitedly at each box. Eagerly he grasped a box here, a box there, and turned them around to see what was on the back. He measures in at 49 inches, so he is eye to eye with the same boxes as Abbie. As a first grader, Alexander has very basic reading skills but nonetheless employs a sophisticated system for making his selection. He will take an unfamiliar element and attempt to reconcile it with that which is familiar to him, as evidenced when he recently asked me, “Do ninjas go to Sunday school?” Having some familiarity with the cereal in question—and being an admirer of its mascot who is a frequent visitor on our television screen in commercials during our Saturday morning cartoon ritual—Alexander chooses a cereal and cartoon combination that has made him happy in the past: a box of Lucky Charms goes into our cart.

After much consideration, Alexander decided to base his choice on “the familiar.” Memory of “the familiar” often breeds nostalgia for those old enough to experience it; manipulated by companies employing cross-marketing strategies, nostalgia is a powerful tool used to sell cereal. Perhaps cereal’s most effective nostalgia strategy has been to connect the genre of cereal box with the antecedent genre of television shows, and in particular, the sub-genre of cartoons.

A child responds to a box with a cartoon drawing on it. Little do they know that the cartoon characters present on the box were created specifically to draw them in. In fact, much of the same talent who created the cartoons of Saturday morning fame were responsible for cereal mascots including Jay Ward, creator of *Rocky and Bullwinkle*, who voiced Cap'n Crunch and introduced him to the cereal world. Cartoon characters hawking cereal has long been profitable for the cereal industry. For example, in 1969 Hanna-Barbera, who for years had a relationship using its characters to promote Kellogg's™ products, merely needed to send out a mailing to “potential licenses around the world” to find a marketing partner for its new prime-time television show. The studio had recently added Pebbles and Bamm-Bamm to *The Flintstones* in order to score a “kid” audience. Despite the fact that the show was at the time sponsored by Winston™ cigarettes, Post™ and Hanna-Barbera struck up a deal to name a cereal “Fruity Pebbles” and plastered the Flintstones all over the box (Bruce and Crawford 195). Over forty years later, my kids wouldn't know who the heck the Flintstones were if it weren't for the cereal. As Bruce and Crawford point out, “The key point to remember in discussing nutrition and breakfast cereal is that when people buy cereal, they aren't buying a nutritional commodity. They are buying a dream” (263).

Yes, I buy into that dream. Nostalgia as a genre has propelled some of our greatest writers and continues to provide that tingle of excitement when I think about some of my childhood cereal memories. What I remember the most about the Mr. T cereal was not how bad it tasted (and it was terrible tasting), but that it was 1985 and I believed that through the power of eating this cereal I was an honorary member of the A-Team. What I remember the most about the C3-

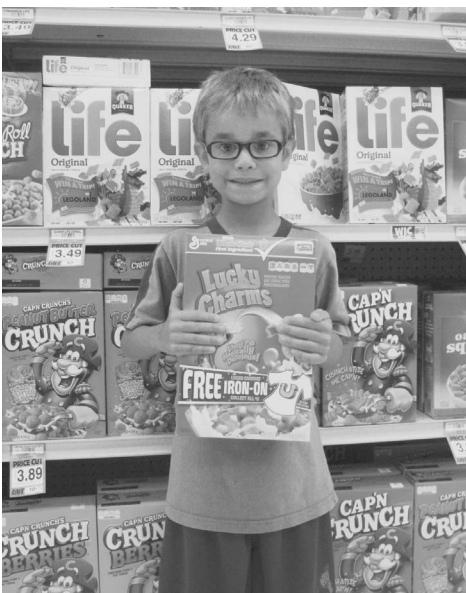


Figure 5: Alexander—Sunday ninja.

PO cereal was that it came out before VCRs and my only ability to relive *Star Wars* was to play with my action figures, leaf through my old bent up Scholastic Book Club paperbacks, and scour the back of this cereal box for any clues as to what was happening with my heroes. Ultimately, the cereal buying experiment itself probably stems from a childhood fantasy of my own, and one probably fulfilled, as evidenced by my memory of eating C3-PO and Mr. T cereal. Cereal marketers who “treated adults like big kids got great results,” and they realized early on to follow “this group of consumers, some eighty million strong from cradle to grave, referred to in the market segment as ‘the pig in the python,’ a population bulge slowly working its way up the demographic timeline” (Bruce and Crawford 249).

Placement: Cereal and Writing

Many other genre situations were revealed during my research that I do not have time to explore here, like the “healthy” cereal placed on the high shelves and the time of year those cereals nearly sell out (after New Year’s resolutions are made). Among the other interesting genres are “the end cap,” which is an art in itself, and the in-store promotional texts including shelf tags which inform the buyer not just about the price, but also whether a cereal is “low sugar” or “gluten free.” Miller wrote at length about the cross-merchandising throughout the aisle with “clip strips hanging down with toys of all kinds” and how cereal “just happens” to share space with the candy aisle. Kellogg™ complicated matters when they sent me a 200 page investor’s kit, and as mesmerizing as all this information is, at the end of the day I am just a dad buying (and eating) cereal with my kids. As an English teacher, I also see fascinating correlations between the cereal box experience and the act of writing. Like the placement of cereal in the aisle, the placement of information in writing is vital and we can learn quite a bit from a trip to buy Golden Grahams. The cereal box genre takes the power it wields with text to stir our hearts and minds, and when this power is modeled by students, it can turn good writing into grrrrreat!

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Michel Soares has been an English teacher for seventeen years and a dad for fifteen. Although he calls Massachusetts home, after he came to ISU for a Bachelor's in English Education and a Master's in Literature, he ended up staying. Now he is raising three kids here. Pictured is Michael holding his treasured autographed photo of Thurl Ravencroft, voice of Tony the Tiger.

Tracing the Tracks of Greeting Cards: Genre History Versus Trajectory

Laurenn Jarema

Greeting cards act as lifesavers for many people drowning in a confusing cluster of words and emotions. In this article, Jarema investigates the history of greeting cards from their origins to their current state to determine whether greeting cards have always served as a relationship rescuer or if there's something more to their history. By exploring the origins of greeting cards and how they have progressed through time, Jarema identifies the important differences between genre "history" and "trajectory." While these two terms intertwine at points, they have distinct qualities that, when understood correctly, can illustrate how writing often travels beyond its expected course.

For generations, when people have struggled to find the perfect words, greeting cards have come to the rescue and aided them in articulating their emotions. Whether a boyfriend cannot find a way to effectively express his feelings to his girlfriend, or an employee is having trouble deciding what words would be appropriate to wish her boss a happy birthday, a greeting card portraying the exact message a sender wishes to convey seems to be available for any occasion. For example, I found myself struggling for months to find the exact words to use when trying to write my mom a note after moving out of my parents' house. After spending some time trying to form a coherent message with the words rattling around in my brain, I realized that I could not put together the perfect note without being wordy and cliché. It was at this point that I decided to head to Hallmark to search for a "Thinking of You" card that could assist me. While roaming up and down the aisles of the store, I suddenly came across a card that had a small child on the front with her two hands covering her eyes as she was counting to ten. I opened the card to find that it said, "I'm pretending we're playing hide & seek and you're just really good at hiding." Immediately, I realized that this picture and these few short lines were the perfect way to put a smile on my mother's face while still

letting her know how much I cared about her, which I could not have done nearly as well by myself.

While many of us are relieved that today greeting cards seem to exist for every possible occasion, was this always the case? How did people manage to express their emotions to loved ones before paper, printing, and the greeting cards we recognize today were created? The truth is that people used greeting cards as early as the sixth century BCE, but these greetings were very different from the ones we now purchase. The timeline provided in this article will allow you to uncover how greeting cards have evolved and transformed throughout history. If you spend some time reviewing the timeline, which begins on the bottom of this page, you will have the opportunity to discover the complex and rich history of the greeting card genre. While reading through the timeline, consider what changes occur during each time period and how these changes affect the genre of greeting cards (especially pay attention to the bolded words). After reading through this timeline and learning about the history of greeting cards, you can use your newly acquired knowledge later in this article to understand the differences between “history” and “trajectory” by comparing the *history* of the greeting card genre to the *trajectory* of specific greeting cards. So go ahead: take a look at the timeline!

The History of Greeting Cards

Fortunately for the many individuals, like me, who have struggled to find the perfect words, greeting cards have been around for quite some time. Actually, the greeting card has been a part of society for such a long period of time that researchers are still not positive of its origins. While concrete

6th Century BCE

Researchers have inferred that the hand-written messages historians uncovered in Egyptian tombs from the sixth century BCE represent the first form of greeting cards. Egyptians would send messages as part of their tradition of giving gifts for the New Year, which included a message that, “whether **written as a note or delivered verbally**, . . . was a greeting—the forerunner or our present-day gift cards” (Chase 10). These cards obviously held an important place in Egyptian society as they were valued enough to be stored in the tombs that Egyptians believed would accompany them to their next lives.

evidence is not available to pinpoint the first greeting card in history, many researchers have made inferences about the earliest greeting cards based on available historical evidence. After reviewing the timeline, it may seem fairly obvious that the greeting cards found in society today do not much resemble the Roman medals and Egyptian messages preserved in tombs, or even have the same style as Horsley and Prang's cards. However, the greeting card's purpose of communicating with various people remains the same, despite many other changes as the genre progressed from their origins to their current position in society. The initial messages of greeting cards seem to have been much simpler due to social expectations and technological limitations. Unlike the many options I sorted through when choosing a "Thinking of You" card, Romans were given, without choice, the message on the medal for their Emperor. Similarly, people in England in the mid-1800s chose from Christmas greeting cards that reflected warm, sentimental wishes and images only, since others, like Horsley's cards, were unacceptable on the market.

Where Greeting Cards are Today

The occasions for cards have grown tremendously since the original greeting cards that were distributed mainly to celebrate the New Year or Christmas. Now cards for Birthdays, Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Easter, Thanksgiving, Grandparent's Day, Anniversaries, New Babies, Thinking of You, and numerous other occasions can be found in greeting card aisles. A wide variety of card types and messages have flooded the industry to ensure that the perfect card can be found for each occasion. And when a greeting card cannot be found that is

120 CE

The Romans distributed greeting cards around 120 CE in the form of **medals** that contained an image of Roman Emperor Hadrian on one side and a message on the other side that stated, "The Senate and People of Rome wish a Happy and Prosperous New Year to Hadrianus Augustus, the father of the country" (Chase 11). Since many citizens of the Roman Empire would have purchased these medals as a symbol of unity and appreciation to Hadrian, they represent the first type of mass-produced greeting card.



Figure 1. Castel Sant'Angelo, the ancient Hadrian Mausoleum (image taken by Laurenn Jarema in Rome, Italy).



Figure 2. Greeting card aisle at Walmart (image taken by Lauren Jarema).

quite specific and heartfelt enough for an occasion, people have, at times, chosen to handcraft their own cards. Many grade school children still craft homemade Valentine's Day cards in school, for example. Other individuals choose to create a unique type of homemade card, such as the post-it greeting card found in the 21st Century section of the timeline, which includes several post-it notes with personalized comments from the sender that can be repurposed and displayed in the recipient's home. Among these many choices, three types of greeting cards are currently available to consumers: print cards, e-cards, and homemade cards. Yet this myriad of card choices can be overwhelming for people who will need to develop the skills to sort through masses of cards in order to find their desired greeting.

During several interviews with students from Illinois State University, I was able to evaluate the specific skills individuals use when attempting to choose the right greeting card. Each individual who was interviewed agreed that the thought process they utilize when choosing greeting cards mainly revolves around their perceptions of the recipient of the card. ISU undergraduate Caroline Rodak states that she chooses a card based on

1450

The cards crafted in Germany in the 15th century, called "Andachtsbilder," continued the Egyptian and Roman tradition of exchanging New Year greetings, but it also propelled the greeting card genre forward by creating cards that were **pre-made** for individuals to send without having to construct a message or format themselves. These pre-made German cards focused on representing religious beliefs as they were, "adorned with an image of a cross-bearing Christ Child, inscribed with wishes for 'ein gut selig jar' ('a good and blessed year') ("Just An Old Christmas Card").

1843



Figure 3. The Christmas card Horsley created for Sir Henry Cole (image courtesy of Bridwell Library at Southern Methodist University).

“the type of person who will be receiving the card and the relationship I would have with that person. If I have a close relationship with the person receiving the card, I would feel that I could send a funny card that other people might think is inappropriate. If I was sending a card to someone I wasn’t very close with, I would probably just send a generic ‘Happy Birthday’ card.” In addition to assessing the recipient and sender’s personal relationship, ISU undergraduate Celynn Mayfield explains that she “would decide what type of card to send based on the recipient’s age. The elderly and young children may not understand very sarcastic jokes in cards, so it wouldn’t be appropriate to send these types of cards.” ISU Master’s student Lisa Lindenfelser agrees that “audience is the first thing I consider. How well I know the person is important as well as the context of the situation. Audience and context go together.”

Insight into the complex knowledge one must assess before purchasing a card demonstrates that while greeting cards have come a long way throughout history, it seems that they are an entirely different type of genre now. This seems especially true with the development of e-cards, or electronic cards, which are currently in competition with print cards. In 1999, card companies began noticing a drastic decline in sales due to “the Internet, new technology and changing demographics. While older consumers are still actively purchasing greeting cards, younger shoppers—especially those under the age of 25—have turned to e-mail and other high-tech solutions, including making greeting cards online, as practical alternatives” (Mendelson). Both ISU undergraduate students that I interviewed confirmed that younger people are more likely to send e-cards; Rodak acknowledged using e-cards herself, especially “to communicate

1843

England introduced the concept of Christmas greeting cards in 1843 when Sir Henry Cole hired John Calcott Horsley to create cards for his family and friends. Once Cole distributed Horsley’s cards to his loved ones, the remaining cards were made available for the public to purchase for one shilling apiece. Yet, the Victorian culture was appalled by the cards, “not for their depictions of the starving and the unclothed, but because one of the figures shown sipping wine in the central panel was a child [which led to criticism] for ‘fostering the moral corruption of children,’ and the cards were quickly withdrawn from the market; today, only about a dozen remain” (“Just An Old Christmas Card”). Even though Horsley’s card images were not accepted by Victorian society, the concept of **Christmas greeting cards** was embraced, and the market grew quickly during the mid-eighteenth century in England.

with relatives overseas.” Mayfield expressed a reliance on Facebook to not only “remember others’ birthdays,” but also to “send friends birthday cards through the app on Facebook.” As younger generations have had more access to online technologies than previous generations, they prove to be utilizing the skills they have developed in order to send greetings in electronic forms, whether through social media sites or by creating an actual e-card.

In an attempt to confront the decline in sales that e-cards have caused, many print card companies have lowered the prices of cards and begun mass marketing their greeting cards to businesses that they would not have sold to before. Even though e-cards have drastically changed the card industry, the top executives from print card companies have expressed their enthusiasm with card sales in 2012, since they believe that technology has only drawn people closer and strengthened relationships. These executives recognize that “while [consumers] appreciate the convenience that new technologies offer, they continue to deeply value how the greeting card category helps them to express their feelings in a creative way that is also authentic and heartfelt” (Krassner). For this reason, card companies continue to produce greeting cards that are more individualized and occasion-specific, something e-cards sometimes cannot provide. While numerous birthday or thank you e-cards may be available to consumers, a person wanting to purchase a graduation card that is specifically written for a godchild might be more likely to purchase a print card since e-cards do not typically provide such occasion-specific greetings.

In addition to the differences between the specific occasions that e-cards and print cards offer, several other factors differentiate these two types of



Figure 4. Louis Prang, the “Father of the American Christmas card,” used a variety of colors in his Christmas cards (image from the collection of the New-York Historical Society).

1875

Louis Prang’s transformation of the chromolithography printing technique allowed him to create a cheaper method of color printing that brought Christmas cards to the United States in 1875. The public quickly desired his **colorful and reasonably priced** cards that depicted “cherubs, children, illustrations of beautiful women, and lush floral arrangements,” and “by the 1880s, Prang’s firm was producing nearly five million cards annually” (“Just An Old Christmas Card”).

greetings, which seems to allow both formats to maintain a place on the market. The actual message space permitted in e-cards and print cards differs vastly and targets different groups of purchasers. Since e-cards typically have a limited space for senders to compose their messages, such as a maximum of a 200 word/character count, people who want to include a lengthy message to the recipient might prefer to purchase a print card instead of an e-card. On the other hand, if a person wanted to send off a quick birthday message to a coworker, he or she may decide that an e-card is the best option, not desiring to include a drawn-out message. Rodak agrees that e-cards are very practical when sending a card to a general acquaintance for a nonspecific occasion, as she explains that “e-cards do not always allow me to insert a message and when they do, I just usually write ‘Happy Birthday’ and sign my name.” E-cards also become very useful whenever someone accidentally forgets about an occasion and no longer has time to purchase a print card; instead of becoming the jerk that forgets a roommate’s birthday, a person can now quickly send off an e-card in a few clicks.

One of the most obvious differences that separate e-cards from print cards is their actual format. While e-cards must be sent electronically, they are received only through e-mail or are posted on a social media site. However, print cards must be hand-delivered or mailed. Consequently, when a person is attending an event, such as a birthday or graduation party, they are more likely to purchase a print greeting card to attach to their gift instead of emailing the recipient an e-card that he or she would not be able to view until after the event. Yet, if a person was unable to attend an event, then he or she might choose to send an e-card so it is received by the recipient quicker. Or, the person might still send a print card through the mail so that the recipient can physically open the card as a gift. Sending a print card through the mail

1900s

While many card manufacturers imitated Prang in the early 20th century, other artists continued with their own styles. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, Kate Greenaway, a popular English children’s author and illustrator, crafted lavish cards with beautiful fringe and satin that were available in a **variety of formats** in America. Greenaway’s cards could be shaped as bells, candles, fans, or crescents; they could be puzzles, pop-ups, or map cards; and they could even include squeaking noisemakers (“Just An Old Christmas Card”).

21st Century

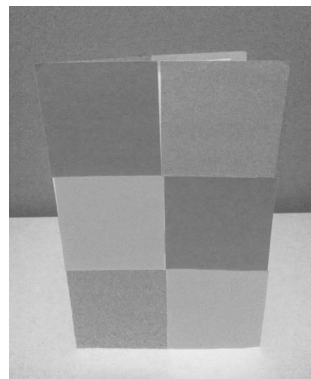


Figure 5. Lisa Lindenfelser’s handmade post-it card (image taken by Laurenn Jarema).

in this situation would also give the sender the option of including a monetary gift in the card as well so that they are still able to provide a gift despite their lack of attendance.

Due to the drastic differences between print and e-cards in terms of format, style, and cost, significant attitudes about the two genres also exist. Although not always the case, e-cards are usually viewed as a more informal type of greeting card, since many e-cards are often free and easy to send with a few clicks on the computer. When a person sends his or her coworker an e-card while the rest of the office took the time to purchase print cards, the recipient might assume that the e-card was sent because the person forgot about the recipient's birthday or did not want to take the time to compose a meaningful message. Consequently, even though the e-card may "save" the person—as in the previous example of the person who forgot about his or her roommate's birthday—the recipient is also likely to be aware of this oversight and possibly frown upon the roommate's decision to send an e-card versus purchasing a print card. Thus, print cards are typically labeled as the more formal greeting card genre; when they are purchased and sent, the sender must spend more time and money while choosing the card, and the recipient is usually conscious and appreciative of this gesture.

Genre History versus Trajectory

By examining the timeline and information regarding the current state of greeting cards, it becomes clear that the history of the greeting card has transformed from verbal messages, to medal greetings, to pre-made cards, to elaborate pop-up and musical cards, to e-cards that can be sent in a couple clicks of a mouse. Each one of these transformations has occurred as production and distribution capabilities expanded within society. The knowledge that individuals gained from previous formats and styles of greeting cards has also tremendously shaped the next genre of cards produced. Without one of these genres of greeting cards, the other genres may have appeared very different or may never have even existed at all. This is true for the modern print cards that are attempting to survive the accessibility, ease, and affordability that e-cards provide by lowering prices and becoming even more personalized. If e-cards had not been developed, these very specific cards might never have been created. Even though the original greeting cards are vastly different from the kinds people purchase today, the history of the genre has proven that greeting cards have expanded and transformed rather than risking extinction by refusing to adapt to changing cultures.

As the history of greeting cards has shown, each card creation has influenced the next, prompting the logical progression of greeting cards. It is interesting to compare the history of greeting cards to the implications of their trajectory. A *history* of a genre allows individuals to examine the progression and expansion the genre has experienced over time, such as by viewing its development in a timeline. However, a *trajectory* allows people to examine the “life” of a specific text, such as a specific greeting card, during its creation, distribution, and use. The trajectory of the Egyptian greeting cards remains intricate in itself, with the sender likely composing a message that could have been mistakenly altered by the messenger or interpreted by the receiver in an unintended way. It is interesting to wonder if the Egyptians envisioned their text continuing its life in the tomb of the receiver only to be discovered by modern historians and put on display in a museum. All of these greetings from the early Egyptians have complex and rich lives through their production, distribution, and use.

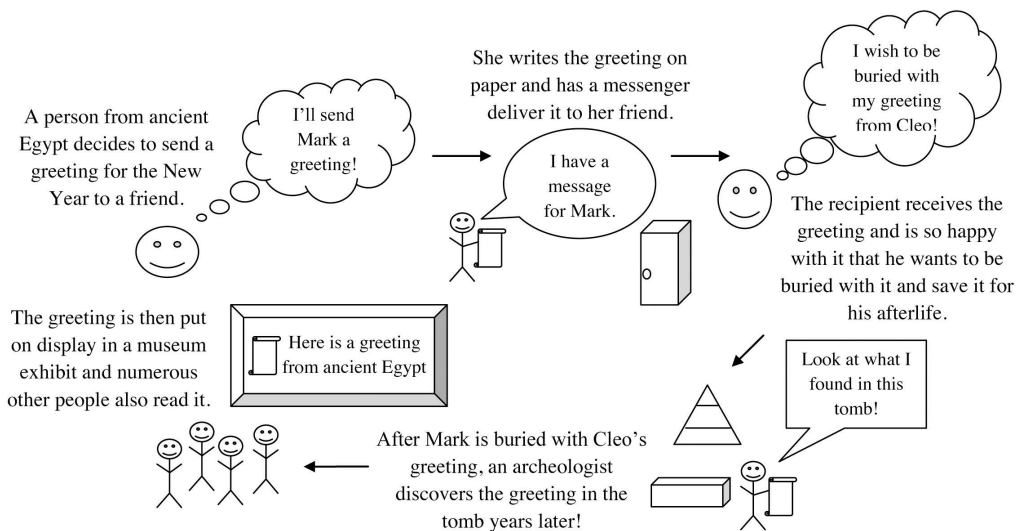


Figure 6. Trajectory of an ancient Egyptian greeting card.

The examination of the trajectory of the entire history of the greeting card genre seems uncomprehendingly complex in comparison to just one greeting from the Egyptian time period. Consequently, while history and trajectory work together and perform similar tasks, they still remain separate entities. History helps inform people of where a certain text's trajectory may have originated, or even how a text's trajectory may have differed from the overall history of the genre. Likewise, as trajectory provides an exact history or lifespan of a specific text, it also explores how writing reaches out to numerous and sometimes unexpected and unpredictable places in the world. A specific example of trajectory can be seen in Figure 6, above. In the example of the trajectory of an ancient Egyptian greeting card, the text's production, distribution, and use are explored. The text's trajectory includes:

- The creator conceiving the idea to make the text (a greeting).
- The creator writing the text.
- The creator giving the text to a messenger.
- The messenger taking the text and delivering it to the recipient.
- The recipient receiving and reading the text.
- The recipient deciding to be buried with the text.
- An archeologist discovering the text in a burial tomb in Egypt.
- The archeologist giving the text to a museum.
- Individuals viewing the text at the museum.

As cards have become more complex and creative, thanks to the progression of technology, it seems even more difficult to predict or trace the trajectory of greeting cards today. Computers, cell phones, cameras, and other electronic devices have not only affected how cards can be created, but also how they are dispersed and even preserved. Instead of having a basic sender and receiver trajectory that could be altered and affected in multiple ways, the technology of today adds many other factors into the equation. A computer glitch could have a greeting card accidentally sent to the wrong recipient, while the Internet also expands the amount of people who receive cards since e-cards are cheaper and easier to send than print cards. Yet, even with the uncertainty of the future trajectory of print cards, e-cards, and the greeting card genre as a whole, it still seems fair to say that the production, distribution, and use of greeting cards will continue in society. Thus, the history of greeting cards will continue to grow as well. As greeting cards continue to be produced, distributed, and used, they will still reach unforeseen audiences and impact society in ways that we might never be able to predict.

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Laurenn Jarema is a Master's student specializing in Rhetoric and Composition at Illinois State University. When she is not reading, running, or relaxing, she loves spending time with her six-month-old puppy, Megatron, who will be receiving a greeting card from her on his first birthday.

The Art of Sexting: Queer Theory and Identity Politics

Eric Longfellow

In this article, Longfellow uses queer theory to trace his foray into the genre of sexting. Pulling from antecedent genres such as romance novels, erotica, and film, he sends explicit text messages to his girlfriend and then analyzes both the texts and her responses. All of this is in an effort to subvert traditional understandings of sexuality, power, and identity.

In 2011, Anthony Weiner brought *sexting* back into the forefront of our collective consciousness when he sent a picture of his penis out to the world in a scandal dubbed “Weinergate.” My first thought: *wait a minute, how is that sexting?* After first hearing the term a few years before in countless television shows and news outlets, I had just assumed that the term sexting was held exclusively for the text message equivalent of phone sex. You know, conversations rapt with awkward misspellings of the word ‘come’ and euphemisms like ‘member’ that you have to assume will make anyone involved feel uncomfortable. The idea that sexting could be as simple as snapping a shot of your erection-stretched boxer briefs . . . sign me up.

So I had to do some research. Turns out sexting is a pretty broad term. Wikipedia, my go to source for semi-reliable background knowledge, told me that “Sexting is the act of sending sexually explicit messages or photographs, primarily between mobile phones. The term was first popularized in early 21st century, and is a portmanteau of sex and texting.” Good to know— if I want to delve into the world of sex-based text messaging, it *can* be as easy as dropping trou and snapping off an Instagram. And on a side note, portmanteau already sounds kinky. I’ll spare everyone the details of my

ensuing thought process—suffice it to say that it involved some contemplation of angles and lighting. Ultimately, though, I had to ask myself if I really felt comfortable with the knowledge that that part of me would be out there, floating around in the ether, and worse, that it could conceivably be traced back to me. The James Lipton commercial came to mind where he stops a young man from sending a picture of his “junk” to his girlfriend by giving him his beard, then saying, “before you text, give it a ponder.” Find it on Youtube. Plus, I couldn’t help but be paranoid that we inopportunately named individuals, the Weiners and the Longfellows of the world alike, have a slightly higher chance of something like that coming back to bite us in the ass. Who knows, I might run for Congress someday.

So, I decided not to go ahead with the erotic photography, but not before running some interesting Photoshop background scenarios through my mind. Also, I had to suppress a disturbing curiosity to use the program Oldify. I digress. Long story short: the little amount of research I had done on sexting made me curious enough to learn more about the growing practice. If the picture wasn’t going to work, I would have to resort to good, old-fashioned words. What follows is a step by step breakdown of how I researched and ultimately composed within this somewhat unfamiliar genre that seems to have much of the country up in arms. This article, then, follows a queer theoretical model to explore conceptions of *heteronormativity* and *intersectionality* in an effort to frame the practice of sexting within a socio-cultural and historical context.

Before I begin, it may be beneficial to give some background knowledge on queer theory and the approach to writing I will be taking. Queer, in this instance, refers to anything that works against dominant modes of culture—anything that works against what would be widely considered “normal.” If you think about identitarian politics, or the categories people use to identify themselves—i.e. I’m straight, or I’m white, or I’m middle class—you can start to see how the term queer can disrupt what is generally thought to be “normal” in productive ways. Heteronormativity, then, can be seen as the dominant thinking that heterosexuality and the binary gender differences between men and women are normal, and that anything falling outside of that thinking is deviant. This is a way of thinking that I would like to complicate. In this essay, I begin to do that by looking at the queer concept of intersectionality, which holds that all categories of identity, be they sexual orientation, race, class, gender, etc., are inherently problematic and unstable, and we would do better to look at an individual as inhabiting all the different categories of identity imposed on them. These definitions and examples may be somewhat dense, and, for our purposes, a bit oversimplified, but they can help us to work toward a base of knowledge for understanding how we might queer our writing in interesting and unexpected ways.

Returning to my exploration of sexting, my first thought was where to start? I've been doing research in the field of gender and sexuality studies for years now, but somehow I felt an annotated bibliography with the likes of well-known theorists such as Gilles Deleuze and Judith Butler, while helpful in framing this article, wasn't going to be all that useful for learning about sexting itself. So, being at least proficient with texting, I decided to start with the other side of things—the sex side of things. In dealing with sex, and writing, and what was essentially a modified form of talking dirty, the logical place to turn, for me, was erotica. As luck would have it, there were some old romance novels lying around from a box of books I'd gotten from a friend. After a good six pages, I was ready to go, or so I thought. What follows is my first foray into sexting, sent to my girlfriend, Jess, who, I should add, was at the time unaware of this article and of my newfound research interests.

Eric: My quivering sex longs for you.

Jess: Stop it.

Eric: I'm writing an article on sexting.

Jess: Well don't do it.

By which, I'm pretty sure she meant don't do it as in don't actually sext her and not don't write the article. Gotta break a few eggs if you're trying to make a filthy, inappropriate omelet, though. In fairness, I knew my first attempt was premature, but I wanted to test the waters before attempting anything serious. My thought process was working off a model of experimentation as a productive tool. I knew that even if she was slightly annoyed, or even confused, Jess knew my sense of humor enough that she wouldn't get angry or offended. I also knew that to experiment, and yes to fail, is often not a bad thing when attempting to write in new and unfamiliar genres. I was fine starting at the bottom, and may I say, the Harlequin romance approach to sexting is indeed the bottom. I did learn a couple things in looking back, though. One, personification of genitalia might not translate well through the medium of text messages; and two, sex as a noun should never be used as a euphemism for any body parts. Embrace the failure, I thought. So, I pressed on.

Eric: How moist are you?

Jess: Oh, God.

Eric: Was that last message intended to be in the form of a moan?

Jess: No. No it was not.

I was getting somewhere! Not with Jess, but the notion that sexting might breed a form of miscommunication with which I was unfamiliar was something I hadn't considered. There are probably a lot of dismissive responses to a sext that could be read as encouragement, or at the very least complicity. *Oh, God* was one, but the possibilities started to add up—*Please, Oh yeah?*, *Come on*—really most curt responses could be misread. In order to move to the next level, I would need to broaden my research base.

Jess's response was pretty clearly not one of encouragement, and knowing in advance that she has an aversion to the word *moist*, it wasn't hard to see that coming. But it led me to an interesting conclusion: audience matters. Reception is an important part of any form of communication. Had I not known the person I was sexting as well as I know my girlfriend, the outcome might have been drastically different. And, further, I don't recommend sexting anyone unless you are absolutely certain that they will be okay with it. Thoughtfulness and tact notwithstanding, issues of harassment can be devastating for people, not to mention the legal ramifications involved with sending unwelcome sexts. Knowing my audience, I set out to improve my sexting literacy. But first I needed to expand the playing field. It sounded easy at first. Jess and I have a strong relationship, and I know she wouldn't mind me sexting other people, but that's where it gets complicated. I found myself abound in issues of identity politics. Despite my hopes that we might all someday queer how we think about identity, I am widely thought to be a white, male, heterosexual of some privilege. And, further, anyone I might send a sext to is well aware of those identity markers. Thinking about intersectionality here raised the issue of not only who I might write to, but also how I might write if I were, say, female, Asian, Latina/o, transgender—the list goes on. I wanted to give myself a broader understanding of the role that socio-cultural context plays in sexting effectively. Even if I don't plan on regularly sexting all of my friends, the knowledge of how to do that could provide me with a better understanding of the complexities involved with the genre.

Instead of attempting to sext friends of different socio-cultural backgrounds, or to put myself in the place of a background different from my own, I decided to challenge heteronormativity by exploring the relationships to power that sexual desire is grounded in. I decided to take my exploration on a turn toward the kinkier side of sex. So, I was on to non-dominant forms of erotica to distance myself from the straight, white, male depictions of sexuality that the romance novels provided. Time to step up my literary game and dust off my copy of *Histoire d'O*. After all, if I'm planning to eventually write serious sext messages to Jess, I should first explore the complex power dynamics that have worked within our individual relationship. And what better than a critically-acclaimed, female-authored, sadomasochistic novel to

distance me from a heteronormative mindset? I decided to again start light—experimentation, even in a comical form, allowed me to get my feet wet. Here’s how it went:

Eric: I’m going to spank you.

Jess: Hmmm.

Eric: Mmmm?

Jess: Hmmm.

Eric: Hmmm.

Jess: . . .

Eric: I’m not going to spank you.

Baby steps. It’s possible that I could have moved further to escalate the level of sexuality in that set of text messages, but to do so still felt precipitate. What I picked up, though, and what these somewhat comic exchanges between Jess and me were helping me to figure out throughout my entire writing process, was this: when you’re reading erotica, or writing erotica for that matter, there is a tendency to jump right in. My comedic attempts to spark something sexual, the way I conducted the research from the beginning; it was all thrown together rather quickly, which might be okay, but it needs to be seen as no more than a step in the larger process of writing. It felt to me as though I wasn’t getting what I needed from my approach to research through erotica. What’s important here is to recognize the limitations inherent in any form of research. For one, there are the limitations of focusing on a single antecedent, or preexisting, genre—in this case, the genre of erotica as a part of the larger genre of sex writing. While it was very helpful in some ways, and got me to realize a number of things about the practice of sexting, it was also incomplete. In addition to that, my own limitations were made clear through this headlong dive into the field of erotica—and that was part of the problem; it is a field of study, a very broad field at that. In any form of research it is likely that deadlines and other obligations will arise. It seems naïve to think that it’s possible to master the study of erotica at all (even having moderate experience researching in the field), but even more so in the window of writing this article.

My goal in turning to erotica, of both the mainstream and literary varieties, was, as I have mentioned, to begin to establish a set of antecedent genres that have influenced how cultural practices of writing about sex have shaped how we might approach sexting, but also how those practices have shaped and have been shaped by our cultural perceptions of sexuality. In

order to write effectively in a given genre (for me, sexting) it is necessary to understand the trajectory that such a genre has traveled. Here we might understand trajectory as the complex set of influences and changes (both historical and cultural) that a genre moves through. While erotica is only one cultural practice that has had an influence on sexting, it provided a starting point for thinking about the multiplicity of factors that go into a specific form of writing. So, while I did take away a good amount of productive information from my brief scholarship of erotica, it was time to clearly set my research parameters and move on.

My next stop was Google. I decided to keep my first search inquiry simple: best sexts. I thought that would give me some direction in terms of how to craft the most effective sexts, but what it did instead was to interpret best as funniest, which led to some interesting realizations. The first site was TFLN, or Texts from Last Night, with which I was already somewhat acquainted. I recognized pretty quickly that the site wasn't going to be very helpful, in part because it broke one of my first dictums, don't misspell words to make them more sexual, e.g. the third item on the list of best texts: "and then she said I drew a line on her forehead with my cum and whispered 'Simba.'" Potentially funny, perhaps, but not entirely helpful. Given that research can often lead down tangential and divergent paths, it's necessary to recognize when you're moving off track and then to move on. So, I changed my search inquiry. But, before I did it was helpful to stop and consider a few things about my project as a whole.

My perspective, the perspective of this article, remains grounded within my relationship to Jess. It is important not to confuse *misogyny* with sexual *desire* (though this is already a fraught concept). My tactic of moving toward a more kinky approach to sexting is potentially problematic as well—after all, my position as a male combined with female submissiveness, when not looked at carefully, can itself seem misogynistic. Lynda Hart, in her book *Between the Body and the Flesh*, comments on this very notion saying that:

All our sexualities are constructed in a classist, racist, heterosexist, and gendered culture, and suppressing or repressing these fantasy scenarios is not going to accomplish changing that social reality. [. . .] I do think that being conscious about these issues as they appear in our *desires* is important to discuss, theorize and suspect. (33, emphasis added)

Put differently, we should not let issues of inequality dictate our sexual desires, but we *should* be aware that those desires are shaped by socio-cultural and historical inequalities. I think this is important to note given our current project of researching and writing within the genre of sexting, which is often grounded within structures of dominance,

hegemony, and desire. Not far back in this very article, I pulled a quote from *Texts From Last Night's* website that may have been offensive to some and might have made some readers uncomfortable—in fact, this entire article may be offensive to and uncomfortable for some readers. I think that part of what makes that particular quote *so* offensive is that it is located within a system of objectification and degradation that has very real effects for women in society. Further, the fact that it's framed as comedy makes it seem superfluous and gratuitous. The question that needs to be asked here (and this is a question that is part of a larger and much more radical argument) is whether or not a quote such as the Simba one can be productive in working through emotional reactions and (often) misplaced structures of belief. Can it help us to go deeper and ask *why* we find certain things so offensive? In thinking about these affective responses and belief structures, it may prove useful to apply Lynda Hart's advice to our broader views on sexuality. Rather than dismiss what we deem offensive, we might heed Hart's call to "discuss, theorize, and suspect" it. After all, if the goal is to be more accepting and to challenge what is considered "normal," then questioning what makes us uncomfortable might be the best place to start.

With that in mind, I moved on to searching for "How to sext," which led me down a bunch of dead ends. So, I switched to "Best sexting phrases," and that turned out to be more productive. The website I found most helpful was called *MadeMan.com*. Before I even opened the site, I was slightly put off by the website's domain name. *MadeMan.com* didn't sound like it had the potential to work against the issues of misogyny and heteronormativity that I wanted to disrupt through my exploration of queer theory. But, then I started to really think about the website's title. The idea that this socio-cultural notion of what we consider to be a *Man* is in fact *Made*, or culturally constructed, rather than being something we consider *essential*, or more simply common sense, fits perfectly with my queer theoretical leanings. Regardless of the website's intent in choosing their domain name, thinking about it in these terms is, in fact, a way to complicate the website and the article, both of which were presumably written for a dominant, heteronormative, male audience. This sort of transgressive thinking offers a way to *queer* the intended reception of a piece of writing—of any piece of writing. As you read the section that I have excerpted from the article, I urge you to consider how its use might be appropriated by a woman, by a gay woman, by a gay woman of color, by a gay woman of color with a disability, etc.—the ultimate goal being to collapse these identity markers.

Rather than recount the article on *MadeMan.com*, I'll post their top three sexts and the subsequent descriptions of them:

- **“Hey, I saw a movie and it got me thinking about you”**— Use this one of the ten best sexting phrases to get the conversation going. You can tell her about all of the steamy sex scenes that put you in the mood and run with it from there.
- **“Send me something naughty”**—After you’ve been talking for a while you can use this one of our ten best sexting phrases to move the conversation into something really naughty.
- **“What are you wearing”**—Yes we know it sounds cliché, but this one of our ten best sexting phrases is a classic when you’re trying to get some action started. She will know exactly where you’re going with this one of our ten best sexting lines, and it can be the start of building sexual tension.

This opened up a lot of doors for me. I knew from the beginning that throwing out explicit, genital related metaphors or imagery would likely not end well, but seeing examples of how to start slow, and do it effectively, really grounded the notion of sexting as a process for me—*sexting as a process* I take to mean the process of using nuance as a critical element to build toward something, but also, the process that I needed to go through as a writer: research, experimentation, failure and persistence allowed me to work through some of the complexities of the genre. Armed with a more thoughtful foundation of how to proceed when sexting, I was ready to move on to my new approach that I hoped would elevate the exchange to a level that Jess and I hadn’t before experienced. I knew that it was likely not plausible to reach a level of mastery in sexting (if there is such a thing), but that didn’t really seem all that important. What was important, for me, was getting to a point where I could write in this genre effectively, on my own terms, and do it in a way that was in line with what mattered to me. Here is how it went:

Eric: I watched this movie, and it made me think of you.

Jess: Is this a sext thing?

Eric: You’re a sext thing. Boom.

Jess: What movie was it?

Eric: The Piano Teacher. Do you know it?

Jess: Was that Haneke directing?

Eric: It was.

Jess: Did you think of me because I’ve been bad?

Eric: Tell me how you’ve been bad.

[. . .]

There's more, but you get the picture—we'll keep it potentially R-rated lest things start to get weird. Going back to my last research attempt, what I learned, in the process of synthesizing the information and actually forming my own sexts, was that what all three of the messages from the website had in common was that they used the power of suggestion to shift the focus to the other party. Nuance became important and so did insinuation. It wasn't until I physically started to write the sext and to imagine my audience, Jess, reading that sext that I was able to see how important the dynamic between myself, as the writer, and Jess, as the reader, really was. To do that I had to consider a multiplicity of different factors that all became imperative to what I was writing. Jess and my past sexual history, for example, came into play, but also all the different factors that went into shaping that sexual history. On top of that, issues mentioned earlier of reception and trajectory became influential in thinking about where Jess would be, what kind of mood she might be in, what the context of the sext was, where it could travel after being sent, how it might shift through context, and the list goes on. To extend that even further, considering how other people from different socio-cultural backgrounds differ and converge with my own sense of being was vital to understanding how I could most effectively compose. While it wasn't possible to consider every aspect of what goes into writing in this genre, I found that the more I was able to consider, the better and more effective the sext turned out to be.

To return, briefly, to the idea of limitations, I feel that it's both necessary and productive to conclude *this* article by discussing *its* limitations. I mentioned before that my own identity was at times problematic for me in undertaking this type of a project. The sorts of fieldwork that I was able to conduct (i.e. my sexts to Jess) were in some ways inadequate when attempting to frame the article within a model of queer theory. Further, the form that the article took, a personal narrative, made these limitations even more extensive. But rather than see these relations to hegemonic structures of power as problematic, or worse hypocritical, it is my hope that the subject position my identity affords within this article might be taken up by you, the reader, the audience, as a means of questioning the authority of the text itself—questioning the authority of all discourses on sexuality—and, foremost, questioning how that authority influences your own thinking and the thinking of others. Finally, I hope that this article might inspire some readers to be transgressive and to challenge what they accept as common sense.

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Eric Longfellow is pursuing a Ph.D. in English Studies from Illinois State University specializing in creative writing (primarily fiction). His interests include gender and sexuality studies and queer theory. It is rumored that he has an inappropriate tattoo, but he refuses to comment on it.

What You Can, Can't, and Can't Not: How to Decipher What Writing "Rules" Apply and When

Abbie O'Ryan

In this article, O'Ryan breaks down the writing rules that we have always known and explains what the "real rules" are and aren't. In order to find out what rules apply when and where, writers must dive into the conventions of language, style, and genre. Every writing situation is different. Should the rules be different, too?

Throughout my education, I have been hounded by teachers about writing rules. Proper writing **doesn't** use contractions. "**Don't begin sentences or paragraphs with quotations,**" said the teacher. **Don't** use **no** double negatives. Wait, did I get that right? I guess it *should* be that proper writing **does not** use contractions. When implementing quotations, "**embed them into the sentence or paragraph,**" corrected the teacher. Multiple negation, commonly called double negatives, should **not** be used. What is the point of all of these rules? Here's a spoiler: these rules don't even apply if a writer decides that they don't matter. It all depends on the writing situation and the genre in which the writer is composing his or her piece.

For the beginning years of many students' writing careers, they write in academic settings where, yes, these rules do apply. But think of how many different writing situations can be encountered in the rest of a student's lifetime, or even just today. Today, I am a college student. I will write a to-do list for my week. I will write down what assignments I have for my classes. I will fill in important dates on my calendar. I will text message my friends and family. I will e-mail my academic advisor about what classes to take next semester. I will comment on Facebook pictures. I will tweet about something funny my teacher said. And I will

write a press release for my public relations class. Furthermore, even though I am in school now, I will have just as many writing opportunities after I go out into the “real” world. My purposes may be different in the future, but I will still have to make to-do lists, compose e-mails, and hopefully write press releases (if I get a job in PR). The idea here is that in each of these different writing situations, certain conventions are expected from the audience. Using contractions, implanted quotations, and multiple negation are not always “dos” or “don’ts.” The regulation on whether writers should use or avoid these “writing rules” depends on the genre.

Contractions

In school, students are taught that a contraction is two words blended together to create a shorter word, and they learn where to insert the apostrophe. Once students learn these things, they are often told, later on in their schooling, that contractions are not appropriate to use in academic writing, such as a research paper. Outside of academia, though, contractions are probably used more than not on a daily basis. Below are some examples of genres with and without the convention to use contractions.

Title: “A Framework Explaining How Consumers Plan and Book Travel Online”

Source: *International Journal of Management and Marketing Research*

Author: Michael Conyette

Also, there was no relationship between enjoyment of booking with a travel agent and ease of researching travel with the Internet. This implies respondents who did not enjoy researching with the Internet or found it difficult would book with a travel agent. Thus, the predictor variables having no association with the response variables were dropped from further analysis.

Figure 1. A scholarly article refraining from contraction use.”²¹

Title: “Sandy slams N.J., plunges parts of NYC into darkness”

Source: *Chicago Sun-Times*

At least half a million people had been ordered to evacuate, including 375,000 from low-lying parts of New York City, and by the afternoon authorities were warning that it could be too late for people who had not left already.

Figure 2. A newspaper article refraining from contraction use.”²²

Source: Facebook

Author: E! Online

Pregnant Kate Middleton returns home from the hopsital with Prince William. <http://conli.ne/RbxNW6>

“LIKE” if you think she’s got that motherly glow!

Figure 3. A Facebook post using a contraction.³

Title: “The School”

Source: *Sixty Stories*

Author: Donald Barthelme

And the trees all died. They were orange trees. I don’t know why they died, they just died. Something wrong with the soil possibly or maybe the stuff we got from the nursery wasn’t the best. We complained about it. So we’ve got thirty kids there, each kid had his or her own little tree to plant and we’ve got these thirty dead trees. All these kids looking at these little brown sticks, it was depressing.

Figure 4. A short story with several contractions.⁴

As you can see, the scholarly article and the newspaper article omit contractions, while the Facebook post and the short story allow them. This basically comes down to formality. In general, if a genre is going to be used academically or is going to be formally published, writers should not use contractions. There are exceptions to this, though. Creative writing, such as a short story, can be found in academic and magazine articles that are published, and sometimes these genres have contractions. Why? Over the years, the language patterns of what is sometimes called “standard written English” have become more fixed, particularly because these patterns have been and are taught in schools. These “rules” for grammar are now generally recognized, and writers try to follow these rules in order to display their writing expertise. We can justify the contractions “rule” more thoroughly when accounting for genre, sub-genre, and writing situation in order to decide which “writing rules” to use when.

Genre categorizes texts or language.⁵ Fiction, poetry, and drama are all examples of genres. Sub-genres are categories within genres, such as an historical play, a persuasive poem, or a fantasy novel. The writing situation includes the scene in which a writer writes as well as the purpose for which a writer writes. Figuring out when certain “rules” apply can be difficult. There is never a right or wrong way that is set in stone. Quite frankly, this can be fortunate or unfortunate depending on the writer’s perspective. Just because

a rule is not set in stone does not mean that a writer cannot be “wrong.” To help with this, authors can study examples of the particular genres they’re planning to write before writing. It helps to take notice of conventions that would not usually be used when just sitting down to write without planning.

Quotations

Quotations are used in writing to establish credibility, to relay information, and to make statements that writers cannot restate better themselves. In different genres, conventions for using quotations differ. Look at the following examples of ways to use quotations in scholarly articles as well as newspaper articles.

Title: “A Framework Explaining How Consumers Plan and Book Travel Online”
Source: *International Journal of Management and Marketing Research*
Author: Michael Conyette

Therefore, rationally, consumers’ search should increase when the importance of the purchase increases. However, search activity for the information itself casts consumers as well. Perceived cost of information search is defined as “the consumer’s subjective assessment of monetary, time, physical effort, and psychological sacrifice that he or she expends searching for information” (Schmidt & Spreng, 1996, p. 253).

Figure 5. A scholarly article with an embedded quotation.⁶

Title: “Sandy slams N.J., plunges parts of NYC into darkness”
Source: *Chicago Sun-Times*

President Barack Obama and Republican challenger Mitt Romney canceled their campaign appearances at the very height of the race, with just over a week to go before Election Day. The president pledged the government’s help and made a direct plea from the White House to those in the storm’s path.

“When they tell you to evacuate, you need to evacuate,” Obama said. “Don’t delay, don’t pause, don’t question the instructions that are being given, because this is a powerful storm.”

Figure 6. A newspaper article using a quotation to expand on the reader’s knowledge.⁷

Quotations are implemented differently in each of the above genres. The author of the scholarly article chose to introduce the quotation and embed it into his sentence. This seems to be the general way that students are taught to use quotations. My teachers told me that I cannot let a quotation just hang out by itself—the quotation means nothing if it has no explanation to back it up. While this is all well and good, it is not always the case. The general theme, here, is that nothing can always be the case with writing. For instance, the given example in Figure 6 above uses a quotation to keep the reader’s attention after reading the comprehensive lead. This is a common practice in journalism because audiences will feel more personally connected to a story with the use of a quotation after learning the important facts. Using a quotation here is a must in journalism to keep the reader interested in the story, but it can also be found in many other genres of writing, such as an academic essay. Thus, my genre research suggests that there is not only one way of embedding a quotation, especially because some news articles actually take a more “scholarly” approach and embed quotations into the sentences and paragraphs. Furthermore, some authors may write differently solely based on personal style. If a writer chooses to repetitively embed a quotation in a certain way, or make any consistent style choice for that matter, he or she is creating his or her own personal writing style. Adhering to personal style, in itself, is a convention that is accepted more or less by different genres. For example, news writing is typically factual and straightforward (omitting personal style), while song writing is all about creativity (embracing personal style).

Multiple Negation

Multiple negation is a language feature that is commonly perceived to be incorrect. What is accepted as Standard English does not allow for multiple negation, but who actually *speaks* Standard English? (Hint: no one.) Why are we taught the standardized features of grammar and writing throughout our lives, yet nobody adheres to every rule of Standard English in his or her everyday speech? In many languages, such as Spanish and African American English (AAE), multiple negation is part of the grammar of the language. In Spanish, “a negative particle such as *nunca* (never) that follows the main verb in the sentence must be accompanied by the word *no* (not) preceding the verb, creating a double negation.”⁸ Because of the proper use of multiple negation in Spanish, many native Spanish speakers who take on English as a second language continue to practice multiple negation in their translations. Meijer and Fox Tree also state, “Although Standard English does not allow the double negation construction, African-American Vernacular English does.”⁹ Green explains that “[t]he system of using multiple negative elements in one

sentence to express a single negative shows that the fact that two negatives make a positive in math does not hold in negative marking in AAE.”¹⁰ The use of multiple negation by speakers of Spanish and AAE is not a style choice, necessarily, but instead is an entirely different grammatical feature that is correct, and in fact required, in these languages. Still, the use of multiple negation is often looked down upon, even more so than the incorrect use of “your” and “you’re,” for example.

With that said, the use of multiple negation can be found in many forms of writing and across a range of genres. First, consider the scholarly article (Figure 7) and newspaper article (Figure 8) excerpts below, which include examples of single negative constructions—“not” and “none”—which, as I’ve already pointed out, is the more common convention in genres that call for Standard English. Both genres are academic-style pieces in which multiple negation would not typically be “allowed.” However, the next two examples (Figures 9 and 10) illustrate two different examples of genres that use multiple negation constructions.

Title: “A Framework Explaining How Consumers Plan and Book Travel Online”

Source: *International Journal of Management and Marketing Research*

Author: Michael Conyette

Limitations in the study are that survey respondents expressed their intention to search travel online but these do not necessarily reflect enduring behavioral patterns of subjects. The survey instrument was administered on the Internet. Subjects were referred to the website which included the survey and appropriate instructions. Every respondent saw the same questionnaire and had the same instructions to guide them. Although the survey was pretested it is difficult to determine if participants fully understood the questions asked. In addition, consumers without much Internet experience most likely did not complete the survey.

Figure 7. A scholarly article using a single negative construction.¹¹

Title: “Historians up in arms about archives future”

Source: *Chicago Tribune*

Author: Rex W. Huppke

D’Emilio and others who have served on the library’s board say that such dramatic changes to the bylaws would have required a membership meeting, and they say that none took place.

Figure 8. A newspaper article using a single negative construction.¹²

Title: “Satisfaction”
Author: Mick Jagger and Keith Richards

I can’t get no satisfaction
 I can’t get no satisfaction
 ‘Cause I try and I try and I try and I try
 I can’t get no, I can’t get no

Figure 9. Song lyrics that use multiple negation.¹³

Title: *Twelfth Night*
Author: William Shakespeare

By innocence I swear, and by my youth
 I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth,
 And that no woman has, nor never none
 Shall mistress be of it, save I alone.

Figure 10. A play using multiple negation.¹⁴

Although they both use multiple negation, each of the genres portrayed in Figures 9 and 10 above are accepted by the public for different reasons. The Rolling Stones’ “Satisfaction” is an anthem of sorts. The band has a very large fan base, and with that, their music is widely accepted. The catchy tune of the song, in my opinion, has created a haze over the “incorrect” double negative construction, “**I can’t** get **no** satisfaction,” so perhaps Rolling Stones fans have never given the song’s “correctness” a second thought. I can also see how this style choice could be viewed as rebellious in the musical style of rock & roll. Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, similarly, is in a legendary position. At the time in which this piece was written, English as a language was in a transition process. According to Baugh and Cable, “For a long time English permitted the use of double negative. We have now discarded it through a false application of mathematical logic to language; but in Elizabethan times it was felt merely as a stronger negative.”¹⁵ Thus, some scholars would argue that Shakespeare’s “nor never none” aims to achieve a purpose, to show extremity, to make the audience pay attention. In my opinion though, I don’t think Shakespeare’s intention really even matters. He could have been choosing his words to achieve a specific stylistic purpose, or he could have been attempting to negotiate a feature of a language in the midst of change. Regardless, respect for Shakespeare’s work is so great that no matter the reason, audiences saw and continue to see his plays as art. Like Shakespeare, writers must always keep in mind the conventions of the language, the genre, and their own personal style, while acknowledging that they may not enjoy the level of prestige that Shakespeare has gained.

Conclusion

With writing rules, there is never an always. Nothing is ever set in stone. The decision regarding whether or not to adhere to certain rules depends on the genre, sub-genre, writing situation, audience expectations, culture, language, and writing style. I have personally noticed differences in the use of contractions, quotations, and multiple negation since I have made the transition from high school to college writing situations. In the near future, I will no longer be writing for school assignments, and the style I take on with each writing situation will be up to me. New writing situations will be presented, and I will have to analyze the conventions for the genres I'm writing in, which may include investigating uses of contractions, quotations, and multiple negation, among other traditional "writing rules." If writers remember to keep the genre conventions and the audience in mind, they will be successful. As time goes on and Standard English changes, many of the "rules" that apply now may be altered or even forgotten all together. New "rules" will form, too. Just remember to adhere to the conventions of the genre, and do not apply any writing rule across the board!

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Abbie O’Ryan is a junior public relations major at Illinois State University. She is a proud member of Alpha Gamma Delta sorority where she has served on the executive council. She also loves to travel and aspires to visit all fifty states in her lifetime.

The Trend of the Pen: A Study of the Writing Attitudes and Habits of ISU Freshmen

JoeyLauren Jiracek

This article explores a freshman's transition from high school writing to college writing. Jiracek reports on a survey she conducted of ISU freshmen writers. The results reveal threads of similarity among freshmen composers/writers. The information gained by conducting this survey, along with Jiracek's reflections on her own process of writing the survey, reveal how freshman can work with their attitudes towards writing to help the transition go smoothly.

JoeyLauren Jiracek is a 2012 recipient of the ISU Writing Program Undergraduate Writing Research Scholarship.

Picture this! It's four o'clock on a Friday afternoon. A group of college freshmen arrive to their last class of the day: English 101. While patiently waiting for the class to start, they notice the professor carrying a large stack of papers. "Could it be another writing assignment?" they wonder. Everyone sits on the edge of his or her seat with anticipation. The professor smiles at their obvious excitement and asks, "Who's ready to write a paper?!" The class unanimously cheers about the new writing assignment! Everyone high-fives each other as the rubrics get passed around the room. Some students, so eager to start the assignment, scribble down their ideas on the first sheet of paper they see. In no time, the class is over and the students are free, but all the students are so focused on their writing that they continue to work throughout the night and weekend!

If you are thinking that this would never happen, then you are probably right. Perhaps the situation described would be accurate if everyone loved to complete writing for the classroom, but we all know that everyone has his or her own attitudes towards writing in this situation. We often see students easily draft up emails, create Facebook statuses, and send daily text messages; many students wouldn't think twice before writing in these particular situations. But

when it comes time to write for a school paper, these same students get tripped up! Granted, there are students who enjoy the process, but for the average college freshman, writing in a classroom setting can be stressful. Think about how you feel when you are faced with a writing assignment: Does this type of writing come naturally to you? Can you easily transfer your ideas into written sentences? Do you panic over requirements or struggle with writer's block before you even begin? Maybe you are somewhere in the middle, or maybe you think that it just depends on the nature of the writing assignment and how comfortable you feel about it.

When I was enrolled in English 101 at Illinois State University, I was exposed to a variety of writing assignments, ranging from a natural disaster report to a restaurant review. I was suddenly being asked to express myself through text in ways that I had not been asked to before by exploring new styles of writing. I found that the assignments I was completing were much different than the ones I had written in high school. My experience also allowed me to think of the writing process in a different way. My English 101 course stressed that each piece of writing could be considered its own "genre." I learned that every type of writing has its own unique elements and that it is necessary to shape my writing to match the specific genre.

Some students may find the concept of genre difficult to grasp; they may also have trouble writing in a new genre or style because they have been influenced throughout high school to write in a standard five-paragraph essay format. This structured writing limits the creativity of students and does not allow much room for development. Being exposed to new styles of writing in college can allow people to grow into more experienced writers, but we all know that this transition from high school to college writing is easier said than done. After completing my freshman year, I wondered, what—if anything—could help ease this transition for future freshmen?

My Hypothesis

I was really interested in finding out what elements could affect a person's writing process, and specifically, their transition from high school writing to college writing. Although it may seem trivial, I believe that one's attitude and writing habits will directly affect how smooth the writing process will go. I feel that the first step in the transition involves awareness of these attitudes and habits. If students are aware of their attitudes towards writing and personal writing habits, then they can target their problem areas, enhance their skills, and experience a successful transition into college writing. Ultimately this will reduce the stress that students feel about writing in general and make one's college writing experiences more enjoyable. Before going out to research my topic, I developed three research questions:

1. What beliefs and habits do college freshmen have about writing?
2. How can these beliefs and habits affect their writing processes?
3. Based on prior writing beliefs and habits, what are some effective ways to improve writing skills?

In order to research the answers for myself, I conducted a survey based on these questions. The survey would serve two purposes: to gain a better understanding of how the students at Illinois State feel about their writing processes and to push myself to try a new genre of writing that I had never tackled before. Because this was my first attempt at creating a survey, I knew that the experience would create an opportunity for me to write in an unfamiliar genre.

Creating the Survey

When creating my survey, the first thing I considered was the audience. Who would the questions be geared towards, and how would I reach them? I decided that my audience would be Illinois State students enrolled in English 101. I knew that this class would be made up of freshmen and that their responses would be the most relatable for future students in the same course. I decided to create an online survey through Survey Monkey because it would be the easiest and fastest way to reach college students. I figured that more participants would prefer this method because many students are familiar with social media and online resources. The next thing I pondered was how many questions I would ask and how they would be written. The survey was ultimately composed of ten questions, some multiple choice and some open-ended. I preferred the open-ended questions because then students would be able to respond in a more personal way; this would allow me to see the differences between individual students as opposed to broad generalizations. However, I kept the multiple-choice questions because I wanted to have precise responses and results as well. After creating the survey, I asked three English 101 classes to participate in the survey, and over a two-week period, I received 28 responses. After the survey responses were collected, I reviewed the students' answers and then thought about how I would respond to the questions myself. In the following section I have reported the actual survey questions, the results, and some thoughts regarding how my experience with writing in the survey genre relates to each response.

Survey Questions and Results

Question One

Generally speaking, how interested are you in writing?

The majority of respondents said that they have some interest in writing, depending on the assignment and/or reason for writing. This means that a lot of students like the writing process when they enjoy *what* they are writing about. When students find interest in writing, no matter what the genre or style is, this leads to a positive attitude and will make assignments seem easier and more enjoyable.

My Experience

As I mentioned before, this was my first time writing a survey. Although I didn't initially know much about the conventions of the genre, I thought that it would be an interesting way to reveal the information I was seeking. The overall process of conducting my survey took a while, but I realized that I enjoyed it. However, not everything about writing is going to be interesting. I realized that there are going to be genres that you prefer more than others, and that's okay! Thus, a person's interest in their topic and genre can have an impact on their writing process.

Question Two

Which statement is a better statement of your attitude towards the writing process?

- *I feel hopeful and confident that my writing process will go smoothly (81%)*
- *I feel discouraged and nervous about the process (19%)*

The overwhelming majority agreed that they feel confident that their writing process will go smoothly, which demonstrates a positive attitude. Based on the survey results, it seems that the writing process begins with positivity. Since many students begin with confidence, one should beware of losing confidence when coming across obstacles or writer's block.

My Experience

When I started this survey genre project, I had a positive attitude. I thought that I would be able to create a simple survey that would reveal what factors influence a college freshman's writing process. However, my attitude was challenged when I started writing the results of the survey—this article. I came across problems with interpreting the results without sounding too much like an expert writer myself. When my attitude was challenged, I found it difficult to move on and started to question the quality of my work. When I feel discouraged or nervous about the writing process, I try to pinpoint what is causing my angst. For some people, having a negative attitude in the beginning of the process stems from their own past writing struggles. I have found that being in tune with your attitude towards writing can affect your writing performance during any part of the writing process.

Question Three

What is the hardest part about writing?

Students' responses to this open-ended question were that starting out and picking a topic were the hardest parts about writing. One student said, "I think that the hardest part about writing is starting off the papers and getting all the different ideas I have in my head to translate well on paper." Another student said, "Finding creative things to write about, and extending your ideas to make papers and assignments longer in length is the hardest part about writing."

My Experience

When writing in the survey genre, I also encountered idea generation and translation issues. Although I knew what aspects of the writing process I wanted to research, I was not sure what questions would be the most effective to identify my participants' writing attitudes and habits. When I find it difficult to come up with good ideas, I like to talk it out with my peers, family, or a professor. In this situation, my father and my advisor from the English department helped me brainstorm, and they reassured me that my topic choice was a good one. It was interesting to see how my obstacles during this project matched other students' troubles during the writing process.

Question Four

Describe your strengths as a writer.

This question studies students' habits. Some people agreed that creativity and overall flow were their strengths. One student wrote, "When I have an idea in my head and I start writing, I just keep typing and do not stop," while another student said, "I don't know what I would consider my strength as a writer; I feel like it depends on the assignment." Overall, it seemed that some students were able to identify their strengths, while others had trouble identifying their strengths.

My Experience

At the beginning of this project, I thought that my strength in writing in the survey genre would be formatting clear and concise questions. Although my first draft of questions ended up being a little wordy for the survey genre, I was able to successfully edit them to be more precise. In addition to discovering my strengths, I also found that I had some areas to work on, specifically my tendency to fall into the role of "expert advisor." I learned that while understanding my strengths and utilizing them in my writing is helpful, discovering bad habits through review and feedback can help me learn and improve my writing skills as well.

Question Five

Do you prefer open-ended writing assignments with minimal guidelines, or highly structured ones with many guidelines? Please explain your answer.

When asked, the majority of students preferred highly structured assignments. Most students said something similar to this response, provided by one student: “I prefer highly structured writing assignments because they are to the point about what is expected which makes the writing process easier.” Only a few students made comments like this response: “I prefer open-ended with minimal guidelines. This allows the writer to express their feelings freely with whatever comes to mind first which tends to be more honest, rather than having to modify what you think to fit the criteria.” I created this question to study students’ attitudes to determine if they are open-minded. The majority of freshmen enjoy a structured assignment because it tells them exactly what they need to do. Sometimes students just want to know what guidelines to meet in order to get a good grade. High school usually emphasizes the importance of these structured assignments, so it makes sense that the students prefer this option.

My Experience

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, I found that after high school, guidelines and requirements began to dwindle. So, I found it beneficial to have an open mind when writing with minimal guidelines. Once students are open to writing in different genres, they can do the research necessary to find credible resources. The genre samples they research can help them pinpoint key features to include in their genre, which ultimately synthesizes into their own style. While writing in the survey genre, I kept an open mind and used resources that included on-line surveys written by credible researchers. I took notes and identified key components to use in this survey.

Question Six

When writing in an unfamiliar genre and/or writing situation, I feel _____. Explain.

In this measure of attitude, most students felt stressed and overwhelmed when asked to write in an unfamiliar genre. One student said, “Overwhelmed. Most people have their niche in writing and their preferred genre. Getting pulled out of that comfort zone can be difficult if there isn’t enough explanation for what is expected in the new genre.” This response is similar to preferring familiar and structured assignments. It’s understandable that the majority of participants felt anxious, but some students viewed the ambiguity as a challenge. One student said, “I feel challenged. Even though it may be hard to adapt to the different conventions, learning new genres is always interesting.”

My Experience

I believe that viewing new genres as a challenge is the better approach. If students are unfamiliar with a style of writing, they shouldn't be afraid to ask for help. A student can always turn to a teacher for assignment clarification or seek help from a librarian to find books on the particular style. But, the best way to overcome unfamiliar genres is to become familiar with them. As previously mentioned, by doing research on the survey genre, I was able to gain a better understanding of the genre's components, which put me at ease while writing this survey.

Question Seven

Describe your ideal writing environment (e.g. a crowded coffee shop, the maximum-quiet floor of the library, etc.).

One student responded, "Somewhere quiet and comfortable with no one around and no distractions." A student with opposite feeling said, "Anywhere that does not make me feel like I am isolated in the world. I prefer a coffee shop with a crowd or a floor in the library where my peers that I am acquainted with are around me." This question got students to think about their writing habits. I found that everyone has a specific writing place where they can be comfortable and efficient. The majority of respondents preferred to be by themselves in a quiet area. Usually they like to be somewhere relaxing, like a bed. Other students mentioned having music playing softly.

My Experience

Throughout the survey writing process, I always removed any distractions and made sure I had a clear head before I started to write. I know I am most efficient in a quiet and secluded workspace. It is important for students to know their ideal environment. Your environment lets you express your ideas more freely. Being in the wrong environment can cause added stress or procrastination.

Question Eight

How do you usually manage your time while writing?

- *I tend to divide the assignment and/or writing situation into smaller tasks, working on it over a period of time. (1%)*
- *I tend to procrastinate and work on everything close to the due date. (38.1%)*
- *It depends upon the assignment and/or writing situation. (42.9%)*
- *It depends upon other responsibilities I have at the time. (14.3%)*

The data on time management habits were not surprising. Procrastination among college students is a common stereotype, especially for freshman, who are busy adjusting to their new environment. It's easy to push writing assignments aside when they are trying to balance other classwork and free time.

My Experience

My strategy of planning early really aided in creating my survey. Writing the survey and interpreting the results took me a whole semester. However, I found that this assignment seemed less intimidating when I broke it down into manageable steps. This also allowed me ample time to revise survey questions. My first draft of questions would have been too broad and confusing to the audience. As I reviewed each subsequent draft, my questions became clearer and more concise. If students start an assignment the night before it's due, it can cause unnecessary stress and may not leave room for improvement. Students may not be able to reach their full writing potential if the assignment they are turning in is basically a rough draft.

Question Nine

How often do you use prewriting techniques such as mind maps or outlines to organize your ideas?

- *Never (10%)*
- *Rarely (50%)*
- *Sometimes (35%)*
- *Always (5%)*

According to the survey results, the majority of English 101 students never or rarely use prewriting techniques. Some students commented that they only create outlines or multiple drafts when the teacher requires them to, perhaps because most college students simply want to complete the assignment. This leads writers to attempt to write the entire genre during their first attempt, rather than consciously thinking or writing before beginning a draft.

My Experience

Although outlines are not for everyone, I found that outlining helped me structure and organize my thoughts when creating my survey. When looking back on my project notes for creating the survey, I could see how my thoughts and ideas built upon each other. My first brainstorming sheet started out with general ideas and questions I wanted to ask for my research. In the survey genre, every researcher has a hypothesis that they aim to prove or disprove. I needed to make sure that each question related back to my hypothesis. My outlines and notes were useful in referring back to my initial survey goals.

Students may find the hardest part of writing to be translating their ideas into words. When they can refer back to an outline, it can usually help them with that difficult transition. Also if a student feels stuck from the beginning of the assignment, brainstorming or mind mapping can at least help to generate some ideas.

Question Ten

Is writing important? Why or why not?

This last survey question measures participants' attitudes again. When asked this question, every student indicated that they thought that writing is important in one way or another. One student responded, "Writing is extremely important. Writing is what gets thoughts from your brain to other people. Speaking does that too, but writing is more permanent. There's a record of it somewhere, and you can refer back to it. Writing is an excellent form of expression that more people should take advantage of."

My Experience

If there is one thing I have learned through my transition from high school to college writing, it is that writing is important, and reflecting on each genre's unique features is crucial. When writing in the survey genre, I learned that it is important to consider the target audience, the types of questions, distribution methods, and data interpretation. Embracing writing in a variety of genres has helped me expand my writing capabilities. Keeping a positive outlook on writing will be beneficial in my future, also, because I can never know what I will be asked to compose. Whether it is a project report or quick email to my boss, my writing needs to be effective and formatted accurately.

Final Thoughts

Looking back on this endeavor, I can see how creating a survey helped identify the trend of the pen. The results showed common beliefs and habits that Illinois State freshmen have about writing. My initial intention in researching was to find ways to ease future students' transitions into college writing and to practice the skill of writing in an unfamiliar genre. I realize now, though, that by writing my own survey, I was demonstrating how attitudes and habits could affect a person's writing process, especially when taking on an unfamiliar genre. The transition into college writing *can* be achieved when students reflect on their own writing attitudes and habits. Being aware of one's beliefs and habits and understanding how to utilize and adjust them can reduce the stress of writing, make writing more pleasurable, and help all writers recognize their full writing potential!



Joey Lauren Jiracek is a sophomore at Illinois State University majoring in Public Relations. She is from Mokena, Illinois. In her spare time, she enjoys shopping, listening to music, and especially attending Zumba classes with her friends. Her ideal job would be to combine her love of fashion and public relations and work for a company that would satisfy both!

The Memoir as Inquiry to Self Discovery

Miles Maggio

In this article, Maggio asks readers to revisit their memories of life-changing moments, breaking down the rigid walls of confusion that separate them from their past. Maggio suggests that, by writing in genres that allow for creativity, we can relive the past and discover who we are and where we have come from, adjusting our future actions in light of our past tendencies.

Miles Maggio is a 2012 recipient of the ISU Writing Program Undergraduate Writing Research Scholarship.

Think about that special event that changed your life. For the most part, each of us has had an event in our life we can call a “turning point.” Whether it happened over a few minutes or a few years, this was a time in which we fundamentally changed as an individual. How beneficial would it be to analyze this “turning point”? Well, consider all the actions and decisions you will encounter in your future. Each of these choices will depend on your past experiences. Having an understanding of the tendencies of your past and their consequences will allow you to have a better understanding of your future. For example, if my tendency is to underestimate how many spelling errors I make and the consequences have been red ink on my papers, then I will, after reconciling the problem through an “isolating method,” realize that I should proofread cautiously.

Why Write About Your Past?

The “isolating method” I am referring to is writing. There are many studies (cf. Chinn, 1994; Ganea, 2007; Schaller, 1997) that indicate that the

same part of our brain that allows us to think methodically also helps us remember our past. The part of your brain that distinguishes between you and your environment is the same region of your brain that uses past experiences to project your possibilities into the future (Radiolab, 2010). More to the point: these studies indicate that using language (more specifically, writing) as a mechanism to articulate past experiences is very accommodating to fully developing—and therefore better understanding—these past experiences (Chinn, 1994). For example, neuroanatomist Jill Bolte Taylor wrote her book, *My Stroke of Insight*, about the morning of her stroke that temporarily caused her to lose her language, memories of the past, and sense of self (Taylor, 2011). In her book, she describes the transparent relationship between losing language and losing her own identity. She indicates that without language there are no “inner voices” that allow us to do just about anything with our past. Consequently, without language there are no “inner voices” that allow us to speculate about our future. Therefore, we could guess that encompassing our past into a language format makes it more concrete or rigid in our mind—like focusing the camera.

Though these examples don’t specifically suggest writing as the mechanism we should use to invoke our past, writing is the best language format for this analysis for many reasons. For one, writing is slow enough to allow the memories to emerge (Chinn, 1994). Nursing journals, such as *Advances in Methods of Inquiry for Nursing*, also advocate for the use of writing as inquiry to learn about past experiences. Allowing time to recall your past enables the authentic story to be displayed (authenticity is vital to the writing process, as indicated later). If we talk about our past, it’s much more likely that we will run across something we can’t recall immediately, so, for the audience’s sake, the story being told is made up or guessed.

In my young, naive perspective, I recalled a past experience in my memoir, *On the Tree Branch*:

Grandpa asked me to stay in the living room because the adults were going to talk about adult things. I felt kind of left out, so I sat in the middle of the living room where I could hear sounds coming from both ends of the kitchen as they traveled around the staircases and kitchen closet. I started looking through the comics section as they talked.

I could pick up little snippets of the conversation like a “court date” coming up and some “legal stuff.” I kind of tuned out to do some well-needed thinking before I realized they were talking about mom—alcoholism and divorce. “Yeah, we’re going to have to get a divorce. There is no way around it,” Dad said, almost unemotionally.

That was it for me; when I heard those words, my thoughts started to pour out. I tried to hold it in despite the fact that there was no one around—I just couldn't. It was too much. My parents were getting a divorce and there was nothing I could do about it. I didn't understand why they couldn't just get over their differences and make up. It wasn't that hard—so many stories ended up that way in the movies.

It was hard to believe that this was actually going to happen; in movies I'd seen, situations got much worse than this, yet they still ended up getting back together in the end. When he said this, I knew it was reality and that there was no going back. It hurt to think about but felt good to cry about. Garfield was about to drown under the tears I'd been bombarding him with. He still seemed to say the things he wanted to say; I don't know why I had a problem speaking up.

Before I knew it, Dad left without saying goodbye. He seemed extremely rushed and anxious to get things moving along. He just kind of blurred in and out of my life real fast. He must have been real busy.

This experience was merely part of the larger turning point; however, while writing about this memory, I realized a few key things about the experience that I hadn't discovered before. For starters, why is this event so vivid in my mind several years later? Before I started really reflecting on the scenario through this writing process, the memory was frail. Fortunately, the only one who experienced my naive perspective was me, so I began the process. In doing so, I realized important aspects of my thoughts such as why I thought divorce was such a horrible thing, why I thought that my parents could make up so easily, and of course, why I didn't have the confidence to speak up. I now realize, for example, that divorce isn't as terrible as I thought it was going to be. It had major financial implications, but my parents' divorce put my siblings and me in a somewhat more stable environment. Through this process, I was able to derive the lesson that I should be less concerned about other people's decisions because they may see many components of the situation that I do not. This method of writing about my past really allowed me to think critically about how I think in comparison to others.

An additional perk to writing about your past includes the mere fact that you can find your own genre. As our society continues to become more specialized, it almost demands writers to become better at specific genres of writing. I wrote a book-length memoir, but you can literally write in any genre and at any length you want to. This engaging process will allow you to find the genre you are inherently drawn to and/or the genre you enjoy writing in. The best part about this method is that you can strengthen your confidence,

allowing you to build your confidence in an engaging and meaningful way. Some writers might say that when they write, they feel consumed and/or surrounded by the plot. Writing a memoir of my childhood certainly allowed me to figuratively surround myself with past experiences, thus allowing me to better understand it. Knowing who you are is key to recognizing and therefore resolving your inherent tendencies for a stronger foundation in the future.

How Do I Find My Genre?

While choosing your genre, there are a few questions you can ask yourself:

- What genre will fit best with my career or interests?
- What genre do I want to get better at?
- What genre am I best at writing in or do I know the most about?
- What genre will fully display such an event in my past? Or, is this genre fitting for the scene?
- What genre will my audience best react to?

These are only guidelines intended to be taken loosely, but try imagining the genre being spoken or performed. Will you be satisfied with the results? If you are still having trouble deciding which genre may be yours, ask a friend or someone who knows your personality. If you have a BFF (best friend forever) or BBF (best bro forever), and he or she knows you well enough, ask him or her to choose your genre. As a last resort, just start writing in a genre and if you find that it doesn't accommodate your interests or writing goals, try another one. Remember that once you start writing in that genre, it does not mean you are married to it for the rest of your life. Take this time to discover another part of yourself and your style. That's what writing should be about.

How Do I Write About My Past In My Genre?

Once you have chosen your genre you may need to continue to get that turning point in your mind. If you need to write out a chronology of an event (or set of events), go right ahead. Though not everyone may need a chronology, it can be important for more elaborate plots because understanding the direction of your changing perception and moods during events allows you to better understand who you are today. For example, when I was ten pages into my book, many important events were swirling in my head, yet I couldn't remember which one came first. Finally, I took three lined

pieces of paper, sprawled them out on a table, and evenly spaced out the years. I drew segments on the time line according to when an event took place, labeled the segments, and gave a brief description of each segment. You do not necessarily need to go to that degree, but it certainly worked for me.

Next, you might check out some other writers that write in your genre. Generally, writers write in a tone that makes their audience relate to and be comforted by the plot, so we should look to experienced authors for tone in helping us relate to the audience. For example, during the imminent loss of a loved one, the author may present a tone of denial, speaking as if the loved one will be there next week until the all too familiar tone of reality sets in, allowing the audience to relate to the tone. As a kind of reference point and inspiration to my writing, I reread sections of *A Long Way Gone* by Ishmael Beah and many other memoirs as I paid close attention to style and tone. Just for dialogue styles (the way conversations are written), I also read sections from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. The more authors you reference, the easier it'll be for you to connect to your audience in your given genre. Make sure that you do not try to write in the exact same tone as another author though because your audience is reading about your past to get your unique perspective on life. I couldn't even get close to the tone of the narrator in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, but even if I could, it wouldn't be mine.

Now you may have noticed while reading this article that I have changed my tone. I have gone from a professional tone (to provide you with research on the topic) to a more conversational and colloquial tone (to demonstrate how this process might fit you personally). While on the journey of life and as we grow and learn from our experiences, reactions and perspectives toward new events should also differ from earlier ones. Use your tone to reflect your new outlook in a situation. Although you are not necessarily informing your audience directly, you will have a theme that lets the reader hear about a life lesson of some sort. It's important to analyze these new reactions and perspectives because they are the primordial synthesis of your current day reactions and moods. Understanding your past reactions can allow you to better understand your reactions and moods today, and therefore, enable you to adjust accordingly. In the passage from my memoir above, I changed tone according to the mood of the narrator because I had new moods, reactions, and outlooks towards my dad and his divorce. Analyzing these changes or "turning points" helped me better understand my place in life at that time, and now. In essence, without fluctuations in tone there would be no direction of thinking. This may take a bit of practice but in time it can make your writing much more nuanced.

While keeping that in mind, let's return to a point that I mentioned earlier: you must be authentic in this form of writing. Try not to worry about adding, deleting, or manipulating your writing in any way. While I was writing,

I made sure I could picture the scene in my head before I wrote it. If I wasn't authentic, I would have been reshaping my past in my mind in a way that didn't correspond to my true experiences. If I have an incorrect reflection on my past, I have a false sense of self that will not prove fruitful when coming to terms with myself and my experiences. Remember: the whole purpose of this process is to discover you, not someone you want to be. And because this kind of writing is meant solely for your own use, there is no reason to falsify it for audience's sake. As stated before, the design of this method will allow us to put our past into writing, which is a more concrete and rigid structure than memory, allowing us to better understand ourselves. With this sense of self comes the confidence needed to handle future projects and events as well as a better perspective to move forward. When we recognize and internalize our own tendencies, we are better equipped to plan and execute future ones. It matters that I realize this tendency, the cause of the tendency, and that I can take a second guess at the consequences of future situations. Along with that comes the benefit of writing in the genre that best fits you. Much like my experience with writing about divorce, you too can receive a much better understand of how we react to turning points in our life. Another, more straightforward trend that I discovered was my tendency to underestimate how bad I spell. I've been getting better at that, too.

Give exploring your memory through writing a try. You don't need to write over two hundred pages for this method to work; just pick your genre, "turning point," and representative tones, and then allow your memories to emerge. In the context of utilizing this method, stay true to your past, and you should be able to figure out your trends in life. When you're finished, write them down and make your future goals accordingly. I noticed that the process improved my confidence, and I'm confident that it can help you, too. Because I explored my past and wrote it all down, I can now look at it again and again, whenever I want to, to help me develop a more concrete foundation for my future.

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Miles Maggio is a sophomore physics major at Illinois State University. Miles loves to learn and integrate writing, debate, and Christian apologetics into his education. One of his life-long endeavors includes discovering the unified theory between general relativity and quantum mechanics. Miles has written a book, *On the Tree Branch*, a memoir of his childhood. The rest are details.

Screenplay Writing: The Art of Writing Films

Brandon Stark

This article is about Stark's journey of discovering screenplay writing and how it has affected him. He also explains some beginner's tips on how to write a screenplay and how to do so with an original style. The goal of this article is to present screenplay writing as a genre option, especially for people who love movies, like Stark.

Brandon Stark is a 2012 recipient of the ISU Writing Program Undergraduate Writing Research Scholarship.

I'm a movie guy. Always have been, always will be. I'm the kind of guy who will spend hours talking about certain movies and what they mean or symbolize. When I was younger, my parents showed me all kinds of movies that inspired my creativity. *Terminator Two: Judgment Day*, *Star Wars*, and *Alien* were only a few of the many that prompted me to become a movie-goer. Movies let people's minds wander into imaginary worlds to surprise, shock, or thrill them through the stories they tell. Films are portals to get away from everyday life as we get pulled into the thought-up worlds on screen. Movies make us feel all kinds of emotions of excitement and happiness (depending on the movie). We meet characters that we'll remember for what they did or some iconic phrase they said. Films can amaze us because of the amount of layers they have to keep their stories interesting and powerful.

Having built up my fascination for movies from a young age, eventually I came to my sophomore year of high school: the year I started developing my own screenplays. I remember watching a behind-the-scenes making of the film *Alien*, directed by Ridley Scott, and realizing that *Alien* is such

a great movie, to me, because of its way of filming, its vivid plot, and its realistic characters. The film takes these three elements and creates what I consider to be one of the greatest movies ever made. The behind-the-scenes film explains the pre-production of *Alien* and shows parts of the original screenplay used for the film, which immediately caught my attention. I stopped the movie to view the format of the screenplay; I wanted to investigate this genre, the writing behind the movie. I had been aware of what screenplays were, but before that moment, I had never taken the time to really look at one.

After getting only a few seconds of reading the actual screenplay of one of my favorite movies, I immediately felt the need to get more exposure to this genre: I wanted to read full-length screenplays. I wanted to read the stories of movies; I wanted to see how they were written to find out how movies could tell stories so well. I searched the Internet until I stumbled upon the Internet Movie Script Database (IMSDB). This website was my first step in to learning how to write my own screenplays. I studied screenplays such as *Titanic*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Alien*, and many more to become familiar with the style and the strict format. I soon realized that this would not be enough. I was reading screenplays to gain familiarity with them, but I needed instructions as to how to properly write one of my own. I needed a step-by-step guide for building my own screenplays.

After searching the web and a few Border's book stores, I finally found the book that would open my world to screenplays even more: *The Hollywood Standard: The Complete and Authoritative Guide to Script Format and Style* by Christopher Riley. The book allowed me to go further with my screenplay writing research than I had before. Riley explains the conventions for what I now think of as all the important aspects of a screenplay:

1. Introducing a scene
2. Properly introducing a character
3. The importance of dialogue
4. Off-screen sounds
5. Scene visualization
6. Character details

After reading the book and reviewing it as much as I could, I've become much more knowledgeable in writing my own screenplays. The book helped me find errors in my own work and common errors that many screenplay writers make. From this research, I was able to build

myself up and write the stories I wanted to, in the format I want to write them in.

One of the lessons I have learned about screenplay writing, and which I think is true of other genres as well, is that a writer must grow into his or her own style of writing. Writers may get inspiration from other writers, but copying another writer's style won't get them far. When writers have their own styles, it allows them to stand out from everyone else. For example, I think Stephen King is one of the greatest living authors of our time. His way of storytelling and providing gripping detail is such that readers all over the world know when they're reading one of King's tales. Writers should be able to demonstrate who they are in their writing; when someone reads a writer's work, the reader should be able to identify whose work they're reading by the way the author has written it. Screenplay writers need to write according to the general conventions and format of the genre of the screenplay, but they must also tell their stories in such a way that readers would automatically recognize who wrote the screenplay. Of course, this doesn't happen right away when someone is just trying out the genre and is usually only the case for very famous, successful screenplay writers, but it's still a good goal to keep in mind. One step towards this goal is for screenplay authors to develop skills in visualization.

In this way, screenplay writing is similar to other kinds of writing. A screenplay writer must be able to create a strong visual impression with his or her words. By this I mean that a screenplay writer should compose in such a way so that whoever is reading his or her script can visualize the story with great detail. Screenplay writers need to develop the writing skills to create a world that their readers (and eventually viewers) can visualize and understand easily. A great example would be *Star Wars* or James Cameron's *Avatar*. Both these films have worlds that need to be explained with great detail in order for readers to get a "visual understanding" of the setting and scenes. In order for the visuals to be born on screen the way the writer conceives of them, the writer must put them on paper in such a way to allow his or her vision to come through. Screenplay writers need to be able to create this "visual understanding" so well that the reader won't want to put the script down. Overall, that's what screenplay writers hope for in the film business: the chance to have their work read and enjoyed.

Let's take a look at some examples, now, to investigate some of the conventions of creating a screenplay with the kind of visualization techniques I've been talking about. Screenplays start out by explaining where the story takes place. Consider this example:

Properly introduce scene; remember it's like watching a movie.

FADE IN:

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT - 8:30

This is the direction. It takes place inside a house, inside the kitchen, at night time, specifically, eight thirty.

TWO MEN sit across from each other at a long table. Each MAN has a GUN. The TWO MEN grin at each other. Hatred burns in their eyes. The MAN ON THE LEFT side of the table has a scar going down the right side of his face. It's been there a while. The MAN ON THE RIGHT side of the table has a fresh cut on his left cheek and his right eye is starting to bruise. They both wear farmers' clothes mixed with some cowboy style to them.

When introducing characters into the story, their names or referents must be capitalized in to show the importance to the reader.

MAN ON THE LEFT

I never thought we'd be here.

Also, objects that make noises must be capitalized, and the noise they make must be capitalized as well.

MAN ON THE RIGHT

I knew we would one day.

Explain what's going on. Give the reader a picture in their head.

The grin stays on both faces. The TWO MEN lift the GUNS off the table and click the safeties off. The GUNS are pointing at each other.

This is the first character and his dialogue.

MAN ON THE LEFT

Ready partner?

This is the second character and his dialogue.

MAN ON THE RIGHT

Let's dance.

If you want to be more specific with the camera angles, feel free to do so. This can only help with visualization.

The CAMERA ZOOMS OUT with the TWO MEN pointing the guns at each other. The screen fades to black and we hear CHAIRS FALLING, MULTIPLE GUNSHOTS, and WINDOWS BREAKING.

Screenplays are always written in Courier New. It's the font for film. Always capitalizing the names emphasizes to the reader who is doing or saying what. Similarly, capitalizing something that is making noise and the noise it makes allows for readers to understand an action scene and what or whom is involved in that scene.

As I mentioned earlier, the most important element I've learned for screenplay writing is visualization. By visualization I mean that whatever you see in your mind you MUST write in great, but limited detail in the

screenplay. What you see in your mind, the reader must be able to see. Give your characters distinct details if they have them or show the characteristics of the room in which the characters are acting. The reason some movies are so great in displaying detail is because the screenplay writers knew how to bring the stories to life on paper. For example, with the gunmen at the table, I described what they looked like with specifics so the reader would know the differences between them, other than just MAN ON THE LEFT and MAN ON THE RIGHT. Giving this description makes the characters more memorable and can allow for more tension between the characters.

Another important convention to keep in mind is that despite the need for visualization, it's not a novel; the script must get straight to the point. Screenplay writers can use detail, but not too much detail:

EXT. ST. ANDREWS HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY - 3
P.M.

It's a sunny day on the parking lot of St. Andrews High School. Kids are leaving school. Parents are picking up kids and the buses are getting ready to leave the school. We ZOOM IN to KEVIN SMITH. Kevin has spiked hair and wears brown shorts and a white t-shirt. His ripped backpack hangs on his left shoulder and his right sandal has duct tape on it keeping it together. He walks across the parking lot to his car when he sees RACHEL SOLER running up to him.

RACHEL

KEVIN! WAIT!

Kevin smiles.

KEVIN (V.O.)

Why does she keep bothering me
to ask me about things that
don't matter? What's she hiding?

Rachel is wearing pink t-shirt and skinny blue jeans. Her hair is light blonde and is surprisingly wearing no shoes or socks. She runs up and starts painting while trying to talk.

I highly recommend getting a screenplay software program like Celtx. It's a free program for screenplay and theatre writers and hasn't disappointed me yet. Screenplay dialogue has to have certain spacing and formatting. Instead of doing it yourself and struggling with the spacing in Microsoft Word, let Celtx do it for you so you can focus on your story.

RACHEL

Hey . . . (pant) . . . can I have a—

KEVIN

Yes, you can have a ride.

RACHEL

Thanks . . . (pant) . . . and—

KEVIN

Yes, I'll help you with the math
homework. But first, where are your shoes?

CUT TO:

The first thing I did in this example was to add a small amount of significant detail. I didn't write how big the school was or what it was shaped like because I decided that it didn't matter to the story. I wrote "a school" in order for the reader to imagine the school they see in their minds. Likewise, I gave a general definition of what an average school parking lot would be like after school ends. A lot of readers can probably relate to this and will be able to visualize an image of the scene quickly.

Kevin and Rachel were written about with some detail for a few reasons. The first is to provide some basic notions of they look like so that readers will be able to picture them clearly. Second, they're not the average kids you see in high school; not the football player, not the prep, not the cheerleader—they're just themselves. They have personalities that are unlike those readers might assume based on the school system they participate in. This presents their individualism; they do and dress how they please and not according to the Internet or what the TV says is the hottest fashion. This also indicates that they have special significance to the plot of the story.

Personally, I will sometimes include what the characters are wearing in order to put a good picture in the reader's mind of what the characters look like. Sometimes I will use other details, but only if it is necessary for the story. Unnecessary details are just a waste of space and could be annoying to the reader. I will give characters certain looks or describe something about the character in a certain way in order to represent a part of the story that needs to be told correctly. Clearly, different writers provide different levels of detail about their characters to achieve different purposes. For example, in some cases, what the characters wear early in the movie can be representative of what kind of person they will become further into the movie.

A writer can be as detailed as he or she wants about the characters, but the characters' actions need to be brought alive by what they say and how they say things. Every person reacts differently to certain situations, and it's important to show that. Each character needs to have a distinct personality. It's important for both the writer and reader to know when an important character has been brought into the story and also to realize who the character is and what makes the character the way he or she is. Good writers never create characters that look, speak, and act the same as everyone else in the story. It'd be way too boring. The story would die in less than five minutes. A story needs chemistry and diversity. Using both those tools in a dynamic way, a writer will create great character development and interaction between characters in the story.

Also central to character development is dialogue. Dialogue is kind of like acting. Actors have different styles of acting. One well-known style is called method acting, which *Wikipedia* defines as “any of a family of techniques used by actors to create in themselves the thoughts and feelings of their characters, so as to develop lifelike performances.” When I write, I do something similar. I call it method writing (I know, clever name). When I'm writing characters and their dialogue, I imagine getting into their minds to see how they would see the world. This allows me, as a writer, to be able to write each character in a way so they don't all feel and sound the same. The characters have stronger conversations, their emotions are expressed more fluidly, and it's just a fun way to write. It's similar to being in someone else's shoes and bringing life to something new in a different way.

Another important element of screenplay writing is learning how to pace the story. It's important to learn how to build the story and to let the characters grow and evolve as the story goes on. Let the story flow; build characters, scenes, and elements. To research how this is best done, I recommend seeing movies and reading screenplays. If you want some good examples of perfectly paced movies, I highly recommend watching *The Shawshank Redemption* and *Alien*; these movies have great pacing, which allows the story and the characters time to evolve. These films will help you to understand how pacing a film/story is truly done. However, keep in mind that a lot of movies today—at least in my opinion—have stories that could be great but rush through some parts in order to get to a certain point in the story, which I think ruins the story in a way.

As you may have figured out already, screenplay writers have to follow certain formatting rules, or film studios will not seriously consider them. In fact, in some ways it is the formatting that makes a screenplay a screenplay. I have already mentioned several examples of this—such as the specific font that is required—but I'll mention a few more. For example, EXT. means exterior, which shows that the following scene will be taking place outside. For an inside

setting, screenplay writers use INT., meaning interior. Also, you'll notice that when I wrote Kevin's dialogue, at one point I wrote (V.O.) by his name; the (V.O.) stands for voice over. This means that the camera will show that Kevin is obviously not talking, but the audience will still be able to hear his voice. Most of the time voice over allows the character to function as a narrator, or it can express what he or she is thinking in his or her mind. The function of voice over can vary from writer to writer. It's important to note that while every screenplay writer follows certain rules, such as those I've described here, individual writers may do a few things differently to show their style.

As I alluded to earlier, screenplays are mainly read by movie studio executives, film agents, directors, producers, etc. These are people within the movie industry that determine whether or not the screenplay is good enough to make into a movie as well as how much money, time, and energy it will cost the studio to produce. The reason "EXT," "INT," "V.O.," and other directions like these are used in screenplays is to help the director and the studio determine where and how to film certain parts, or how to pace and film the story to follow the characters' actions. Lighting, extras, and set pieces are all important parts of this process. These days, it's about how much it's going to cost a studio to make the movie and how much more they're going to make out of the film.

Sometimes studios will take control of a script to make more money out of it. By this I mean the studio will change major aspects of the story to create what they believe will yield a bigger income if the movie is to be produced and filmed. They might change characters, parts of the story, or locations or topics to be represented in the film. I would argue that in these kinds of situations, studio executives can forget an important rule: without a great story, there can't be a great movie. In translation for the studio executives: without a good story, there's no cash.

That's why it's important for screenplay writers to practice and perfect their art, to explain the worlds they imagine with the joy and excitement that they then bring out onto the pages of their writing. When a writer puts true emotion and dedication into their writing, he or she can make the story powerful and challenging. If a story is hard to write, then a screenplay writer is probably on track; it's not easy work but that's the beauty of it.

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Brandon Stark is currently attending Illinois State University. His major is English with a minor in creative writing. He's a film addict and enjoys having long conversations about film. His passion for film and writing stays strong. He continues to write screenplays and short stories. He hopes to pursue a career in writing. For now, he's focusing on school and waiting to see where life takes him. He personally believes that hard work, real hard work, will take people to the places they want to go.

Bust a Rhyme: A New Poetics of Food Journaling

Kate Browne

In this article, Browne explores her initial experiences learning to write food journals for weight loss and discovers a way to repurpose the genre for disordered eating recovery through subversion. Using poetry and a generous helping of radical politics, Browne then conducts a writing experiment intended to challenge prescriptive and limiting genre conventions.

“Mabye we’ll have french toset.”

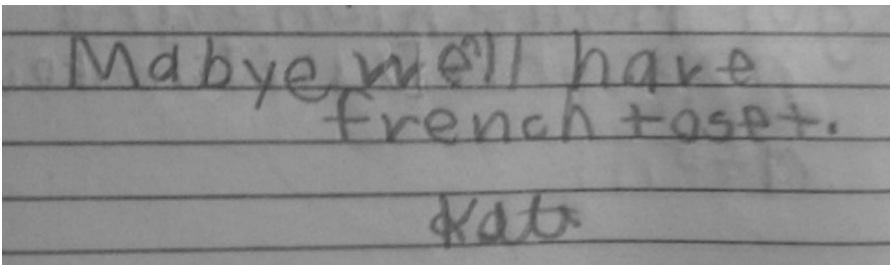


Figure 1. First foray into food journaling.

In a diary entry written on August 24, 1992, I speculated a breakfast possibility while staying at my aunt and grandma’s house for the weekend. At nine years old, diary-keeping was a new writing activity for me. I don’t know how I learned that a diary is a place to document day-to-day thoughts and happenings, but I produced entries overrun with descriptions of classmates I had a crush on, musings about school, and the peskiness of my younger brother and sister. I wrote about food twice over the span of a year and only

as minor details that fit into the larger goal of recording events that reflect good times and family togetherness. In these early entries, writing about food was not substantially different from writing about anything else that happened in my life. Soon after that diary entry, though, a new kind of food journaling took over my world—food journaling for weight loss.

How I Learned to Food Journal

Soon after I turned ten, my pediatrician suggested to my parents that it would be in my best interest to lose weight. My parents, concerned for my well-being, enrolled me in the Weight Watchers™ program where one of the primary methods for accountability and nutrition-tracking comes in the form of food journaling.¹ What I did not know then but understand now is that food journaling for weight loss comprises one part of a complex system of assumptions and goals based on cultural and social constructions of weight loss as beneficial and healthy. Although I did not have a name for the process of learning how to write in this genre at the time, I now understand that I followed a process similar to learning a new genre using Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT).

I think of CHAT as an analytical tool that is useful when learning how to write in new genres and that can help writers understand how and why they might choose to write in frequently used genres. I felt confident in my knowledge of what a diary was and the practice of keeping one, but the genre of food journaling, though based on daily diary-keeping, has a slightly different set of practices that can be determined and analyzed using CHAT. At its most basic, CHAT argues that writers engage with and are influenced by an infinite number of factors that determine how, why, when, where, and to whom a writer writes. At nine years old, I knew that writing a birthday card to a friend was different than my spelling homework—which was not the same as writing in my diary—but I did not know why. After learning about CHAT, I can now reflect on more specific issues of representation, production, distribution, and ecology that are present in writing—an analysis I didn't have the knowledge to conduct when I first learned to write in different genres. I set out on a writing experiment to find out if CHAT could help me look differently at how I learned to write a food journal as a child and, in turn, give me some ideas on how to use food journaling to fit my needs as an adult.

Weight Watchers™ promotes the use of food journaling for tracking nutrition and weight loss accountability. First, food is broken down into units similar to those used for scientific data. With food journaling, if I wanted to write about French toast, it would have an arbitrary numeric value assigned to its nutritional content.² Entries are generally written in list form with columns or checkboxes. At minimum, the food journal contains information about the

date of the entry, food eaten, and numerical value of the writer's choice. Taken objectively, food journaling is very similar to collecting scientific data. Collected over time, the data proves or disproves hypotheses. Trends in dieting for weight loss include public sharing of part of or the entire food journal. Each week, I presented a small, trifold pamphlet to one of the Weight Watchers™ leaders as a record of my weight loss journey for the week. If I lost very little or gained, I would also be expected to present my food journal for the previous week to the leader so she could review it to see where I went wrong. Therefore, the food journal as a genre is not something I kept for personal data collecting or to record simple memories, like a diary; rather, it served as a site of judgment to determine the failure or success of my weight loss efforts. Based on this socialization, I often falsified my journal by adding additional servings of water or vegetables or by not writing about a piece of birthday cake I ate that week. The act of keeping the journal (as in writing daily and recording every meal) also became a socialized experience. Other members were praised for keeping their journals for an entire week or through a holiday season no matter what was written, though honesty was encouraged to maintain accountability. Weight Watchers™ even gave out small star stickers for encouragement—the equivalent of a writing merit badge.

Later, during my teenage years, I repeated lessons learned from Weight Watchers™ during doctor appointments. Because my initial attempts at

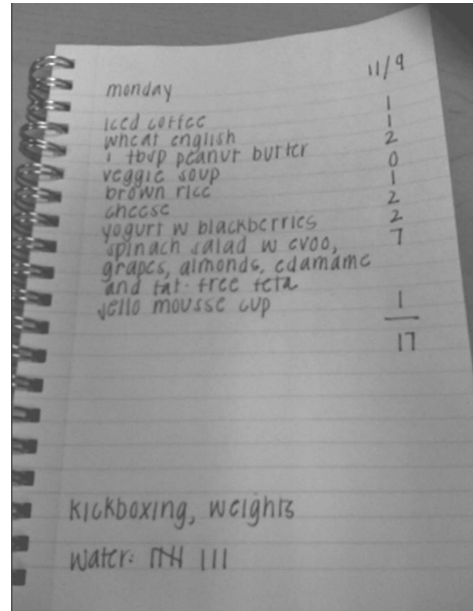


Figure 2. Sample of a traditional food journal, based on Weight Watchers Points™ Program, via <http://healthygirltips.blogspot.com>.

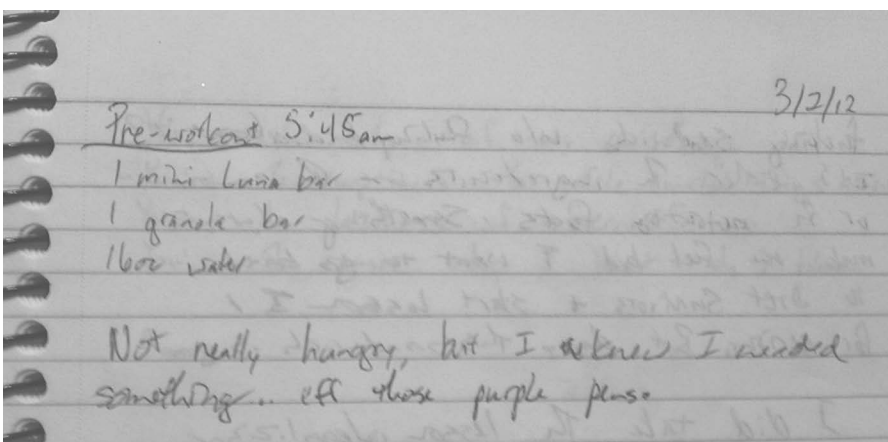


Figure 3. Author's attempt at post-Weight Watchers™ food journaling.

weight loss were unsuccessful, and I was still experiencing bullying at school, my physician again suggested weight loss as the answer. She, too, suggested food journaling as a tool for weight loss and instructed me to keep one for her review at my monthly appointment. Again, I wrote the date of my entry, then a breakdown of breakfast, lunch, and dinner (no snacks allowed). Under each meal category, I would write the food item along with its serving size and calorie content. At the bottom of the category, I would total the calories. I followed my doctor's instructions carefully for the first month. When she reviewed my journal, she noted that pretzels were too high in sodium and carbohydrates (I hadn't been tracking those nutrition categories), and she said I should abstain from eating cookies entirely. The second month and every month thereafter, I falsified my food journal to include only what I believed my doctor wanted. Because I was taking the prescription fen-phen (or fenfluramine/phentermine), an anti-obesity drug treatment, I lost weight no matter what I ate. Keeping the food journal had no effect on my weight loss, nor did it curb the binge eating habit I had developed in response to severe emotional trauma.

In the post-adolescent years that followed, no one person monitored my food journal activities, although I frequently engaged in food journaling for weight loss. All of my attempts were based on the conventions of the genre as they had been described to me and as I had been practicing them for many years. At some point, I began keeping a personal blog. I had seen other bloggers post their food journals on blogs dedicated to weight loss. I felt inspired by the weight loss success stories posted by these bloggers and wondered if public accountability through a blog would finally be the answer to correcting a lifetime of personal weight loss failures. Instead of a blog or pen and paper journal, I used Excel spreadsheets and apps, such as MyFitnessPal™ and SparkPeople™, to track the same kinds of information I had tracked in the past, though I experimented with the data I included in the journal.³ Sometimes I included a daily weigh-in or a progress chart or advanced meal planning. Other times, I simply followed the trends and examples of bloggers I considered successful. Each time I started a new diet, I started a new journal, vowing that I would be successful this time. When the diet failed, I closed the blog to start fresh. Food journaling this way—the way I'd learned and always done—was comfortable. I knew exactly what to write and how to judge the relative success or failure of my production. If I did experience a failure, the blame lay with me and my lazy, undisciplined habits. The first rule of weight loss has always been that if a weight loss plan fails, it's not the plan's fault.⁴ Despite writing in my last blog project about being happy playing roller derby and succeeding in my fitness goals, I still felt like a failure.

Your Food Diary For: ◀ Friday August 12, 2011 ▶ 📅

Breakfast

	Calories	Carbs	Fat	Fiber	Protein	Calcium	
General Mills - Cinnamon Toast Crunch, 0.75 cup	130	25	3	2	1	10	⊖
Milk - Reduced fat, 2% milkfat, 0.5 cup	61	6	2	0	4	14	⊖
Add Food Quick Tools	191	31	5	2	5	24	

Lunch

Amy's - Bean & Cheese Burrito, 8 oz	310	46	9	7	11	10	⊖
Add Food Quick Tools	310	46	9	7	11	10	

Dinner

Mrs. T's Pierogies - Potato & Cheese Mini Pierogies, 1 container (28 pierogies ea.)	560	108	8	4	16	8	⊖
Pork - Cured, bacon, cooked, pan-fried, 1 slice cooked	42	0	3	0	3	0	⊖
Add Food Quick Tools	602	108	11	4	19	8	

Snacks

Albertson's - Traditional Chicken & Wild Rice Soup, 1 container (2 cup (245g) ea.)	240	38	4	6	12	4	⊖
Dole - Diced Peaches In Light Syrup; 4 Pack, 1 container	80	20	0	0	0	0	⊖
Sargento - Light String Cheese, 1 Piece	50	1	3	0	6	15	⊖
Add Food Quick Tools	370	59	7	6	18	19	

Totals	1,473	244	32	19	53	61	
Your Daily Goal	2,460	338	82	28	92	100	
Remaining	987	94	50	9	39	39	
	Calories	Carbs	Fat	Fiber	Protein	Calcium	

Figure 4. Author's digital food journal on MyFitnessPal.com™.

How I Un-Learned to Food Journal

My first radical notion about food journaling started during a running workout. I ran an uninterrupted mile for the first time ever, and I felt pretty great about it. Weight loss no longer seemed to be a requirement for happiness or fitness. As if I were in an infomercial right before the life-changing product reveal, I thought: “there’s got to be a better way!” I set out to learn more about food journaling, weight loss, and if I could keep being happy without either one. Like many researchers in the 21st century, I turned to Google and the Internet to begin my search.

No results found for “food journaling without weight loss”.

Figure 5. Google results, December 2012.

I was surprised to find very few resources about food journaling without a weight loss focus. Even when I specified that I didn’t want weight loss results in my search, I still encountered “how-to” guides that explicitly taught how to keep a food journal for weight loss. While I did not find exactly what I was looking for, I did come across some interesting information about weight loss

and eating disorders. For instance, 81% of ten-year-olds admit to dieting, binge eating, or a fear of getting fat.⁵ Also, 91% of women surveyed on a college campus had attempted to control their weight through dieting, and 22% of those women claimed they dieted “often” or “always.” 95% of all dieters, regardless of age or gender, will regain their lost weight within 5 years.⁶ Given these results, I’m clearly not the only ten-year-old, woman, or college student to learn how to diet. If food journaling is a common tool of weight loss, it stands to reason that many people are learning the genre using the techniques and criteria I described.

I had a good idea of how people learn to food journal based on my experience and reading about similar experiences on other weight loss blogs. The next thing I wanted to learn is if people use food journaling in disordered eating recovery. Disordered eating affects at least five million people in the United States and is used to describe a wide range of irregular eating behaviors but does not fit a specific eating disorder diagnosis. It is also the diagnosis given to me by my therapist. She suggested that I begin including moods or feelings related to the food items in my food journal to uncover emotional eating triggers. She also suggested I read *The Diet Survivor’s Handbook*.⁷ In this book, eating disorder recovery counselors Judith Matz and Ellen Frankel advocate the use of a 1 to 10 scale to indicate fullness, in addition to recording food eaten. Unfortunately, when I tried this method, I quickly found myself back in the same pattern: religiously record food intake for two or three days, stop recording, self-loathe, re-devote, repeat. Back to the drawing board.

How I Learned to Un-Crazy My Food Journal

At this point in my food journaling life, I started feeling desperate. Would I ever recover from disordered eating and have a truly healthy relationship with food? I found the answer in genre subversion—intentionally writing against genre conventions to make a statement. Using a CHAT analysis of the food journal, I identified a few places where I could use the genre itself to disrupt or subvert the original intent of a food journal. Given my unsuccessful past attempts to work within the genre to find a new way, I knew I had to completely shatter my ideas of what a food journal is supposed to do. So I started with what I “know” about a food journal:

- Not a narrative—usually contains lists, checkboxes, columns, or rows.
- Food items are listed in a descriptive, basic way (examples: “apple” or “McDonald’s chicken nuggets”).

- Numerical data includes nutrition information (calories, at minimum) with totals as well as date and/or time.
- Optional attributes include exercise completed and/or emotions before or after consumption.
- Can be electronic or pen/paper.
- Consistency is key—you must write multiple times per day every day.
- “Good” food journals lead to weight loss and “bad” food journals lead to weight gain.

Subversion has always been attractive to me as a tool of resistance and social change: shortly before embarking on this experiment, I had begun to read more about the fat activism movement through blogs and websites, which challenges popular ideas of health and fitness in relation to intentional weight loss. But even though information about subverting stigma through fashion, sexuality, and visibility is plentiful, I could not find any information about rebellion through personal writing. I attribute this, in part, to ideas in fat activism that what or how much someone eats is strictly private information; therefore, no discussion on conventional food journaling would be needed. However, I found an article by Lesley Kinzel helpful when identifying areas of subversion.⁸ Kinzel acknowledges that some people would like to keep a food journal for reasons other than dieting, and suggests that keeping a food journal that is “non crazymaking” can be a helpful goal for those recovering from disordered eating. My favorite advice centers on developing a poetic relationship with food journaling as a way to break free from the shame and self-recrimination of food journaling for dieting.

I chose two specific ways of subverting the food journal genre. First, I would write poetry because I am not a poet, and writing poetry is not very comfortable for me. I would be unable to fall back into writing patterns of the past because my knowledge of how to write poetry is so limited. Second, I would start a blog for this poetic food journal. It may seem incongruous to my goal of subversion because I admit to having kept food journal blogs in the past, but the subversion comes from intent. Online food journals are intended for accountability and judgment of food choices. I challenged myself to write poems about “bad” or “unhealthy” foods because I would normally expect readers to judge this choice, but it was important to me to experiment with an authenticity about food and writing that had been missing from my literate life for a very long time.

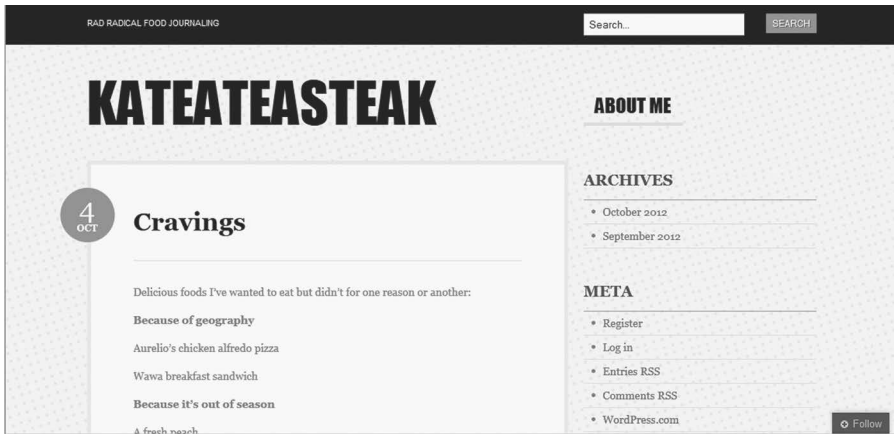


Figure 6. kateateasteak.wordpress.com.

I decided to name my blog “kateateasteak” because I can’t resist delicious word play and also for the upfront assertion that I eat steak. As much as food is the primary focus of food journaling, not all foods are considered equal, so I embraced steak as a symbol for intentional indulgence. I wrote poetry in several styles—from English sonnet to haiku—and on several food topics—from mac n’ cheese to coffee. At first, I tried to write a poem for every meal, which turned out to be a mistake because daily writing is an arbitrary mark of a “good” traditional food journaling and, thus, was not necessarily a requirement for success in my genre subversion venture. So eventually I only wrote when the mood struck me. That turned out to be less often than I expected. I wrote thirteen entries in September 2012 and one in October 2012.

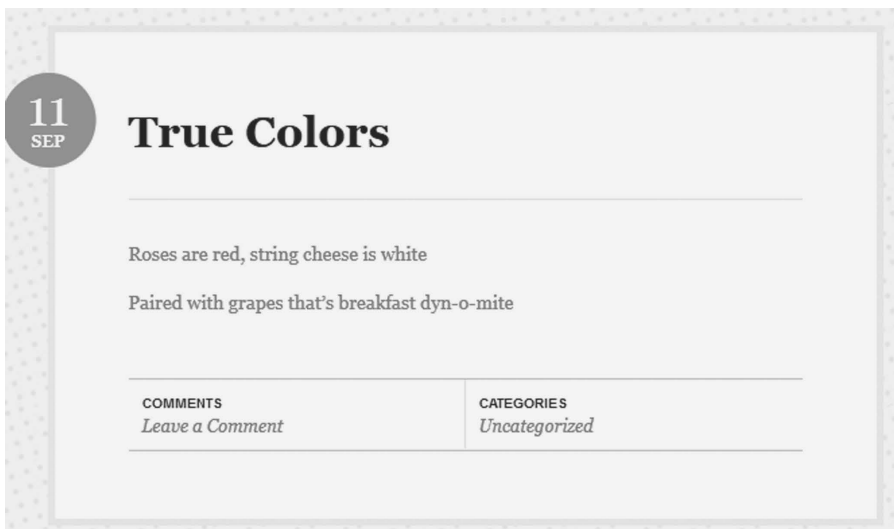


Figure 7. Sample poem from kateateasteak.wordpress.com.

My process of writing also changed. My first poems were based on what I actually ate. Later the poems reflected something amusing or unusual I found about the food—if only to play with rhymes. For the first time in a long time, writing about food reflected my personality. I did not feel shame when I wrote about fruit snacks, nor did I feel shame when I didn't write. No matter the content or the frequency of the posts, writing a poetic food journal functioned only in the ways I determined necessary.



Figure 8. Sample poem from katecateasteak.wordpress.com.

Ultimately, I gave up the poetic food journal project because I had learned what I needed to from it. I learned that food journaling does not have to be caught up in weight loss or psychological disorders; instead, understanding the genre can help the writer customize the journal to his or her nutritional or emotional needs rather than conforming to a rigid set of diet rules. Now, freed from the constraints of the genre, success in food journaling no longer needs to be about “doing it right.” I do continue to write food journals, but the activity is no longer tied to weight loss, recrimination, or judgment.

I do believe that food journaling with open-ended genre conventions can be a useful tool in a number of practical applications. Allergy testing and certain medical conditions rely on tracking food intake to determine symptom patterns. Athletes also use food journaling to track how their choices affect performance. An approach that combines the poetic food journal with the traditional one helps me with disordered eating recovery and nutritional data collection—the best of both worlds. I believe my subversion was successful not because every choice I made was a good one, but because through trial and error I made up a flexible genre that worked for me without the burden of considering what others told me were the conventions for a good food journal.

The End?

Excising one's personal demons on the Internet is uncomfortable work at times, but I invite you to kateateasteak.wordpress.com to see all fifteen poetry entries. As a bonus, I've included some additional entries on my history with trauma and disordered eating that did not make the final cut of this article but that I hope will be useful to anyone else struggling with similar issues. I know you're out there, and now you know I'm out there, too. May you always have French toast if you want it and forever question the "right" way to write.

Endnotes

1. WEIGHT WATCHERS is the trade name and the registered trademark and service mark of Weight Watchers International.
2. In the Weight Watchers™ plan, the value comes in the form of Points™ or relative units based on a patented and trademarked algorithm, but the more common unit for weight loss is the calorie. Depending on nutritional need or focus of the specific weight loss program, calculated units may also include fat or fiber grams, sodium milligrams, or grams of cholesterol.
3. MyFitnessPal.com and the MyFitnessPal logo (collectively, the "MyFitnessPal Marks") are trademarks or registered trademarks of MyFitnessPal, LLC (<http://www.myfitnesspal.com>). SPARKPEOPLE is a registered trademark of SparkPeople, Inc. (<http://www.sparkpeople.com>).
4. Similar to the logic of "guns don't kill people, people kill people."
5. Sacker, Ira M., and Marc A. Zimmer. *Dying to be Thin: Understanding and Defeating Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia—A Practical, Lifesaving Guide*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1987.
6. National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, Inc. (ANAD). "Eating Disorder Statistics." N.d. 16 Feb. 2013. <http://www.anad.org/get-information/about-eating-disorders/eating-disorders-statistics/>.
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8. Kinzel, Lesley. "How To: Keep a Non-Crazymaking Food Journal." XOJane.com. 24 Jul. 2012. <http://www.xojane.com/healthy/how-keep-non-crazymaking-food-journal>.



Kate Browne is a PhD student specializing in American women's life writing because her mother said she'd be a writer someday even though she played a nurse in the preschool graduation pageant. She's also the type of person who would follow the signs to "See the Egress" just to be sure she didn't miss anything.

Zombie Apocalypse: A Genre Studies Guide to Survival

Francesco Levato

After being confronted with both the possibility of an impending zombie apocalypse and the realization of his lack of knowledge of zombie culture, Levato turns to genre theory in an attempt to unpack the zombie, as a genre, with the hope of understanding the complexities of this cultural object in order to survive the coming of the zombie hordes.

I'm not a fan of zombies. I never watch zombie movies. I don't watch zombie TV shows. I've never read *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. From what I can tell, zombies are rude, always trying to eat your brains or tear out your entrails without so much as buying you a drink first. They smell, being dead and all, and I imagine they're fairly awkward at social gatherings (see above commentary on smell and rudeness). Aside from my opinions on their lack of social skills and poor hygiene, I knew little to nothing about them and was quite content in that ignorance. I mean, really, what more does one need to know? It's not like I have zombie neighbors. My dog doesn't come bounding in from the backyard with Bob's rotting foot dangling from his mouth—Bob being my zombie neighbor;



Figure 1. Aaargh! the zombie.¹

that is, if I had a zombie neighbor, he would probably be named Bob because that would be my luck: living next to Bob the zombie, not Gurlck! the zombie or Aaargh! the zombie or any other name you might imagine gurgling out of a jawless zombie neck. My neighbor would be Bob, and he would have a jaw, and he would chatter incessantly about things like petroleum free lip balm (because unfortunately, unlike other zombies, he would have lips, and petroleum-based products make chapping worse, and did you know that some manufacturers put ground glass in their lip balms so your lips never heal, and, and . . .). So, the extent of what I would need to know about him or other zombies like him would be how to shut him, or them, the fuck up. Right? Not exactly.



Figure 2. Original CDC Facebook post.²

My somewhat blissful state of ignorance was completely blown apart when one of my friends, we'll call him "Not Bob," posted on Facebook that "the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warns public to prepare for a zombie apocalypse."³ Great. Prepare? Now what? I really can't deal with a real-life, or real-dead, Bob right now: "chatter chatter, yap yap . . . my foot . . . your dog . . . my lips are dry, maybe I should put on more lip balm, do you think I should, or maybe I should just switch brands, this one isn't really doing it for me . . ." Ok, breathe. How hard can it be? The CDC has to have a guide on their website. After all, they issued the warning; all I should need to do is follow their instructions. The post on their blog opens with:

There are all kinds of emergencies out there that we can prepare for. Take a zombie apocalypse for example. That's right, I said z-o-m-b-i-e a-p-o-c-a-l-y-p-s-e. You may laugh now, but when it happens you'll be happy you read this, and hey, maybe you'll even learn a thing or two about how to prepare for a real emergency.⁴

I'm sorry, laughing? More like hyperventilating. But it'll be ok, right? They've laid everything out, a one-stop zombie apocalypse survival shop—just one click from Facebook, right to the CDC website, didn't even have to use Google. So what do we have, hmm . . . caused by everything from infectious diseases to radiation to just being plain evil and/or having a real bad attitude . . . Ok, here we go: “. . . a zombie apocalypse could happen. In such a scenario zombies would take over entire countries, roaming city streets eating anything living that got in their way.”⁵ Well yeah, isn't that why you scared the hell out of me with: “That's right, I said z-o-m-b-i-e a-p-o-c-a-l-y-p-s-e”? It's bad enough—the whole apocalypse thing—but dragging the word out like that, “a-p-o-c-a-l-y-p-s-e,” who writes like that anyway? It's like finding a long lost journal of some ill-fated mission where the poor bastard made to keep a journal in the first place was forced to write, “I'm the last of the crew, the beast is upon me, I can feel his breath on . . . aaaaaarrrrrrggggghhhh! [sic],” and that is so not helpful. I can almost hear Bob rattling the back door—I'm the last of my . . . Ok, get it together. There's gotta be a list or something. I mean it is a government website, and aren't government employees all “listy,” all white-collared, and by-the-book, and everything looks to be in order here, sir, and—ok, ok, here's the CDC's official “emergency kit”⁶:

- **Water** (1 gallon per person per day)
- **Food** (stock up on non-perishable items that you eat regularly)
- **Medications** (this includes prescription and non-prescription meds)
- **Tools and Supplies** (utility knife, duct tape, battery powered radio, etc.)
- **Sanitation and Hygiene** (household bleach, soap, towels, etc.)
- **Clothing and Bedding** (a change of clothes for each family member and blankets)
- **Important documents** (copies of your driver's license, passport, and birth certificate to name a few)
- **First Aid supplies** (although you're a goner if a zombie bites you, you can use these supplies to treat basic cuts and lacerations that you might get during a tornado or hurricane)



Figure 3. CDC emergency kit.⁷

Wait, that's it—water, medications, documents?! What the hell am I gonna do when Bob bursts through the back door looking for his foot?

Chuck a water bottle at him, show him my ID so he knows just who he's eating, whip out my bottle of prescription tranquilizers and try to stall him? "Um, hi, can you read the dosage for me, the print's so small, I know, don't you hate that? Yeah, I just need to like—know how much to take—to like—make the fucking nightmare that's you go away." I can just see Bob taking the bottle and shoving it down his rotting zombie throat right before burying his few remaining teeth into my forehead. And I bet it wouldn't even faze him, enough tranqs to drop a horse . . . or would it? Are zombies even affected by meds? Where's that information on the website? It's all, "stock up on water, pick a place to regroup, plan your evacuation route, blah, blah, blah." Not one mention of what to do if, before you had a chance to plan for said "z-o-m-b-i-e a-p-o-c-a-l-y-p-s-e," Bob was able to get his rather unpleasant mouth wrapped firmly around a good portion of your head, not one! I need some real information, like now. I need to know what the hell I'm dealing with here. Looks like I'll have to use Google after all.

Ok, here we go, Google main page, search field, two buttons: "Google Search" and "I'm Feeling Lucky." Really, "I'm Feeling Lucky"? I'm trying to figure out how to survive a fucking zombie apocalypse, so no, I'm not feeling particularly lucky. Fine, "Google Search" button it is.

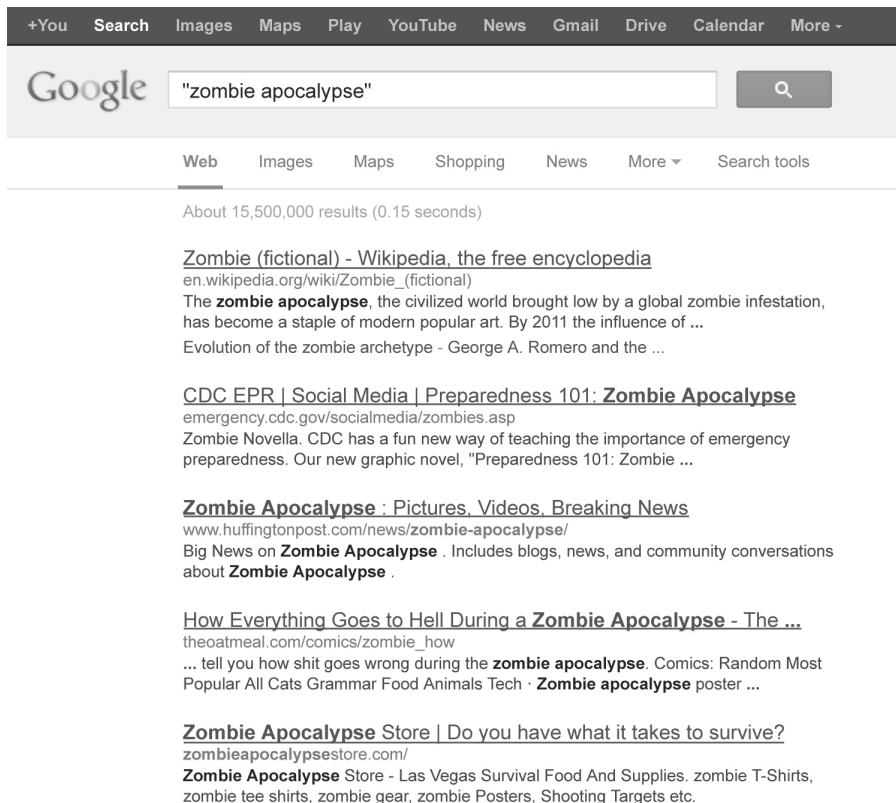


Figure 4. Screenshot of Google search for "zombie apocalypse."⁸

15,500,000 results, crap. “Zombie (fictional) - Wikipedia,”⁹ fictional—um, not really, haven’t you heard? “How Everything Goes to Hell During a Zombie Apocalypse,”¹⁰ no shit. “Zombie Apocalypse Store | Do you have what it takes to survive?”¹¹ No! And I can’t get to Las Vegas for your four-hour introductory “Urban Zombie Knife Defense” seminar either. I am so screwed. I need to think. Ok, what’s the worst-case scenario? No, that’s no good. I know that answer already—Bob bites me, I turn all zombie, we spend the rest of eternity together trading lip balm secrets (God that sounds horrible). I need to know how to deal with this shit, like for real. And, judging by the apocalyptic volume of web pages devoted to everything from surviving zombies to merchandizing them, I don’t have the time to grow a beard, find a corduroy jacket with elbow patches, and ponder the de Certeau’ean implications of strategies versus tactics in the kicking of zombie ass. I need to get my non-zombie ass in gear. I need a battle plan, and fast. I’ll also need a strategic command center from which to plot the eradication of the zombie hordes: a globally networked bunker with the highest-tech research tools available and a stockpile of provisions. Ok, I have a partially finished basement—bunker, check. Wireless internet—global network, check. I have Netflix, a Kindle eBook reader, an iPhone, and Google ready to roll—high-tech research tools, check. And I have enough bottled water and Pop-Tarts to last me until the first wave of zombie infection passes, or until I run out of Pop-Tarts, which should actually be about a day because I only have one box left (chocolate, in case you’re wondering)—provisions stockpile, check. All right, time to outline my battle plan, find answers to some essential questions:

- What is a zombie anyway?
- How do I survive the coming apocalypse?
- And, “Oh crap, it’s here, that didn’t work, how the fuck do I kill ’em?”

What is a Zombie Anyway?

Do I really care exactly what a zombie is? I just want to be able to detect and eradicate! A quick online search for zombie detection finds: “The undead surround us. Infection rates are growing exponentially. How can you be sure who’s a zombie before they try to bite?”¹² The answer: the Zombie Survival



Figure 5. Zombie Survival Guide Scanner image of me as a zombie.¹⁵

Guide Scanner app for iPhone.¹³ Sweet. Research complete: just have my iPhone tell me who's a zombie, then stay the hell away from them. Ok, simple interface, live photo and one big scan button. Scan myself to see how it works: "Zombie Survival Guide Scanner Diagnosis: 16% Infected. Initial signs of infection present. Consult a medical professional immediately and present this diagnosis image."¹⁴ How the hell am I already infected? And what's with my face?! I really need to exfoliate. And my lips . . . crap, I could use some lip balm. Did I look like this when I woke up? This can't be right. Fine. (Emotive sigh goes here.) Back to research.

The scanner app came from Max Brooks' website, author of *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead*.¹⁶ Maybe I can get the eBook and see if it doesn't suck as much as the app. Ok, here's something, a definition in Brooks' book:

ZOM-BIE: n. also ZOM-BIES pl. 1. An animated corpse that feeds on living human flesh. 2. A voodoo spell that raises the dead. 3. A Voodoo snake god. 4. One who moves or acts in a daze 'like a zombie.' [a word of West African origin]¹⁷

Brooks further states, "We must begin by separating fact from fiction. The walking dead are neither a work of 'black magic' nor any other supernatural force. Their origin stems from a virus known as Solanum."¹⁸ What the hell is "Solanum"? Ok, back to Google. First result, from Wikipedia, "Solanum, the nightshades, horehound and relatives, are a large and diverse genus of annual and perennial plants."¹⁹ That can't be it. Second result, again from Wikipedia, a link to the entry on Brooks' *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead*. There's got to be more out there than this. Maybe search Netflix. There's a shitload of zombie films on Netflix. All right, here we go, hope my Pop-Tarts last. According to the film *Night of the Living Dead*, zombies are born of "radioactive contamination from a space probe returning from Venus that exploded in the Earth's atmosphere."²⁰ In *The Evil Dead*, the "Deadites" are undead created by the Necronomicon, an ancient book written by the "Mad Arab" Abdul Alhazred from the horror stories of H. P. Lovecraft.²¹ And in *Zombieland*, a mutated strain of mad cow disease, delivered by way of a contaminated burger, is the culprit.²² Ok, so zombie origins are all over the place, but at least they, zombies, all seem to be some form of "animated corpse that feeds on living human flesh."²³ Ok, on to the next question.

How Do I Survive the Coming Apocalypse?

A Google search of "surviving zombie apocalypse" yields advice from AliceAttack, a registered user of the Zombie Survival and Defense Wiki.²⁴

She has a plan that includes “bugging in,” which involves staying in the house from the first few days to the first month of the zombie outbreak and requires fencing, razor wire, boards, metal plates, and a stack of red bricks²⁵—not quite sure what the bricks are for but they could prove useful should Bob come poking around all, “Hi neighbor,” and, “Ooh, are you planning a gazebo,” and, “Oh my, razor wire, you cheeky monkey!” But on Netflix I discover that Columbus, from the movie *Zombieland*, instead stayed mobile and adhered to his list of rules for surviving in a zombie-infested world, including: “Cardio” and “Limbering up” (as he was always running his ass off); “Beware of bathrooms” (solid advice, even without the threat of zombie hordes); “Avoid strip clubs”; “Don’t be a hero”; and “Get a kick-ass partner” (seems sensible) as well as a “Cast iron skillet” and “Bowling ball” (I’m still working out the implications of these).²⁶ Brooks suggests that “[h]ooking on scuba gear and blindly diving into zombie-infested water is a wonderful way to mix the two childhood terrors of being eaten and drowning.”²⁷ Hmm, I hadn’t thought of that. No time to piss about though, last question needs answering.

Oh Crap, It’s Here, That Didn’t Work, How the Fuck Do I Kill ‘Em?



Figure 6. Zombie horde.²⁸

You might think, machine-gun! Go all Scarface on ‘em: “You wanna fuck with me? Okay. You wanna play rough? Okay. Say hello to my little friend!”²⁹ Or maybe, a flamethrower! Whoo hoo, damn! While these are

flashy and rather impressive options, you would be wrong. Guns are loud. They can attract any zombie horde within a mile radius. And flamethrowers are, well, bulky—and they run out of fuel. You definitely don't want an empty flamethrower slowing you down after Scarface over there just let every zombie in earshot know where their next meal was. Characters in the *The Walking Dead*, thanks Netflix, recommend silent weapons: everything from a baseball bat to a screwdriver to a Samurai sword.³⁰ In the interactive eBook for iPhone version of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (yes, I know, I know . . .), “Mr. Bennet guides his daughters in martial arts and weapons training, molding them into a fearsome zombie-fighting army,” and the female characters weigh the pros and cons of carrying a musket as it provides safety but is considered “unladylike.”³¹ And it would appear that Abraham Lincoln favored a scythe, not some little hand-held one either; we're talking the big honkin' Grim Reaper kind, at least according to the film *Abraham Lincoln vs. Zombies*.³² Despite the range of preferred weapons, one thing seems certain: whether you shoot them with a handgun, machine-gun, compound-bow, or crossbow; bludgeon them with a baseball bat, crowbar, or sledgehammer; run over them with a bulldozer, pick-up truck, or electric scooter; poke them through the eye socket with a screwdriver, arrow, pocket knife, or knitting needle; decapitate or otherwise dismember them with a Samurai sword, chainsaw, machete, wood-chopping axe, or big honkin' Abe Lincoln scythe, zombie heads must be destroyed. Otherwise they'll keep hobbling, crawling, or slithering after you, dragging whatever sloppy, gooey, dripping mess remains of them, for fucking ever, and . . . Oh crap. Something rattling. The back door . . .

Oh, uh, hi, Bob. Good, good, how are you? No, no I haven't seen it. Did you check the back yard? Maybe dig around a little? Me? Ha, no, no, haven't been digging myself, no. This, on my shirt? No, not dirt, um, just um, Pop-Tart crumbs. Whatcha been up to? Oh, that's nice, a gazebo huh? Me? Um, just hanging out online, doing some research, you know . . . You'd be amazed at what people are doing these days with razor wire and red bricks.

Please note: No zombies were harmed in the writing of this article. All characters appearing in this article are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or undead, is purely coincidental. The author does not advocate violence or discrimination against any members of the undead based on expiration date; odor or discoloration; remaining number, functionality, or awkward angle of limbs; or possession, or lack, of jaw (though the latter does make them, thankfully, much less chatty).

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Francesco Levato is a poet, translator, and filmmaker. Recent books include *Endless*, *Beautiful*, *Exact*; *Elegy for Dead Languages*; *War Rug*; and *Creasuring* (as translator). His poetry films have been performed with various composers, including Philip Glass. He founded the Chicago School of Poetics, holds an MFA in Poetry, and is working on his PhD in English Studies. www.francescolevato.com.

Pricked: Extreme Embroidery, or the Sampler's Extraordinary Journey across Cultures

Adriana Gradea

American visual artist Andrea Dezső appropriated the genre of the Transylvanian sampler, modified it, and recontextualized it to allow for its visibility in the high-culture milieu of the North American art world. Dezső's samplers take age-old beliefs and superstitions from the domestic sphere of rural Eastern Europe into the public space and the digital techno-sphere. Through her transformation of the sampler genre, Dezső emphasizes the genre's hybridity; by complicating fonts, chromatic palettes, and messages of a woman's place in the private sphere, the artist is able to assert the woman's power to question the world's belief systems that govern her everyday actions. Dezső, a woman herself, offers the genre of the sampler a trajectory and a journey through geographical and social spaces.

A Traditional Genre

In the region of Transylvania, Romania, the embroidered sampler is a low-culture type of artifact used as a kitchen wall-art decoration by most ethnic groups (Romanian, Hungarian, German, Slovak, Serbian, etc.). But this art form can also be found elsewhere in Romania, and probably all over the world, for that matter, in various expressions. The traditional Transylvanian artifact uses red or blue color thread on a white background. Visually, the sampler combines image and text, and its message pertains mostly to family and domestic life. A contemporary example of the embroidery sampler is shown in Figure 1, below, featuring birds and flowers in red thread and the following text in Romanian cursive writing: "The Blessing of the Home: Where there's faith, there's love, where there's love, there's peace, where there's peace, there's blessing" (my translation).

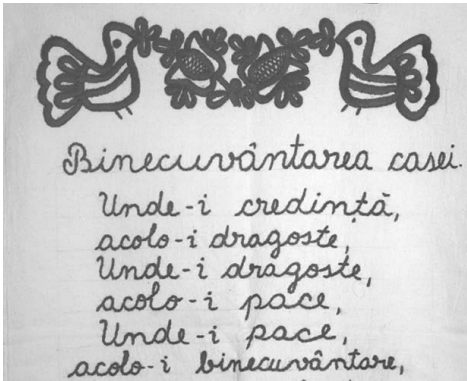


Figure 1. Contemporary Transylvanian sampler (in Romanian).¹

The traditional sampler genre addresses the small circle of family and friends that happen to visit the home, or what some call the “domestic sphere.” These samplers know their place as an age-old medium; their ambition is not to cross into high culture or to offer social critique, despite the texts’ attempts to appear as wise, philosophical catch-phrases. When the traditional Transylvanian sampler talks to these familiar visitors, the message it sends is one of agreement and positivity. Referring to the home and family, it reinforces established gender roles expected

by traditional society and contributes to the domestic harmony of the house in which the woman knows her expected role. The traditional genre’s audience is not one to be challenged with feminist words meant to disturb the male-female relationship. The sampler acts as a glue for these relationships while fulfilling its role of an unassuming aesthetic decoration for the home. In all these aspects, the sampler is designed to reinforce the societal bond between community members.

An Artist’s Remix

Andrea Dezső is a Transylvania-born American visual artist I knew from when we both attended the Visual Arts High School in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. She went to study visual arts in Budapest, Hungary, after graduating from high school, and like me, followed her destiny to America in the late 1990s. After bumping into each other on the street in New York one fall evening in 1997, I learned that she had become an accomplished visual artist, working as an art professor in New York, lecturing in the U.S. and abroad, and holding art shows all over the world.

After our chance encounter, I checked out Dezső’s website² and found out about a collection of embroideries that she had created. The collection of 48 artifacts was exhibited in the “Pricked: Extreme Embroidery” art show at the New York Museum of Arts and Design in 2007-2008. Several of the pieces from the exhibit are featured on her website, including some animated embroidery work. Prestigious publications like *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Village Voice*, and *The New York Times* included articles about the exhibition. For instance, *The New York Times* review article “Needling

More Than the Feminist Consciousness”³ written by Karen Rosenberg and published on December 28, 2007 in the Arts, says the following of Dezsó:

Some of the most interesting works reinvigorate the tradition of the sampler, a piece of embroidery that offers a religious or moral saying. . . . The Romanian artist Andrea Dezsó has embroidered 48 cotton squares with bits of Transylvanian folk wisdom passed down from her mother. One square suggests, “You can get hepatitis from a handshake,” while another claims, “Men will like me more if I pretend to be less smart.” Each warning or cautionary tale is accompanied by a small, equally humorous illustration.⁴

Dezsó is the only artist in the exhibition who referenced the traditional sampler genre I discussed above.

When I found these references on Dezsó’s website and the links to various articles commenting on her work, I was intrigued. I have to admit that, at the time, I knew little about the traditional sampler genre for several reasons: first, because the genre belongs to the countryside subculture, and I’d been born and raised in the city, and secondly, because European education still shows more interest in “high culture” than “low” or pop culture, even more so than in places such as the United States. In many parts of the world, including Romania, the city and the village differ radically in their cultures, the village being more traditional than the modernist city. The sampler genre was nowhere near my interests while I lived in Romania, but when I found Dezsó’s exquisite interpretations of them on her website, I realized that these artifacts were way more than needlework.

Having studied art myself, I’d always been aware of how artists often take existing genres and adapt them to new forms, looking for new ways to address issues of the day or cultural and philosophical questions. In a similar way, Dezsó takes the age-old sampler genre and transforms it according to her artistic vision. The final result, carrying her artistic fingerprint, is the perfect example of how a genre can be repurposed and resituated to speak to a different audience in new contexts.

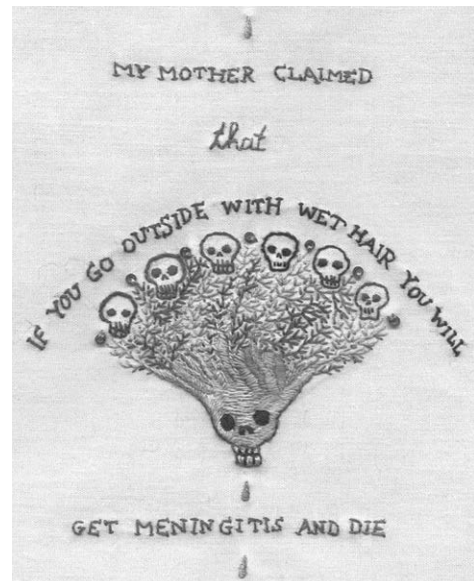


Figure 2. An embroidery about obsolete medical knowledge.⁵

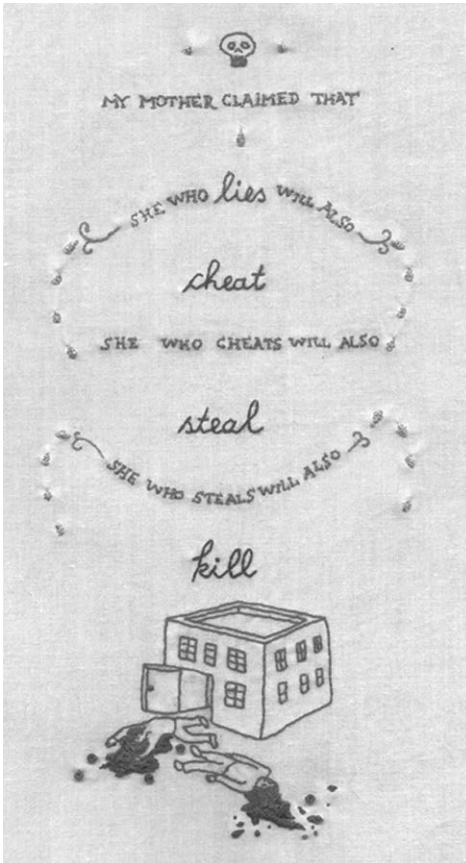


Figure 3. An embroidery about an obsolete vision on the justice system.⁶

Dezső appropriates this genre of the sampler by modifying it, and her artistic interpretation of the sampler is meant to resituate it in a new context. Some of her changes at the level of the form consist in aesthetic changes, such as dropping the border, the monochromatic use of red or blue, and the exclusive use of cursive writing. She also adds more colors, capital letters, and a more militant, daring design, as can be seen in Figures 2, 3, and 4. In addition to aesthetic modifications, Dezső also changes the textual component in a more salient way. All of her embroideries have at the top the phrase “My mother claimed that,” followed by a specific image and text combination. By taking the aesthetic form and the semantic content of the original artifact to new realms of interpretation, she manages to resituate the artifact into the new context of the “high art” of New York, where the art exhibition took place. Moreover, since she has pictures of the artifacts on her personal website, this artwork exists in the digital sphere, therefore addressing a digital audience in addition to the museum-going crowd.

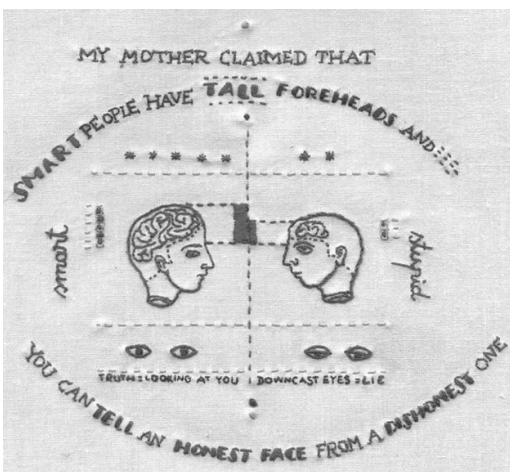


Figure 4. An embroidery about phrenology⁷, which is “the study of the conformation of the skull based on the belief that it is indicative of mental faculties and character [. . .] Though popular well into the 20th century, phrenology has been wholly discredited.”⁸

Of course, these messages disturbed me at first; was Dezső saying that our little culture in Transylvania was too traditional, weird, backward, outdated, superstitious, or stupid? Was this a way to criticize that particular culture, cultural artifact, or society? Were these artifacts engaging in any serious discussion at all, or was this supposed to be seen as a mere whimsical exercise? Was my friend saying that a mother could actually say all those things? By the way, was she talking about her actual mother? At this first encounter, when visiting Dezső’s website, I was so shocked that I thought

I would close down the browser and just forget about it. But, of course, a few days later, I couldn't help but take another look.

Looking closer and sifting through her artwork to better understand what exactly it was saying, I discovered that, at a more profound level, while funny and slightly absurd, these messages essentially read as a critique of humanity's organization of knowledge and belief systems. Societies, indeed humanity in general, organize knowledge and belief systems in a certain relative way that changes with time and from generation to generation. For example, medieval medical practices were considered obsolete by the 19th century in the same way that Victorian Puritanism is seen differently in the 21st century. Science, medicine, religion, philosophy, and society organization change with time, and, thus, so does our understanding and organization of knowledge. Our knowledge of the world changes with time in a vertical way: the mother belongs to an older generation, as do historical periods, and so knowledge changes vertically, with time. Likewise, knowledge also changes spatially, with one's movement around the world: what holds true today for a culture in one part of the world may be considered entirely wrong in another. This replicates exactly Dezsó's movement from the culture of Transylvania to that of the United States—a horizontal move through geographical space. In a different interpretation, the mother is the representative of the older generation, entrusted with the education of the young and with the transmittal of values about life and society to the next generation. The mother-daughter dialog is a conversation between two women, in which the mother teaches lessons, hence the collection's title: "Lessons from My Mother."

Reading again the textual messages on Dezsó's embroidered artifacts through the lens of belief and knowledge modification through time or geographical space, we can see how "Mother's" interpretations of the world are obsolete. For instance, "My Mother claimed that our destinies are written in our palms"⁹ reminds us that various cultures might have believed this literally at some point in history, or that certain subcultures may still believe it today. Also consider this example: "My Mother claimed that the house is cold in winter because of a lack of oxygen inside. Open the windows—the fresh oxygen will warm up the house fast."¹⁰ This saying may be interpreted as a way to explain the world when chemistry and physics are not fully understood by a particular subculture, or a worldview at a time in history when scientific discoveries are not advanced enough for humanity to understand them. Similarly, "My Mother claimed that she who lies will also cheat, she who cheats will also steal, she who steals will also kill"¹¹ speaks to the way humanity may have once organized the justice system, or to the way certain cultures do it today. And lastly, "My Mother claimed that if you go outside with wet hair you will get meningitis and die"¹² reads as a superstition or misinterpretation

of the world, or even as an obsolete view of medical issues. Most of these statements also function as a degree of separation from conventional wisdom.

As you can see from the examples above, Andrea Dezső does not discard the original genre's naive text in her recreation of the artifact. She starts with a seemingly powerless genre, which had small circulation, being restricted to one's circle of family and friends, but when she reorients it, the modified genre is even more powerful by virtue of its transformation. When she starts from original messages like, "I'm a good cook and a great homemaker" in order to arrive at "She who lies will also cheat, she who cheats will also steal, she who steals will also kill,"¹³ or, "My Mother claimed that men will like me more if I pretend to be less smart,"¹⁴ the subject matter has gained sophistication and strength. The new text talks about humanity and its values or about the way we understand justice or gender roles in society. In particular, the text critiques a patriarchal culture in which gender roles are prescribed. Generally, the textual message becomes deeper and more intricate, therefore speaking to a different audience.

Changes in Trajectory and Audience

To explore these changes in audience, let us consider the embroidery in Figure 5, which reads, "My Mother claimed that you don't know what kind of man you married until after you married him and by then it's too late."¹⁵ Not only is this text powerful because it talks about the condition of women living in a society in which it may be "too late" if she is in a bad marriage, but it is also strong because it contrasts cynicism and disillusionment with the idyllic graphic representation. The three-tier cake is set in predominantly

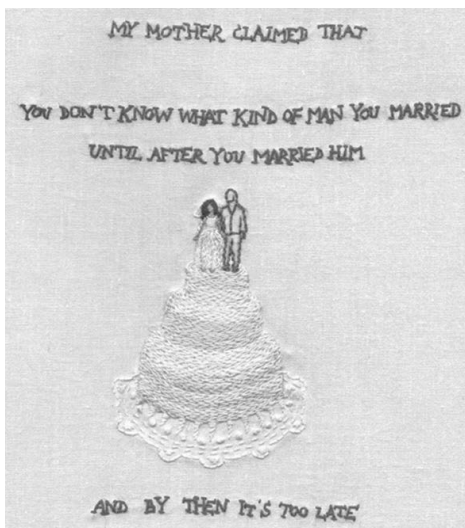


Figure 5. An embroidery about marriage.¹⁷

white and some pastel colors, denoting serenity, and if one were to ignore the text, the image by itself would contain no controversy or negative connotation. Its denotation (i.e., face-value meaning), therefore, is in opposition to its connotation (i.e., social, historical, and cultural meaning) of the hybridized text/image.¹⁶ Thus, the two extreme representations emphasize each other by means of a text divorced from the image it accompanies. When Dezső takes the wall-art decorative artifact and applies her own artistic fingerprint, she extracts it from its original context, brings it into New York's artistic milieu, and finds new audiences for it. The artifacts created in this style and

exhibited in the “Pricked: Extreme Embroidery” art show are reinvented folklore samplers whose messages have by now abandoned their domestic connotations and are ready to take on the world by challenging already established notions.

So, what happens to this new genre when it gets such exposure? The artist knows that the message has to be resituated from being simple, humble, and speaking to the womanly skills of the matriarch; addressing the American audience, particularly the high-art society of New York, the artistic message has to leave behind the simple, immediate parochial circle in order to expand and incorporate more abstract and cultural concepts. So first, it ceases to speak to just a small group of people made up of family and friends; the audience enlarges to incorporate the viewers of the exhibition in New York: young, aspiring, or established artists, students in various disciplines, and potentially people of all ages and professions who may take an interest in art and culture in general. Furthermore, when the audience changes, the trajectory of the genre changes. Once uprooted from its original context of a harmonious community where it found a well-defined place, the artifact changes in voice and attitude. Its message does not align along lines of harmony and agreement, but instead challenges and provokes its viewers, addressing deeper cultural values and speaking in a “new language.”

In March 2008, Dezső said in a National Public Radio interview¹⁸ that she sees her artistic sampler creations as “simply good stories.” I think the artwork she creates poses serious philosophical questions and challenges our understanding of the world. I also think that the transformation of the sampler genre interestingly replicates the artist’s journey from her original culture to that of the United States. In this repurposing of the original genre, the artist prepares it for different audiences, and most remarkably, sends it on a trajectory that leaves behind the domestic sphere. The newly remixed genre is ready to occupy a place in the public sphere. And it all started with the genre of a humble, unassuming cultural artifact that has undertaken an extraordinary journey in being transformed to address the world.

I would like to thank Andrea Dezső for providing me with high resolution files for all of the images of her embroideries in this article.

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Adriana Gradea was born in the region of Transylvania in Romania. Having lived, however, in Romania, Italy, and in American cities like New York, Seattle, and Philadelphia, she considers herself a citizen of the world, the Milky Way Galaxy, and well, the Universe.

Writing Pains: Exploring the Writing Activity of a “Slacker”

Cayla Eagon

Eagon utilizes her personal struggle writing a film analysis to illustrate the ups and downs of her writing process and her negative feelings towards the act. By describing the literate activities she practices and the frustration she encounters as a result, Eagon debunks the rather romanticized idea that writing is inspired and instead reveals it to be a slow and stressful experience. She also admits that the writing experience is different for every writer and every genre. Consequently, she realizes in the end that though the process may never be easy, she can begin to approach writing with less anxiety by trying out various writing habits to find what suits her individual needs best.

I tried to avoid this! I tried to start early, be proactive. How did I wind up in this situation once again? Writing at the last minute is so stressful, and I feel like I've been working on this paper all weekend long—why is it still not finished?! I'm so tired . . . I just want to go to bed. My writing is probably suffering as a result of my sleep deprivation. Not to mention the stress. Maybe I could lie down for a 20-minute nap? No, I should probably just make another pot of coffee.

This situation is one of the reasons why I hate writing papers. For me, they inevitably end up in long, stressful nights consisting of too much caffeine and “napping” with my head atop my desk, trying to find an angle at which my face is not painfully balanced on my nose or sharp cheekbones. These all-nighters wind up occurring frequently before my deadlines because I’m a procrastinator—although some prefer the term “slacker” and others have even ventured “perfectionist.” Although these terms have very different meanings, there is some connection between them as I find that my desire for mastery in writing becomes so stressful it often leads to putting work off until later. Despite the mostly negative associations friends and colleagues have given to my writing identity, these bad habits aren’t quite steeped in the apathetic torpor or laziness that people suspect. I think Emily Dickenson

defines my condition best when she writes: “Much madness is divinest sense / to a discerning eye” (lines 1-2). There is definitely some sense to my madness, which I otherwise refer to as my personal “writing process.”

For me, my writing process begins as soon as I receive a writing task, whether it is an email that requires response or an assigned essay. Even if all I do is mark the email as unread or stuff the assignment sheet into the back of my notebook and forget about the task until confronted with it again, I still consider myself to be taking part in the writing process. Once I’m given that writing task, I’ve crossed the line between someone who didn’t have writing to do and someone who definitely has to write a specific genre for a specific audience. If I choose to, I can spend the majority of my writing process pretending I’m the former person and that this task doesn’t exist; but in the back of my mind I know it’s there, and I’m making a conscious choice about how to approach writing it. Offering a more succinct definition of process, composition scholars David Rosenwasser and Jill Stephen claim that “The process includes everything you needed to do in order to get to the finished draft” (14). Writing process can also be described as a literate activity system in which all of the numerous and complex components of the process—from where writing happens to when it happens to how it happens—make up the activity of writing. Joyce Walker explains this idea in much more detail in her article “Just CHATting” (74-77), where she describes literate activity from multiple different perspectives that “can be used to help researchers [as well as writers at all levels] investigate the complicated factors that impact what/how/when/why we write” (74).

There are many different genres of writing and probably just as many ways to participate in the activity of writing, but there’s not just one “right” way. For instance, some writers approach Facebook status updates as something they can write quickly on their phone while on the go, while others linger over these updates, constructing creative expressions or lengthy rants. Similarly, other writers, when given a research paper, immediately begin brainstorming, researching, drafting, revising, etc. I envy these writers and their ability to sit down and get work done—yet, I don’t pretend to assume that these activities qualify such authors as better writers or even good writers. In fact, I’ve encountered many writers who employ such practices because they struggle with writing, and drafting early means having time for necessary revisions and edits. Therefore, I do not wish to be these writers as much as I wish I had their diligence. Instead, my particular method of writing involves being in a constant battle with myself, and it’s definitely not a model to follow; however, my writing process could perhaps be a model in the “learn from my mistakes” vein. Indeed, my composition activities at least serve to debunk any glorified ideas of writing as a sort of magical event inspired by the muses. I think

my activities also reveal the reality of writing as hard work that involves not only putting words on a page, but thinking critically, researching, scheduling, working in difficult environments, and mediating harsh self-criticism with the effort to draft. Thus the act of writing for me is an intricate and complex system that requires much more activity than simply typing words onto a computer screen; and as I mentioned, this activity begins when I receive a writing task.

The Analysis Writing Assignment

In one of my first graduate classes as a student in a Master's of English program, I received this assignment: write a four- to six-page academic essay for which you choose an object to analyze. The object can be a place, relationship, experience, institution, or anything literary, popular, cultural, written, filmic, musical, or pictorial. The essay should describe/contextualize the object. Furthermore, whatever object is selected for this paper will also be the topic of three more four- to six-page papers. The paper should be written in MLA format and double-spaced; it's due in three weeks. My reaction?

This is an awesome assignment! I'm not quite sure in what way this paper will work with the subsequent papers for this class, but I'm excited about it nonetheless because of the complete freedom it gives me. I've wanted the chance to focus on my own research interests and write something that I could potentially get published; now I have the opportunity. Plus, since the topic is entirely of my own choosing, my interest in this assignment should make it easy to write.

I put the assignment sheet on the dry erase board hanging up in my home office so I can see it every time I walk in the room. I'm determined to make my writing process productive from the beginning so that the writing experience doesn't become stressful and neurosis inducing in the end. My next activity was to find a topic.

Brainstorming for Topic Ideas

In their book *Tutoring Writing: A Practical Guide for Conferences*, Donald A. McAndrew and Thomas J. Reigstad offer eight helpful strategies for finding a topic including free writing, rapid sketching, conversation, free talking, doodling or sketching, using a three-by-five index card exercise, heightening alertness, and using writing territories, which consists of generating a list of familiar and/or interesting subjects (32). Personally, I find conversation to be a particularly helpful activity, even if it's only a conversation with myself—

although, I do generally rely on friends to help me with this part. I actually enjoy thinking about possible topics; therefore, brainstorming can often take up a large period of my process, which ultimately produces time constraints for my several remaining writing activities. For this paper, brainstorming lasted two weeks. This is the condensed version of that activity:

Since I have absolute freedom and I have to write four papers on this topic, I should probably pick something I like. I could write about the 2011 Jane Eyre movie! After all, why are there about two-dozen Jane Eyre movies anyway? But then again, I've never written about movies . . . Maybe I should pick something I know? What do I know? I know literature; I should probably write about literature. I've wanted to read Nabokov's Lolita for over a year now; I could use that. But I don't know anything about Russian literature. Plus, there is the issue of working with a translation. Wait . . . Lolita wasn't translated; it was written in English. But still, I better stick with British literature. I could write about Harry Potter! It would finally give me a chance to finish the series. But then I would have to work with all seven books since it's a series. That's a lot to take on, and it adds more reading to my workload. Maybe I should pick something I've already read. I could use Wilkie Collins's Armadale since I wrote my Honors thesis on it—I have so much more to say about that book. And I've also read quite a lot of secondary criticism on that novel. But would that be cheating? I'd still be writing from scratch, and I'd be taking up new ideas. I don't think it's cheating. I should definitely use Armadale.

One week before the paper is due, I find out my professor wants this assignment to be not only an opportunity for us to explore a topic we're interested in, but he's encouraging us to try experimenting a little. So after all this thinking, I decide to write about Cary Fukunaga's 2011 film adaptation of *Jane Eyre*.

Reviewing the Topic

If I had chosen a novel for my object, I would have to read it and fortunately I had already read Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. Since I chose a movie, I watched it while sitting on my comfy couch and taking detailed notes.

Opening scene: Adult Jane leaving Thornfield in tears; wobbly, frantic camera angles; Jane walking through moors—wide angles; Jane walking through rain—sees the Rivers' house. St. John finds Jane on doorstep—in book, Jane is turned away by the Rivers sisters.

Flashback: Jane remembers being child (book opening scene).

Now that I had a good set of notes, I had to sit down and start writing; but my anxiety about what exactly to write made this part a little challenging for me.

Making Time to Write

Monday: work, read for class, go to class, eat dinner, go to next class, come home around 9pm. *I'm too tired to start writing my paper tonight. I'll start it tomorrow.*

Tuesday: work, prepare for class, teach, office hours—*I've got to read for class tonight*—go to class, come home around 9pm. *I'm too tired to start writing my paper tonight, but I still have time. I'll start it tomorrow.*

Wednesday: work, read for class, go to class, get home around 5pm. *I'm so glad to have a night off! I'll just enjoy my evening a little and then start working . . .*

Thursday: Sitting down to write. *How do I start? I'm not sure what I want to say. I wonder what other people have said about this movie?* Google. Milner Library Online. MLA International Bibliography database.

Making time to write is an extremely difficult activity for me. As I mentioned earlier, I often hold off on returning emails—I also frequently forget about text messages I've received as other situations arise while I'm contemplating how to respond—but academic writing is my worst form of procrastination. Whether it be memos, lab reports, research papers, or literary analysis essays, sitting in front of a Word document seems like the most boring way to spend time I could be using to do other homework, clean my apartment, cook dinner, or catch up on sleep. For me, there is never a *good* time to write. Maybe eventually I'll find my perfect time of day and the ideal atmosphere for writing; but since it currently eludes me, I must force myself to sit and just write.

Reading to Write

Inevitably, when I sit down to write, I feel like I have nothing to say. Or sometimes I have so many things to say that I have no idea where to start. This always prompts me to do some research, and this is the dangerous part for me—after all, there are so many interesting things on the Internet. I'm a pretty big nerd when it comes to literary study and even though I don't like writing, I love researching. Because this activity is so much fun for me, I usually spend a lot of time here—like with brainstorming—and I try to make it as productive as possible. So, in this instance, I Google “Cary Fukunaga's *Jane Eyre*” and search through film reviews. I start a working bibliography to keep track of these sources and a new Word document in which to paste quotes that I like from my readings. In my experience with research, one idea

always leads to several others so I end up spending [too much] time watching interviews with Fukunaga on YouTube.

Really Writing This Time

Okay, now I'm committed. I'm sitting down at my desk; my blank Word document is open—I hate how that blinking cursor taunts me. What to write? I don't know how to start this essay. Oh, it doesn't matter! If I just start, then I can go back and edit it later: "Charlotte Bronte's novel Jane Eyre (1847) has been gaining attention for over one hundred and fifty years." Okay, I've got the first sentence. That's always the hardest part—why do I start with intro, anyway? I usually end up changing it drastically once I've figured out what my paper is actually about. Have I always started papers this way? It doesn't seem very productive. Anyway, now what am I going to say? I have thoughts; I just don't have any words for them. Maybe my thoughts will develop if I just linger on them for a bit while I play on the computer.

This thought usually results in me checking my Facebook page, playing a game (or two or three) of FreeCell, or taking ridiculous pictures of myself in Photo Booth that strangely offer a visual epitome of my writing activity (see Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1. I hate writing.



Figure 2. Pretending to think hard.

I usually have an ideal in mind of how I want my writing to look and sound, but I don't think I ever quite get there. I can't ever seem to completely master my thoughts and words into a perfect textual body. I have all of these ideas jumping around in my head like little kids in a bouncy castle, but translating those thoughts into words on a computer screen is a slow, time-consuming process that involves hours of what feels like wasted time. This time is otherwise manifested in me sitting at a local coffee shop and staring out the window as if the words I'm looking for are going to stroll right down the sidewalk, into the front door, and sit down at the table with me (I happen to be looking out the coffee shop window waiting for the words to arrive at

the time of this writing). This activity always takes longer than I think it will, which is what leads into the miserable middle-of-the-night writing described in the opening of this article.

The All-Nighter, etc.

By this stage in the writing process, I actually have something I want to say—usually. I’ve spent several hours over the course of multiple days thinking about my topic, reviewing my topic, reading up on my topic, but it took me so long to sit down and write that I end up pulling that all-nighter, writing up to the deadline, and drinking enough coffee to cut years off of my life. This is why I hate writing. It’s stressful, time-consuming, hard work, and there’s no guarantee of positive feedback for all the effort. I’m working on overcoming this approach to my writing process by focusing more on how to improve the individual activities that make up writing. And maybe when I do, I’ll write another article about how I’m such a fabulous writer and I have this great strategy and everyone should follow my lead. However, I don’t think such a universal truth exists. I think writing is a complex activity system that varies for each person and each situation. So even though my personal process for writing academic essays is slow, stressful, and riddled with self-criticism, my approach doesn’t make me any less of a writer. I’m still translating my thoughts into words on a page, which makes me—good or bad—a writer. I realize that I may never be able to “overcome” my writing problems—but at least by recognizing the different activities that form my own writing process, I can point to specific areas that need tweaking.

So let the writing process begin again. This time I’ll try something new and different to see how it works for me. Maybe it’ll be scheduling a writing appointment with myself at an exact time every week. Maybe it’ll be writing in a place I haven’t tried before. Maybe it’ll be making myself a writing snack right before getting started. Maybe these habits will work for me and maybe they won’t, but I’ll keep trying until I find some strategies and techniques that help relieve my writing pains.

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Cayla Eagon is an English 101 instructor and MA student of Literary and Cultural Studies in the English department at Illinois State. Her favorite activities include playing *Jeopardy*, watching movies in high definition, and reading literature—especially the *Bildungsroman* and Gothic fiction. She’s also notorious for leaving about coffee mugs.

Stefan Becker: The *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* Interview

Michael Gibson Wollitz

Over the course of an eventful afternoon, the *GWRJ*'s intrepid correspondent Aaron Mulnower sits down with Stefan Becker, legendary writer of liner notes—that genre of writing which appears as part of the packaging of musical albums and can take the form of anything from biography to lyrics to musician credits—in an attempt to get to the heart of the great man's writing philosophy. What results is both surprising and disturbing. Below is the official transcript of their conversation, complete with eyewitness editorial commentary.

MULNOWER: Mr. Becker, it's an honor and a pleasure. Thank you for agreeing to sit down and talk with us today.

BECKER: Yes, yes, of course. You're welcome.

MULNOWER: Shall we get right to it, then? I suppose the best place to start is at the beginning. Stefan Becker: Winner of eight Grammy Awards for Best Album Notes; recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship; the only music writer in American history to be awarded the National Book Foundation's "Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters"; guest at the White House of every president since Nixon; author of liner notes for countless iconic bands, including artists as diverse as The Rolling Stones and Lil Wayne. (Makes a "phew" sound) One almost feels the need to come up for air, and still there could be more; one could go on and on and on listing your writing accomplishments.

BECKER: You are very kind, young man.

MULNOWER: Just the facts, sir. You have had the kind of success as a writer most can only dream about achieving. Now for those readers who might be unaware of even the most basic elements of liner notes, yet still want to learn

a bit about you and your esteemed body of work, let me take a moment to sketch out the conventions of the form. Liner notes consist of the text that accompanies any physical product of music, like a CD, a vinyl record, a cassette tape, or even once upon a time, an eight-track. Liner notes most often include such pertinent information as the names and running order of the songs included; the lineup of musicians that made the recording; the names of the individuals who produced, recorded, mixed, and engineered the recording, and the locations where such work was completed; and any number of thank yous or acknowledgements that the performers wish to make. (Pauses, smiling) Now, of course you would be well aware of such things, Mr. Becker. For our purposes here, then, my question is: Which of these many characteristics interested you most, and thus made you want to start studying liner notes?

BECKER: (Shrugs) None of them. Nothing in particular appealed to me about the genre. Certainly I didn't study anything. I just did the work.

MULNOWER: Okay. Fair enough. Well then, you must have started somewhere. Describe, if you would, how you became the writer you are today.

BECKER: There is nothing to say.

MULNOWER: Pardon?

BECKER: Your request, there is nothing to describe. I was born as I am: A wonderful writer, a true artist. My abilities as a writer are God-given gifts. One day, when I was very young, I decided to put pen to paper, and what resulted was an exercise in greatness. The rest is, as you were alluding to, history.

MULNOWER: Really? My goodness, that is something else. What a blessing, indeed. I've always heard that writing is a process. A matter of—

BECKER: (Interrupts) Writing is a process? (Uproarious laughter) Writing is a process, so the young man has heard. I'm sorry, my friend, but writing is a matter of mastery. Either you master the writing task at hand, or you fail. There is no room for anything in between. Writing is nothing you can learn.

MULNOWER: Okay, well, point taken. Let's move on. I want to ask you about how you approach each, let's just say, "assignment." You've done work for so many different kinds of musicians. How do you prepare differently when writing for Miley Cyrus, as compared to writing liner notes for Radiohead?

BECKER: There is no difference. I do nothing differently.

MULNOWER: Is that so?

BECKER: Yes, certainly. I approach every kind of project the exact same way.

MULNOWER: But don't these very dissimilar kinds of bands or performers require very dissimilar kinds of writing? Just like you wouldn't write a job application cover letter and turn that in as your final paper for a history class . . .

BECKER: Oh, young man, how much you have to learn! All writing is the same, regardless of the genre of music! Liner notes for the infamous Norwegian death metal band Lunatic Grapefruit? Liner notes for Leonard Bernstein's *New York Philharmonic Greatest Hits*? It's all the same. No matter what, I am me, and I write the same.

MULNOWER: So when you are writing you are never concerned about your audience?

BECKER: Audience? My audience? Young man, are you kidding me? (Laughs heartily, with much knee slapping) Why would I ever, ever, ever worry about my audience? I don't care about them! They'll read whatever I write, naturally. For the life of me, I can think of no reason why anyone would ever consider who they are writing for when they are writing.

MULNOWER: Good to know. Talk about unexpected. I would never have thought that was the case.

BECKER: It's true. It's why anyone who tells you they spend a lot of time organizing their thoughts or doing (Here Becker makes air quotes with his hands and adopts a high-pitched, whiny voice for the next sentence) "research" about what they're writing, they're both crazy and foolish.

MULNOWER: Really? How so exactly? I can't imagine a writer able to produce work of such quality without doing any kind of research . . . (Curious, his eyes narrow)

BECKER: Young man, surely you jest! Since when have you ever heard anything about research for a writer? Writing research? WRITING RESEARCH? (He practically shouts this phrase the second time before bursting into such vigorous laughter that he begins to cough furiously. He takes about thirty seconds to recover from this fit before speaking again, during which time he clears his throat repeatedly, pulls out a gold trimmed handkerchief from the pocket of his tweed blazer—which he uses to clean his circular, tortoiseshell glasses—and lights a large, expensive looking cigar) Excuse me, my apologies. It's just, writing research, what a funny thing to think about. No, no, research is not for the writing, my dear boy. Research is

all well and good, but it is something for the scientists and laboratory peoples. You do research to cure the cancer, to make the pandas have babies, to learn about the dinosaurs, to discover how to travel through time. You do not research writing, you simply write something. I've never researched anything about writing, and look at how much I know about how to write.

MULNOWER: Okay. Hmmm. Well, I suppose this is as good a time as any to ask you, if I may, about the controversy surrounding your most recent piece of work. Your recent liner notes for Taylor Swift's new album *Red* have come under fire for being, as *The New York Times* put it, "wildly inappropriate" and "a laughably poor effort from a once great artist." Do you th—

BECKER: (Interrupts) Nonsense. I couldn't care less what the, who, what'd you call them? *The New York City Times Review Free Daily Leaflet Paper?*

MULNOWER: No, it was, in fact, *The New York Times*.

BECKER: Yes, *The New York City Times*. I could care less what they think. My writing, its intentions are pure and holy. I do what I want, of course, but I never intend to offend any overly sensitive souls. To complainers and simpletons like these *New York City Times* people, I say: If you do not understand my work, then you must be confused. There can be no other explanation.

MULNOWER: So would you say you never concern yourself with your audience?

BECKER: (Responds haughtily) I never worry about anything, young man. Worrying is a waste of time, and Stefan Becker is not in the business of wasting time. Stefan Becker is in the business of being a writing master.

MULNOWER: (Unfazed, he continues) Mmmm. So as far as you are concerned, external things—like, for instance, cultural and historical factors—have no influence on the interpretation or reception of your work? You create, as it were, in a vacuum?

BECKER: (Eyes widen grotesquely to express seemingly superhuman levels of incredulity) Whatever do you mean, young man, with this nonsense about external things influencing my writing? (Angry) Nothing affects my writing!

MULNOWER: But you do acknowledge that at a certain, inevitable point in the writing process, the text is out of your control?

BECKER: What are you saying, young man?!? Out of my control?! (Yelling) OUT OF MY CONTROL? My writing is never affected by anything but me. By nothing, you hear me! This is the deal, young man, this is how it is: I write. I finish writing. You follow so far?

MULNOWER: Yes, sir. So you “write” (now adopting air quotes himself) without any planning, research, attention to your potential audience, or concern with the consequences of your production?

BECKER: Listen close. This shouldn’t be hard, even for you, as there’s not much to writing after all. Yes, I write. I finish writing. Then it’s over. You hear me, son? Everything is done with at that point in time. Nothing else matters. The work is dead when I conclude it. My readers, they read it, and they accept it as I the writer, as I the artist, make them accept it. As I intended it to be read, so it is read. They read it and understand what I mean, no ifs, ands, or buts. End of story.

MULNOWER: I see wh—

BECKER: (Continuing his rant) And if they don’t, they are fools.

MULNOWER: Okay, thank you. So, I take it you are not a big believer in the idea of the “trajectory” of a piece of writing?

BECKER: (Disbelieving, unknowing, voice raised) The what?!?

MULNOWER: The trajectory of . . .

BECKER: Trajectory? Like an airplane? I am a little boy, picking my nose and making the paper planes that fly through the air?

MULNOWER: No, that’s not what I mean. I meant like the trajectory of a text, the way a text has a process of production, how any given piece of writing has a different relationship to any number of other entities, be they people or institutions or whatever.

BECKER: (Snorts dismissively) Trajectory, what a thing. (Laughs again, in what is getting harder and harder to describe as anything but a mean-spirited manner) Once more, young man—and I will make sure to talk very slowly here for you—my work, my writing, it doesn’t matter what anybody else thinks of any of it. Their opinion doesn’t matter at all. The whole of human history, the entirety of our contemporary culture, (pounds table with his fist as he says each word, cigar ashes flying through the air in short, little, fiery bursts) **NONE OF THAT INFLUENCES ANYTHING THAT IS WRITTEN BY ME.**

MULNOWER: (Sarcastic) Okay then, so, how do you write? What technologies do you use as part of your process?

BECKER: (Frustrated, visibly angry, and now making little attempt to hide it) Again, process is imaginary. I have no process. Why have process when you can just write!

MULNOWER: Technology. I mean, just technology. What do you use?

BECKER: I don't use any technology.

MULNOWER: Come again?

BECKER: I don't use any technology.

MULNOWER: I am afraid I don't follow. You say you don't use any technology?

BECKER: Young man, I swear you are on my very last nerve. Are you now deaf, in addition to being dumb, which you have already well established? I . . . do . . . not . . . use . . . any . . . technology.

MULNOWER: (Confidently) My journalistic integrity compels me to follow up: How so?

BECKER: (Eyes shoot daggers at Mulnower. Now unquestionably apoplectic. The threat of violence is in the room.) I, STEFAN BECKER, DO NOT USE ANY TECHNOLOGY WHEN WRITING! I write out everything by hand, and that's that!

MULNOWER: So you would deny that paper is its own technology?

BECKER: (Face bright red, veins visible in forehead, breaths short and forced. In his trembling hands the cigar is moments away from being snapped in two.) Technology? No, you fool! Technology is computers and The Internets and things of those natures. (Looks around the room, presumably for his manager/agent) With all due respect, young man, I am not sure you are qualified to be conducting this interview. I was under the impression that I was going to be interviewed by someone who knew a lot about the magical craft of writing, not some chump who ceaselessly brings up inane things that have nothing to do with being a writer.

MULNOWER: I am sorry you feel that way. I, and many others, would consider even pencil and paper a technology.

BECKER: (Laughs, bitter and disgusted) Okay, fine. Silly as that is, if you are just expressing the ideas . . . if it's just the crazy ideas of you and your foolish band of confused friends that you are babbling about, I can accept that and attempt to forgive your ignorance. (Sighs deeply)

MULNOWER: Thank you. Shall we try and continue with another question?

BECKER: (Rolls eyes, sighs deeply again) Sure, why not.

MULNOWER: I appreciate your time immensely. Let's wrap this up. Mr. Becker, I must ask about this. What do you make of those who would say that

because of iTunes and MP3s and digital downloads and all that, that album liner notes are a dying genre?

BECKER: I don't follow you, young man.

MULNOWER: No one buys CDs anymore, let alone vinyl records. How do you expect your genre of choice to continue to survive going forward in the future?

(There is a long spell of silence. When Becker next speaks, his words are measured and monotonous, but somehow still carry an air of real menace)

BECKER: Young man . . . do you . . . I ask you . . . do you mean . . . to imply . . . that there won't . . . always be . . . liner notes?

MULNOWER: I'm not implying it. That's exactly what I'm saying.

BECKER: Liner notes have always been liner notes, and they will always be liner notes, end of story. **HOW DARE YOU?** Why I ought to . . . I'll teach you a lesson! (Becker rises from his chair, cigar ash cascading off his stomach and chest as he springs forward, attempting to attack Mulnower. However, Mulnower is too quick for Becker. He grabs a manila folder from his stack of interviewer's papers and moves away from Becker, keeping the table strategically between them. Becker picks up a chair and chases Mulnower around the table. This lasts for several minutes. Finally, the two men pause to catch their breaths. Standing, edgy, paranoid, they eye each other from across the table.)

MULNOWER: You are a monster! You really are a monster!

BECKER: I am judge, jury, and executioner! No one questions Stefan Becker! No one! I'll be the end of you, you inconsequential fool!

MULNOWER: No sir, I'll be the end of *you*! I didn't want to do this, but you made me: No more Mr. Nice Guy. (Waves the manila folder at Becker) Do you know what this is?

BECKER: (Wheezing) I've no idea, and I do not care.

MULNOWER: You will care. This, this is research, something you wouldn't know anything about. I've done some research into your writing and I've discovered some interesting things, Mr. Becker.

BECKER: (Trying to maintain his haughty demeanor, but wary now) Oh, really? Like what?

MULNOWER: (Smirking in triumph) I have research here showing that you are a fraud, Stefan Becker. A fraud! You're a terrible, terrible writer, and a horrible, horrible person. How could you ever be a good writer? You've

never done any writing research in your life. The only reason you have been successful is because of . . . your mother!

BECKER: You leave my mother out of this!

MULNOWER: Your mother wrote all those famous liner notes that received all those fancy awards. She was quite the writer researcher, and in the way of doting mothers she loved you so very much that she devoted herself for forty years to developing and then protecting the myth of Stefan Becker. (Waves folder again) It's all here, every gory detail. It's all here. That's why your liner notes for Taylor Swift's *Red* are so bad: Your mother died earlier this year. They are the first liner notes you yourself have ever written. In your arrogance you thought you could carry on without your personal writer researcher, but you couldn't. You couldn't! My goodness, man, look at these liner notes! Listen to what you wrote as liner notes for Taylor Swift—

BECKER: (Stricken) No! No! Spare me! Do not throw those notes back in my face! Not here! Not now!

MULNOWER: Oh yes, yes indeed. You dodged me once, but we are going there now. Over the picture of a koala, you wrote, and I quote: (Reading now from a piece of paper drawn from his folder) "What you must understand, you morons, is egg salad. The beauty, the perfection, the elegance. Music. Words. Sounds. Eggs. Mayonaise. Tasty, tasty mayonaise. And therein lies the power of song." (Laughs derisively while tossing the folder on the table) And you didn't even spell mayonnaise right. Two N's, Becker! TWO N's! (Intensity of his speech changes. Mulnower is no longer the prosecutor passionately arguing his case before a judge, but rather now sounds like a teacher patiently explaining a new concept to a student) Mayonnaise is spelled with two N's, Mr. Becker. What was that gibberish, sir? Because it sure wasn't liner notes. Liner notes are a way to convey to the reader additional information about a piece of music to which he or she is listening. Sure they can vary wildly, taking the form of anything from abstract artwork that reveals little in the way of tangible detail about the music it accompanies, to an erudite essay that painstakingly describes the product at hand from conception to completion; regardless, I can promise you liner notes, like any other form of writing, require more attention and research than a couple of sentences about egg salad superimposed on a picture of a koala.

BECKER: (Slumps forward, his left arm resting on the back of a chair, his right hand massaging his forehead) I thought . . . No one . . . All these years . . . My secret was safe . . . (Looks up at Mulnower, crestfallen, unbelieving) And you accomplished all this by . . . by . . . by research?

MULNOWER: Yes, yes I did. And now the world will know the truth about Stefan Becker.

BECKER: NEVER! OVER MY DEAD BODY! (Stands up fully and lunges across the table, grabbing Mulnower by the collar of his shirt. Mulnower goes somersaulting backwards over his chair. As the two men tussle, the tape ends in a squeal of static.)

* * *

Author's Note: Fear not Gentle Reader, in the end our brave man in the field, Aaron Mulnower, came out of this little dustup no worse for wear. However, your writing won't be fine if you listen to the ranting of a literary lunatic like Stefan Becker. His callous message of writing being an activity that you do not think about, or study, or research, or work hard at like any other craft or labor of love is one to avoid like the plague. Shut your ears and avert your eyes! Maybe even boycott Becker's work if you are so inclined . . .

Nah, on second thought, who are we kidding, there's no need for that, as fortunately, Stefan Becker and Aaron Mulnower and their terrible tussle are mere figments of our overactive imaginations. None of the above encounter was real. Instead, what is very real is the challenge each and every one of us face each and every day as we attempt to go about learning more about the ways of writing research, and what exactly it means to be a "writer." Also, very real: All the fun and different and strange yet exciting things you can do when writing. For instance, you can create a fake transcript of an imaginary interview involving fictional people to make legitimate points about a serious topic, and somehow it might work. Or maybe it won't. Either way, there are so many roads you can explore when writing. Just remember, though: No matter what path you take as a writer/writer researcher, don't take the path Stefan Becker would take. Think: What Would Stefan Becker Do? And do the opposite. Don't be Stefan Becker. Just say no.



Michael Gibson Wollitz is a PhD candidate in English Studies at Illinois State University. His research focuses on contemporary American and Irish literature.

Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*

GWRJ Editors

Our Mission Statement

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

General Information

Submissions

Articles can be submitted to the *GWRJ* at any time. Contact the Associate Editor at grassrootswriting@gmail.com with queries about possible submissions and to submit your work. However, we do have deadlines for upcoming issues. For issue 5.1, which will come out in August, 2014, articles must be submitted by October 1, 2013. For issue 5.2, which will come out in January, 2015, articles must be submitted by February 1, 2014.

Queries and Drafts

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

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

Honoraria

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

Style and Tone

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

1. The readership of the *GWRJ* is writers. It is not “students,” even though the journal is used by writing instructors and students. (The *GWRJ* remains the primary text for Writing Program courses at Illinois State University, and it’s also used by teachers and students in other programs as well.) *GWRJ* articles should attempt to provide valuable content to writers who are engaged in the activity of “learning how to learn about” genres.
2. “Teacher narratives” are not acceptable as *GWRJ* articles. We are interested in material that looks at literate activities from the position of a “writer” or a “researcher,” but articles that discuss ways to “teach” people about writing are not appropriate for this journal.
3. Language and style that is overly formal or “academic” may be difficult or unappealing to our readers.
4. A tone that situates the author as a “master” writer is often problematic. (We call these “success” narratives, which are often how-to type articles in which the focus is on the author’s learned expertise.) Authors should remember that no one “learns” a genre completely or in completely simple way. So while writers (especially of first-person narratives) may write about successes, they need to complicate the genres with which they are working.
5. Tone or content that situates the reader as a certain kind of writer (whether as a master or novice), with certain kinds of shared experiences, can be problematic, because the readership of the journal constitutes a wide variety of writers with different writing abilities and experiences.
6. Whenever possible, articles should make use of published research about writing practices, but the research should be incorporated into the text in

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

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

Media, Mode, and Copyright Issues

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

Researching for the *GWRJ*

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

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

But this kind of research isn’t just about people. It’s really about what we call “activity systems,” which just means that we want to learn about

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

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

Investigating Genres

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

Personal Explorations of Literate Practice

This kind of research is often closely connected to genre investigations. Authors examine their own practices to discover how they have learned to produce certain kinds of writing in certain situations, or they investigate particular kinds of composing practices, such as different practices for engaging in research or revision. Like genre investigations, these kinds of

projects sometimes have a “how-to” focus, as authors learn to think about and explain to others the things they know (or are coming to know) about different literate practices.

Composing Practices

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

Literate Activity in the Wild

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

people try to compose particular kinds of texts in particular situations. We are also interested in research that looks at the ways that textual production is interactive—how it involves all kinds of interactions between different people and different objects, tools, and other entities over time. This kind of research can involve the interactions of people and genres and different cultural norms and practices.

Case Studies of Individual Literate Practices

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

Linguistic Writing Research

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

Global or Intercultural Literate Practices

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

The Researcher's Process

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

Step One

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

Step Two

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

Step Three

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

Step Four

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

Step Five

It can also be important to think about “target genres,” or types of writing that might be used as examples during the research and writing

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

Step Six

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

Step Seven

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

Step Eight

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

Step Nine

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

Step Ten

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

Questions?

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

