

GRASSROOTS WRITING RESEARCH JOURNAL

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From the Editors

Sarah Warren-Riley

As our eighth year of publication at the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* comes to a close, we are excited to share this new issue with our readers. The 8.2 issue includes a variety of articles by both new and returning authors that each provide intriguing and thought-provoking perspectives as they pursue investigations into a range of literate practices and genres. The twelve new articles in this issue—which range from inquiries into overcoming writer’s block to a consideration of the sly distribution strategies of BuzzFeed quizzes—continue the journal’s long tradition of interrogating writing and literate activity in a wide array of forms and digging deep into all of their myriad complexities. What we find particularly fascinating about this issue is the way that the work in this issue exemplifies the true nature of citizen writing research, including the fascinations, curiosities, and even straight-out frustrations, that lead authors to further analyze and attempt to understand both the nature of writing and themselves as writers. Truly, the work of the contributors to this issue continues to expand our collective understanding of the multifaceted nature of genres, activity systems, and the work of writing in the world in general. As such, we hope you enjoy this new issue as much as we do.

To start off Issue 8.2, the first three articles delve into writing research projects fueled by personal curiosity. First, **Maddi Kartcheske** shares her personal struggle to overcome writer’s block as she looks beyond the typical tips and tricks for overcoming this common affliction and applies CHAT to the situation—discovering that for herself, ecology and production go hand in hand when considering a solution to the problem. Next, **Brian Zimmerman** narrates how his interest in an old map that he discovered by chance drove him into an investigation into the planning documents that structure communities (city plans) as well as the process involved in creating them. Then, **Jeff Rients** shows how a personal hunch about how people perceive the concepts of “writing” and “research” caused him to investigate the potential connection between writing, research (or perhaps more particularly, perceptions of what it means to be a “good” writer and a “good” researcher), and character traits, by conducting a survey across several platforms.

The next four articles apply cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) to a variety of genres to uncover more about their complexity, impact, and evolution.

Karishma Verma examines the evolution of horror movie posters by comparing classic horror movie posters to more contemporary versions of the genre, noting the changes that have occurred in this genre over time. **Lexi Horras** then recounts how a long drive and a frustrating experience with GPS led her to make interesting connections between GPS and CHAT. Then, **Gina Stinnett**, inspired by a previous *GWRJ* article about Tumblr, digs deep into the history of her own personal Tumblr archive to interrogate how this platform has evolved over time learning along the way how the users of the form have proved a critical influence on these changes. **Hope Fairchild** then relates how her personal love of BuzzFeed quizzes fueled an inquiry into the genre, leading her to uncover some surprising things about BuzzFeed's distribution process and the trajectory of the quizzes themselves.

Following this, the next two articles enlighten us on the problems and possibilities offered by considering the impact of our antecedent knowledge on our literate practices. First, **David Hansen** explains his journey into understanding the ways in which his antecedent knowledge proved to get in the way of his critical thinking—and the way that using an uptake journal helped him to begin to combat this issue. Then, **Nicole Hassels** highlights how, in her case, her antecedent knowledge of golf and antecedent genre knowledge of golf scorecards helped her to make connections between CHAT and the scorecards that others might not have been able to make, ultimately allowing her to better understand the role these cards play and the sport overall.

Finally, the last three articles in Issue 8.2 offer glimpses into the ways that writing—as a practice and in its many varied forms—informs and affects writers in a variety of settings, occupations, and positions. First, **Olivia Brown** honestly narrates her writing and writing research process while reluctantly working on a required project (a minigrant application) for her eighth grade English Language Arts class, eventually recognizing that the work she had so often grumbled about was well worth it when her grant application is selected to receive funding. Then, **Maddi Kartcheske** interviews Seth Bernard about the various types of writing he encounters—and the writing practices he engages with personally—in his career as a non-profit administrator, musician, educator, and activist. And, finally, in the last article of the issue, **Kelsey Lewis** reveals how connecting CHAT to her process of creation as a graphic designer helped her to better understand the concepts from each area.

Per tradition, we end this issue with another reprinting of “Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*,” which we again hope will continue to inspire future writing researchers to share their work with the *GWRJ*. As we look toward our ninth year of publication, we remain excited to work with writers to develop articles that continue to further our understanding of the complexity of literate

activity and the way that writing works in the world. We are always inspired by the work of citizen writing researchers—their creativity and capacity for curiosity continually expands our collective knowledge and furthers the conversation into what writing is, what it means to be a writer, and what a writing research approach can teach us overall. We look forward to continuing to share new and innovative projects with you in future issues of the *GWRJ*.

Building Blocks: Process Makes Perfect

Maddi Kartcheske

For as long as there have been writers, there have been those who feel they cannot write. In the following article, Maddi Kartcheske takes a close look at writer's block to determine how much writing is done when we think we're not writing.

My story as an undergraduate English major is a typical one. I wrote tons of stories when I was a kid, always got As in language arts, and took a particularly inspiring English class during my senior year of high school. After navigating Ms. Hussain's Literature of Moral Conflict class, I became fascinated with the way that written language can guide, shape, and alter how a reader understands a text. I ended up deciding to study it in college and dove headfirst into reader-response theory, rhetoric, and any field of study that looked at the purposeful construction of the English language. While I'm fascinated by this technical and utilitarian approach to studying all kinds of writing, it's hard to get outside of my head when I produce my own. With every single sentence, I'm faced with the same questions I ask when analyzing literature in class: What purpose does this sentence serve? Is this tangent contributing to an overall theme? Why choose this verb over a different one?

As you can imagine, it becomes difficult to get words on the page when I'm constantly questioning my choices. In the most simple terms, this seems to be writer's block. I, a writer, am having trouble writing. But this

doesn't match the typical image we see in stories of a writer staring at a blank page and crumpling up half-finished drafts. It feels like a lot more work than that. In typical English major fashion, I turned to books to try and marry my experiences with what I'd come to understand from other peoples' accounts of writer's block. I flipped through my used copy of Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*, a book with life and writing tips, and I noticed a familiar sentiment written in the margin by a stranger on page 103. In dark black ink, they wrote "is this my problem???" Though it was nice to know that I wasn't alone in my confusion, I wanted to know more about writer's block. I knew turning to research wouldn't fail me, but I also wanted a cohesive record of my findings. What better way to analyze writing than by writing about it?

It's All in Your Head

I found articles like "Writer's Block: 27 Ways to Crush It Forever" and "How to Overcome Writer's Block: 14 Tricks that Work." These articles, while entertaining, adhered to the image of the "blank" writer. In the first article mentioned, written by Henneke Duistermaat, she attempts to relate to the reader by describing her idea of writer's block: "Let me guess. You're staring at the blank screen. Your brain is fried. You can feel a headache coming on. You know you should be writing, but . . . You can't do this anymore. Your muse is gone. Your well of inspiration is empty. Finished. Stone-dry."

Though I'd hoped some of the tips would be useful regardless of the way she described writer's block, I failed to understand how "2. Curse like a Sailor" and "5. Chug Some Caffeine" were going to help me understand the phenomenon. Duistermaat described tips and tricks to calling your muse back, suggesting immersing yourself in a new environment to "get the creative juices flowing." These were all too mystical for me to understand: *What is creative juice? Where is it in my body? Why does it stop flowing?*

Down pages and pages of these search results, I stumbled upon Rjurik Davidson's article "On Writer's Block," which was different right off the bat. Like a breath of fresh air, he echoed my thoughts perfectly:

Because I had accepted a romantic notion of art, it all seemed a mystery to me. Art was *meant* to be unfathomable. To ask questions about the process, to break it down scientifically, would be to destroy it, I thought.

So I put the problem down to some mysterious personal weakness.

. . . I never really believed in writer's block. When people had mentioned it, I thought they were referring to a lack of

ideas, with the blank page representing the blankness of their imagination.

This was not what I was suffering from. I was suffering from an *unnecessary* blockage, a self-undermining behaviour. My writer's block was something much more *functional*: the writing-paralysis caused by anxiety, fear or a similar kind of discomfort.

Any attempt to deal with writer's block, then, needs to begin with an understanding of what it is and how it functions (25–26).

No mention of a muse, of a juice, or a quick fix, just a readiness to learn and understand writer's block. I was in heaven. In the rest of the article, Davidson briefly discusses ten different psychological theories from a wide variety of scientists on what areas of our brain affect our writing (and, most importantly, what stops us). Finally, some science! One of the scientists that Davidson studies, Robert Boice, attributes writer's block to impatience. "Writers are blocked, Boice suggests, by 'their over-eagerness to write quickly and to completion'" (qtd. in Davison 26). Our expectation of producing literary genius on the first try "pre-shapes" how we will write it, and when we fall short of these ideas, it makes sense that we would feel discouraged and unable to write. This negativity can be paired with our tools as well, as Davidson also observes, "If we conclude that facing the blank page is the cause of our distress, we're pretty likely to leap from the computer and find other things to do instead" (27). All the negative things that we say to or about ourselves can be referred to as "negative self-talk," a term coined by Robert Boice. Davidson's summaries led me to believe that writer's block was a lot more common than I thought. Though I was slightly more informed on the origins of writer's block, I also needed to know how to write a *Grassroots* article. This took me to the online archives on the ISU Writing Program web page, *isuwriting.com*.

As I was studying the genre of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, I read Heidi Bowman's article, "'Good Enough': Getting the Writing Written and Letting It Go," an article about her own experiences with writer's block. The way she described her difficulties struck a particular chord with me: "I know the answer is twisted up in the tangles of perfectionism, procrastination, and, as I think when I'm not being nice to myself, good ol' laziness" (101). I was fascinated by the idea that someone who had her Master's degree and was teaching at a university would still feel the same negativity and "meanness" as an undergraduate sophomore does. Through my research, I had found a practical application of Boice's concept of negative self-talk.

Though I knew I was doubting myself, my research brought my attention to anxieties that I hadn't even noticed. I knew this article would be used in an English 101 course, but I didn't realize that I was worried about how it would



Figure 1: A glamour shot of my youngest cat, Sam.

be used in the classroom: *Will those who don't yet understand cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) still make sense of it?* And after all this research, I had even more questions floating around: *What can I do with this information? Davidson, Bowman, and my questions all seem to be connected in some way, but how? What's the common factor I can use to find some solutions to this problem?*

These questions followed me for days, until, surprisingly, I saw the answer in my cat, Sam (Figure 1).

(Bear with me, I promise I have a point.)

1, 2, 3, All Eyes on Me

From my kitchen table where I do most of my writing, I often watch Sam toss a crumpled straw wrapper up and down the stairs. It's mundane, but I could watch him play fetch by himself for hours. My role in this game is to make myself as still and quiet as possible. If he notices me watching, he freezes. He stares at me with big green eyes, hoping I'll look away before he gets too scared. As I watch him play, I'm reminded of **reception**, how an audience may interpret or repurpose a text.

In my experience, people like to write, whether it's for school, fun, or Twitter. When writing for myself, I rarely worry about things like reception (how others will understand my story) right away. Since the story is for me, I know that I can edit it later to clear up my own confusion. When I'm writing for, say, a writing research journal used in an English 101 classroom, I'm much more aware of the reception of future students (you). Writing, like the straw wrapper, becomes an activity for an audience rather than an activity for a writer (or cat). I start worrying about what people will think, how a professor will use it, if a student will like it. Constantly worrying about what my audience will think makes it a lot more difficult to put words on the page. These fears, I realized, are all based in reception.

A Sixth Sense: CHAT Analysis

Once I saw CHAT in my cat, I saw it in everything. For example, I've always had trouble reading on a screen. As I was conducting my earlier research, I was struggling to read Davidson's piece online. I planned on printing it, but

it has full color images and would take up sixteen full pages of ink. I spent hours rereading the articles, straining my eyes against the bright florescent screen, ultimately failing to make any headway on the project. I realized that this issue was based largely in **ecology**, or the “physical, biological forces that exist beyond the boundaries of any text we are producing” (Walker 76). I couldn’t afford to waste \$14.00 ink on these sources when I have other classes and projects that require me to print weekly papers (the physical force that affects my writing here is being a broke college undergrad).

But not all problems are that straightforward. As Davidson mentioned before, we get stuck when we fall short of our own expectations and get discouraged by our negative self-talk. Bowman found herself criticizing her writing process, labeling her avoidance of the blank page as laziness. This, instead, could be a problem based in representation. Using **representation**, we know that how we think about a text affects what we write, so Davidson’s negative self-talk and Bowman’s admission of “laziness” both change how we write (which is to say, we don’t).

What? And, So What? [In Other Words, It’s Not Just a Pen]

The easy part was identifying these problems using CHAT. The more complicated part is finding solutions for them. The first of my own issues I solved was by considering **production**, or the tools and practices that help shape a text. Using this definition of production on a surface level, we might say that the tools a student needs in order to write an essay might be a computer and research material. These are physical items (tools) that are absolutely essential to writing an essay. If a student were missing their computer, their writing would be extremely difficult and the process may stop altogether.

So, when I sat down to write, I had all of these things in front of me. I wrote a few words, but then I stopped. My arms were cold. I rubbed them with my hands, hugged myself, and blew hot air on them before continuing with my writing. Another sentence later, I repeated the process and wasted time. I realized that if I’m cold, I’m not writing. I’m focused on warming myself up.

In the spirit of productivity, I got up and grabbed a blanket. I started to write again, but the blanket kept slipping off my arms and wouldn’t stay around my frigid toes. I spent even *more* time re-wrapping myself. The blanket was more distracting than the temperature itself! I finally swapped the blanket for a warm sweater and socks, and my need to fidget went away immediately. The sweater stayed on my shoulders and covered my arms, but left my hands available to write. The socks eliminated the need to tuck and

re-tuck my feet. I was finally able to focus with a sweater and socks, but I wasted an entire hour trying to find this solution.

If I analyze this situation through the production lens of CHAT, I can identify the sweater and socks as my tools. Instead of spending an hour next time trying to solve this production-related issue, I can remember my analysis and gather all of my tools before I sit down. Alternatively, this is another example of how ecology and production affect the writing process.¹ Either way, I've eliminated a distraction—one of the reasons I was blocked.

This may seem like another tip and/or trick, but we've approached this situation differently than my initial online research. Instead of telling *all* writers that being warm with a sweater and socks will help them write, CHAT forced me to look at my own unique situation and needs. Some writers may find the cold useful to stay alert, or might need a fan or ice water to fend off the heat. Instead of looking at production in a two-dimensional way, we can expand our view to include all tools that assist in our writing.

After CHAT, my list of tools had a major makeover, also illustrated below in Figure 2:

BEFORE	AFTER
Laptop Sources	Pen and Paper Laptop Hard Copies of Sources Classical Music (no lyrics) Sweater and Socks Thesaurus Hair Clip

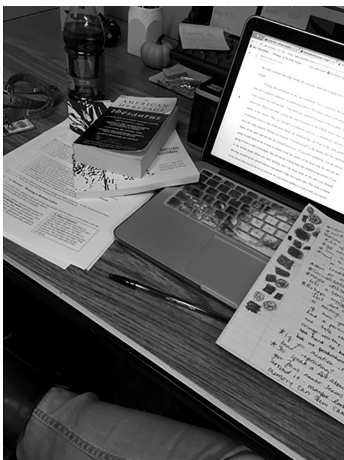


Figure 2: A messy desk is a productive desk full of useful tools.

I looked at my production/ecology printer issue that I mentioned earlier and spent time fiddling with the settings to invent the “Mini-Source”: a full-length version of my sources printed at half or a quarter of their original size to save ink. And, as Davidson mentioned about pairing our tools with our negativity, the way we *represent* a text starts to bleed into the way we *produce* a text. Recognizing this direct relationship could remind writers, as I remind myself, to be patient with the process and that thinking poorly about yourself only hinders your ability to write. These solutions save me time that I can put towards writing.

Once You've Seen It, You Won't Be Able to Stop

As I was reading through the archives on the ISU Writing Program's website to research the genre in the first place, I noticed tons of writers performing these exact same steps and analyses without even mentioning it. In "The March of the Llamas: Or, How to Be an Effective Note-Taker," Nathan Schmidt identifies his need to doodle on notes to introduce "*disorganization* into an otherwise organized system" and "re-select and re-structure [his] environment in the classroom" (103, 106). He identifies an issue with his own personal reception of his notes and solves the discomfort through doodling. Matt Del Fiacco does his best writing under a forced deadline, a unique tool that can be identified through the production lens, admitting that "it wasn't a muse or unseen force that finally got the work done. It was NaNoWriMo [National Novel Writing Month]," in his article "CHATting About NaNoWriMo" (75). He went into NaNoWriMo knowing that it had very specific parameters. These parameters "pre-shaped" how quickly and effectively he wrote his novel. Eric Pitman used a blend of production and representation when talking about his adapted method of taking concise notes and using that method to write effective flash fiction in "Flash Fiction and Remediation: Ironing Out the Details" (114). Samuel Kamara had trouble with the reception of U.S. textbooks, and so he relied on marginalia—a tool he used to better understand his assignments in "Exploring Marginalia: The Intersection Between Reading and Cognition" (19). Countless examples of this occur in each article of every journal. An author will find out that one of their habits is actually an essential part of their writing process, and then write about it in the journal.

These authors are self-aware. They're geniuses. They most definitely suffer from writer's block. Maybe we all do. But the key, I think, to "curing" writer's block is to harness the same kind of analytic awareness that these authors do. Instead of blankly looking at our process the same way we do an empty page, we can use CHAT to understand some of the tools, behaviors, and activities that we absolutely need in order to write.

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Endnote

¹Here, we can see that production and ecology have overlapped quite a bit. The problems themselves are most closely related to the ecology of my activity system (temperature, uncooperative blankets, not having money for ink cartridges). I found solutions by looking at production and the number of tools I would need in order to write (socks, sweater, advanced printer settings). To look at one aspect of my writing, I used a combination of two terms. This may seem like a complicated way to look at CHAT, but CHAT is complicated! These terms don't act as strict boundaries or boxes that we can put different aspects of our writing processes in. The production of this article was directly affected by its ecology, and that complexity is what makes the activity system worth writing about!

Maddi Kartcheske is a junior at Illinois State University majoring in creative writing and minoring in civic engagement and responsibility. She loves her home state, North Carolina, large bodies of water, and studying the English language. She wishes she could artfully craft a clever bio, but she suffers from as much writer's block here as she did for the article itself.



Creating Familiar: The Document That Outlines Your Entire Hometown

Brian Zimmerman

Comprehensive Plans are responsible for everything that goes into the planning and development of spaces within cities and villages. In this article, Brian Zimmerman investigates the process of creating these plans and how they are distributed and enacted in the real world.

I really like maps. Whether it's scrolling around on Google Earth or looking at old historical maps, something about them has always really captured my eye. Because of this, I have stumbled upon some pretty interesting things. A few months ago, one of these things was the Burnham Plan of Chicago. At first, I didn't think too much of it. All I thought I had found were some old maps of the city and some grandiose images of things in the city that were either exaggerated or never made it beyond paper. Despite not thinking they were any bigger than what was in front of me, I still wanted to know more about what I was looking at and where it came from, and eventually I came across the Plan of Chicago, one of the most influential documents in not just the city of Chicago's history, but city planning in general.

The Plan of Chicago, also known as the Burnham Plan, was a comprehensive plan for the city of Chicago and its surrounding area created in 1909 by Daniel H. Burnham and Edward H. Bennett. It's divided into three sections. The first section goes through preplanning and looks at the other great cities like London, Washington, Rome, and Cleveland, as well as

the status of 1909 Chicago and its surrounding area. The second section is the actual plan, which contains most of the maps and building concepts that I had originally found. The third section contains the actual implementation of the plan and how it can be changed and amended as time progressed, photos of which can be seen in Figures 1 and 2.

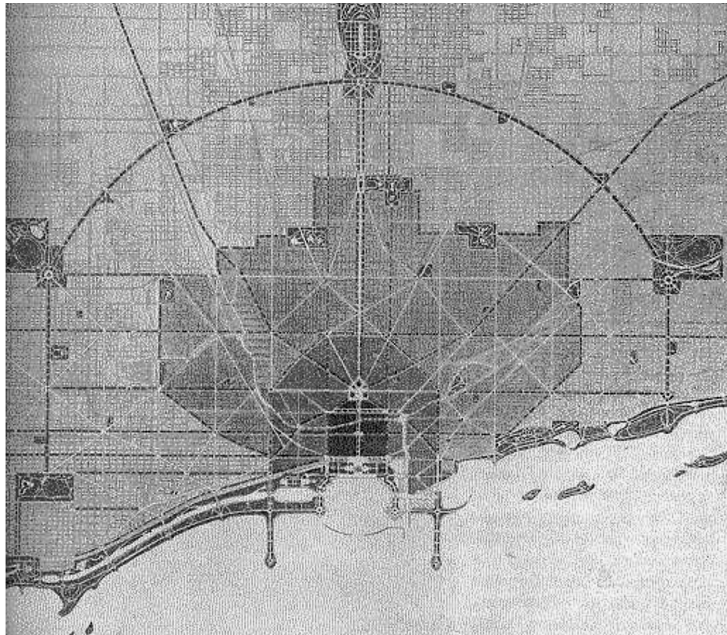


Figure 1: Aerial view of streets under the Burnham Plan.

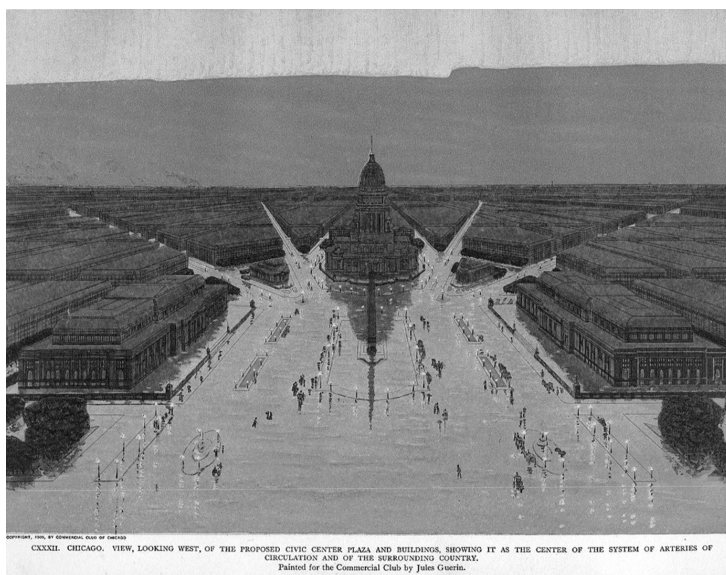


Figure 2: Concept for a civic center and plaza in the current location of the Jane Byrne Interchange.

At this point, I was really interested in the plan. It had never even occurred to me that cities could be planned all at once. I always assumed that buildings, streets, parks, and other city amenities were planned separately and just put into place upon approval, but now I was looking at a plan for a massive city like Chicago that touched on all of that and more. I could not find a full version of the plan online, but from what I found, I could tell that there was a lot of consideration and detail put into the plans and a lot of interesting styles of writing that seemed out of place in an official plan for a major city.

I decided that I was going to dive into the writing process that these plans went through to be created. Starting small, I decided to head north and look at my hometown and its surrounding communities; by examining some more plans and talking with some people who work with them, I tried to find out what these plans were used for and why they were written in the way that they were.

Huntley

My hometown is odd. Fifty miles northwest of Chicago, everything to the east is suburbia, and everything to the west is corn. It's the place where you'll be driving on a four-lane road with stores and houses on each side, and also see a tractor driving across the same road. Its uniqueness is only amplified because of the town's past. For most of its history, it was a relatively small farm town, but that changed in the early 2000s when its population began to expand rapidly. It looked like it was going to grow into another typical northern suburb of Chicago, but when the stock market crashed in 2008, it was left looking like a checker board of subdivisions and cornfields.

Driving through Huntley you can see a lot of unfinished ideas. There are patches in neighborhoods where houses were supposed to be, and some would-be subdivisions that are just winding roads with nothing but utility boxes along them. There are also streets, like the one in Figure 3, that lead to nowhere or stop at a field, or streets that have the same name but are separated by a field because there was



Figure 3: The end of Central Park Blvd. in Huntley is marked off as a dead end. The road was originally supposed to go farther but the connecting roads were never built. One of the many roads like this in the Huntley area.

originally a plan to connect them that never saw the light of day. When I first moved there, it was sad to think about the vision that was clearly there for the town that was never put into reality, but as time went on, I grew accustomed to the different identity the town took on as a hybrid farm town/Chicago suburb.

Despite becoming comfortable with its new identity, I was still curious about the Huntley that never was, and I began to try to connect the dots between certain areas and try to see what ways it was specifically changed. Upon finding out about the Burnham Plan, I became curious if there was a master plan for Huntley, and I found it through the town's website. At first, I wasn't sure what I had stumbled across. It was a 113-page PDF document that was somewhat hard to navigate at first glance. After a few minutes of scrolling through, I realized I was looking at the master plan for Huntley, Illinois.

The plan starts out fairly simple with a cover page and a list of everyone who had a say in the plan, including the Village President and Village Manager. It also notes two amendments from 2011 and 2012, but it does not have the original date of the plan's creation. After that, there is a table of contents. There were seven chapters in Huntley's plan: Preface, Community Goals and Objectives, Existing Conditions, Plan Recommendations, Transportation Plan, Subareas, and Implementation. There are also sections in the table of contents to point out where certain maps and figures are located.

To my surprise, the rest of the plan is also written fairly simply. There is a header indicating what each section will address, and then the text that follows flows well and is easy to understand. There isn't a lot of legal jargon, and for the most part anyone can understand what the text is indicating.

3.2.1 School District 158

One of the most important characteristics of the Village is the quality of public education. School districts in growing communities, constituted primarily of affordable single family homes typically experience substantial enrollment growth as young families move in. Unit School District 158 serves both elementary and high school students. Administrative offices are located at 12015 Mill Street in Huntley. An elementary, middle school and high school campus is located on Harmony Road. A new campus consisting of elementary and middle schools is now being constructed on Reed Road, east of Route 47. This campus falls within the corporate limits of the Village of Lake in the Hills; however, it is surrounded on two sides by the Village of Huntley.

Figure 4: Excerpt from Huntley Comprehensive Plan that shows the setup of each section.

Despite being easy to read and flowing well, the more I read the more questions I had about what I was looking at. The wording in the plan wasn't very specific and seemed more like a general outline than an official legal document. There were not a lot of numbers or set deadlines as much as just a vague description of what the town needed. At this point, I wasn't really sure what the purpose of the plan was, who was supposed to be using it, or how it was supposed to be implemented.

My confusion only grew further as I got to some of the maps. One of the older maps in the plan showed the creation of a new boulevard, but with knowledge of what the town looks like today, I know that there is currently a subdivision there, and if the road were put into place, it would go through several of the houses. After exploring the plan enough, I eventually figured out that most of the original plans were written up in 1998 and 1999 before the neighborhood was built. As seen in Figures 5 and 6, it was clear that the road wasn't meant to go through the houses, but, rather, the houses were not a part of the original plan and things had changed.

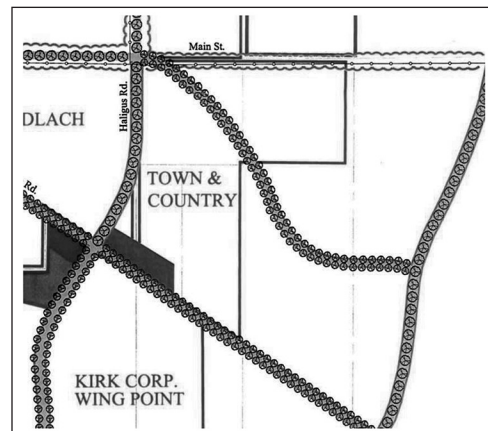


Figure 5: The original road plans from the Comprehensive Plan.



Figure 6: Present day map of the same area in Huntley. The lines marked with stars represent the planned roads that were not built and show that they would go through houses if they were built today.

Examining the plan further made me feel more confused and defeated about trying to understand what it was and what it was for. So many parts of it just didn't seem to click with what Huntley actually looks like now. Even taking into account the market crash, some of the changes were not unfinished projects, but different projects altogether that made the ones planned seem impossible. I would assume maybe it was an outdated plan, but this one had amendments from as recent as five years ago, and those were thrown in the middle of the old plan and seemed unorganized and didn't seem to match the rest of the plan. I made some guesses about why the plan was so misleading. My number one guess was that maybe the plan was written by a committee and not just one person. That could mean that different ideas were all thrown in, but not all of them were voted as a go. My only other guess was that maybe the plan wasn't law as much as it was a guideline that could be casually followed. Either way, I was confused, and I was also completely in the dark about the writing process behind making it, so I decided I needed to talk to someone with more experience in the field. Luckily, the Building Commissioner in Vernon Hills, a nearby suburb, returned my call and was willing to answer questions about the process.

Vernon Hills

I sat down with Vernon Hills Building Commissioner Mike Atkinson to ask him about the writing process that goes into making a village plan and to get help understanding what everything in these plans means. Atkinson is responsible for multiple things in regard to the village and planning, including the comprehensive plan. After giving him a little background about CHAT (cultural-historical activity theory), we started our interview by going over the writing process and some of the CHAT terms that might help explain the making of a village plan.

BRIAN: Who is involved with the production of the plan? Is it a group of people from the village or usually just one person?

ATKINSON: At staff level, it's usually the director of planning and development, who is an educated planner. He'll work with the planning and the zoning commission, and they'll look over it and review it and make a recommendation to the village board—who will make the final decision.

BRIAN: So, is the planner the only person designing the plan or do any of the others put in their own ideas?

ATKINSON: Usually the planner will put all the information together, including the village's map, and he'll point out vacant land because that's what the comprehensive plan is mostly geared to, creating a vision, so looking into the future, you can see how it's going to be developed. The map will also include areas adjacent to the village and how they will be developed if they are annexed into the village. The planning and zoning committee may make changes and, after their review, the final product will be presented to the village board.

BRIAN: In Huntley's plan, it mentions planning for school districts and other organizations. Who gets represented in the discussion, and do they get a say in any of the planning or do they usually have to wait and see what happens?

ATKINSON: They're usually included in the discussion. They'll be notified of when the planning and zoning commissions take place, and they will have an opportunity to voice any opinions or concerns they have.

BRIAN: Looking at Huntley's plan, it doesn't seem very formal. How serious is the implementation of the plan taken?

ATKINSON: Plans are meant to be used as a guide. It's not meant to say, "This is what's going to happen at this property." It's used as a tool mostly by staff so that when a developer comes in and says, "I want to develop this land and annex it into your village," staff can go to this comprehensive plan and look at it and say, "The village board has already set a vision for this property and that is for it to be residential." So, if they come in and say they want to make it a retail store, the village can show them their vision of it being residential. If they do propose a residential plan, that's where you'll get into the fine details. So, this by design is pretty conceptual.

BRIAN: Are the plans distributed village-wide or do they usually just stay with the planner until they need to be opened for reference?

ATKINSON: We make them available. The public hearing takes place and the announcements are put on the village website and in the newspapers, which is required by law. Then the information is made available at Village Hall, so if someone wanted to come in and see the information, they could. They can also always show up to the public hearings and listen.

BRIAN: So, is the actual writing of the document done just by the planner?

ATKINSON: Yeah, and the commissioners will recommend changes or give direction to the village planner, but the writing tends to stay with the planner.

BRIAN: So, the plan works as a guideline, but I know, for example, that Huntley's plan is written for about up to twenty years. Do they make a new plan every twenty years or just amend the old plan?

ATKINSON: Vernon Hills updates their plan every ten years, which is typical. Twenty years seems like a long time to wait to update. They may have a twenty-year vision, but they'll probably update it sooner.

BRIAN: That makes more sense now because in this plan there are updates from 2011 and 2012.

ATKINSON: That would make sense. If it originated in 1998 and they're amending it in 2011, that's normal.

BRIAN: How does the natural environment interfere or change plans?

ATKINSON: If there's an environmentally sensitive area in the village or if one could be annexed into the village, the comprehensive plan would have language on how to control that.

BRIAN: I know here in Vernon Hills, Lake Michigan is used as a direct source for village water. Is that put into the comprehensive plan or is that a separate issue?

ATKINSON: Separate issue. If a village were using wells to serve its citizens' water, that could be in a long-term plan. In Vernon Hills, we have Lake Michigan water already, so that's not an issue we'd address.

With the understanding I gained from asking Atkinson questions, I was able to easily see how I could apply CHAT to the plans. The production of a plan is done by a smaller group, and a planner works on it along with the planning and zoning commission. Other groups like school districts, the park district, public works, and others are still included as their input and comments are accepted and reviewed by the planners. The plans are distributed around the village when they are needed. Since the plan is more of a guideline and not a set-in-stone plan, usually if someone needs them they will have to ask for them. The plans are also made public, and any member of the public is able to access them. Reception varies based on what the plan is saying and who is reviewing the plan. For example, a park district may like a plan that marks a lot of areas for reserves and parklands, whereas a commercial developer may not like that at all. All groups have access to review the plan, as the meeting where it's reviewed is public. After the plan is adopted, the socialization of the plan can be fairly private because of the fact that the plans are often only looked at when someone is trying to build something, and they aren't usually spread around the village otherwise. While they are just a guideline, the activities done in both creating

and implementing the plan can be very important, as they direct what the village would like to be done with each section of the village. Ecology affects the plans in a pretty straightforward way as they can be used to protect or preserve certain lands. But, they can also detail how nearby resources are going to be used by the town, like water sources in the town (showing how ecology impacts the development of the plans overall).

Along with answering the CHAT questions, I walked through Huntley's plan with Atkinson and went over some of the confusion I had with the map. As far as 2011 and 2012 amendments being mixed in with the original plan, Atkinson said that was probably just poor organization when creating the PDF. After talking with Atkinson, the Huntley plan made a lot more sense. Looking at the plan as a guideline, the language makes much more sense rather than if it were a law. It also explains why certain plans like roads were never implemented and why subdivisions filled their place. The size of Huntley's plan also made much more sense given that these plans tend to focus on empty land and Huntley was fairly rural in 1998.

Chicago

Knowing more about how the plans work after going through Huntley's plan, I decided to revisit the Burnham Plan and see what similarities it had to Huntley's and what the differences were. Since I was unable to find the full plan online, I decided to check and see if it was available at the library, and sure enough it was. Immediately upon opening the book I noticed similarities between the Plan of Chicago and Huntley's Comprehensive Plan. The table of contents at the beginning was nearly identical, dividing the plan into different subsections. Each plan had a separate section to point out maps and figures.

Understanding the plan as a guideline also made much more sense. Most of the plan looks foreign to modern-day Chicago. It contains ideas such as a civic center, a second pier the size of Navy Pier, and a road layout that doesn't even resemble the modern city. Looking at the plan as a guideline, you can see why certain things didn't go through. For one, in 1909 the growth of the automobile was probably not considered, and its rise must have had a huge impact on roadways in the city. Figure 7 shows the original plans for the roadway meant for pedestrians. For the most part, the plan's layout stayed identical to Huntley's for most of the book. Based on the influence the Burnham Plan had, it would make sense why other towns, especially those in the shadow of Chicago, would try to copy its writing and design tactics.



Figure 7: Image of roadway from the Plan of Chicago showing the emphasis of foot travel over cars, most likely a leading factor of why it was not fully implemented.

Conclusion

After researching the work and planning that goes into making a town, driving down the streets feels different. It's amazing to pass neighborhoods or stores and know that there was a plan in place to make sure it all fit and created a town that was functional and well designed for the people who live there. In Huntley, the cut-off streets and empty fields are not as depressing to look at anymore because I know that the village's plans for that land will evolve as time goes on and that they will create a space that they think is best for the village. Not only has this research allowed me to appreciate the writing and work that goes into the design of a town, but it also makes me think about the other crucial designing that goes into everything else in life that isn't given a second glance.

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Brian Zimmerman is a freshman at Illinois State University studying history social-sciences education. He enjoys history, politics, music, and Chicago sports teams. He spent the last night of writing this article watching the Blackhawks lose Game 3 to Nashville and was very upset.

Not Just Skills: Writing, Research, and Character

Jeff Rients

In this research report, Jeff Rients narrates his attempt to find out about the connection (if any) between success as a writer/researcher and Character Strengths. He describes his survey tool and results, discovering that many different Character Strengths can play into successful writing and research, but some strengths are valued more than others.

What I Wanted to Know

Nearly everyone you know is a writer. You're a writer, too. Have you ever made a shopping list or texted a friend? That's writing. Similarly, nearly everyone is a researcher. You ever bargain shop, comparing prices among multiple vendors? Or have you ever looked up something on Wikipedia to settle an argument? Congratulations, you did some research.

But, as much as I truly believe that we're all writers and researchers, the common understanding is that many people are writers but only some people are capital double-u "Writers." And we may all do research, but the general belief is that only some people are "Researchers." What is the difference between ordinary writers/researchers and those special people we somehow agree are "real" Writers and Researchers?

There are lots of possible ways to answer this question. Perhaps those special Writers have way more experience at writing than the rest of us, but I'm not so sure. There are lots of examples of great wordsmiths dying young.

Perhaps success at getting your work published magically turns you into a Writer. But in this era of widespread digital publishing, does that mean more people get to be Writers thanks to the Internet? I have my doubts. Technical skill at crafting interesting texts is often suggested as the key to being a Writer, but I suspect that presents an incomplete picture as well. I won't name names, but there sure seem to be a lot of celebrated Writers whose books seem like crap to me. That's a personal opinion, but I stand by it.

Here's what I think: Writers are Writers and Researchers are Researchers because of the kind of people they are, in terms of temperament. That is to say, I believe that the content of their character is at least as important to their success as their ability to string words together into coherent sentences, or their skill at discovering new facts through systematic investigation. I suspect this is the case because even many people who are competent at writing and research seem to avoid these tasks, while examples abound of people with less-than-excellent technical skills who still manage to hold down jobs that require these skills.

By the word *character* I mean “positive traits” that “allow us to acknowledge and explain . . . features of a good life,” as defined by Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman in their 2004 work *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (12). Peterson and Seligman provide a systematic framework to understanding character. As the result of research that looks at human values across cultures and throughout history, Peterson and Seligman propose a classification scheme consisting of twenty-four distinct Character Strengths.¹

To test this hypothesis—that character counts when writing and researching—I put together a survey.

How I Tried to Find Out

My Survey

I created a survey using Google Forms, a free tool available as part of the suite of online applications tied to Google Drive. The survey consisted of 7 questions, made available as 4 sections (separate screens):

¹Thanks to Jim Almeda, Kerrie Calvert, and Lyla Ramires of Illinois State's Health Promotion and Wellness Unit, as well as Phyllis McCluskey-Titus of ISU's School of Educational Administration and Foundations. Their workshop “Incorporating Concepts of Character into Your Classes” introduced me to the Peterson and Seligman schema and provided an important venue for thinking through this research project.

Section/Screen 1

Q1: In a word or phrase, describe your current profession.

Q2: Do you do any form of writing as a regular part of practicing your profession? (Please consider “writing” broadly here. For example, if you regularly make a to-do list for that day’s activities, that counts as writing.)

- Yes, I write at work.
- No, I never write in my job.

Q3: Do you do any form of research as a regular part of practicing your profession? (As with the previous question, please consider “research” broadly. For example, if you sometimes look up a part number in a catalog to order a new one, that is a form of research.)

- Yes, I do research at work.
- No, I never do research in my job.

Section/Screen 2

Q4: Do you think of yourself as a **W**riter with a capital double-u?

- Yes.
- No. I may write, but other people are Writers.

Q5: Do you think of yourself as a **R**esearcher?

- Yes.
- No. I may do research, but other people are Researchers.

Section/Screen 3

Q6: Which of the following Character Strengths do you think are most important to a successful WRITER? Please check no more than FIVE.

- Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence/Awe/Wonder
- Bravery/Valor
- Creativity/Originality/Ingenuity
- Curiosity/Interest/Novelty-seeking/Openness to experience
- Fairness
- Forgiveness
- Gratitude
- Honesty/Authenticity/Integrity
- Hope/Optimism/Future-mindedness
- Humility
- Humor/Playfulness
- Judgment/Critical thinking
- Kindness/Generosity/Care/Compassion/Niceness
- Leadership
- Love
- Love of Learning
- Perseverance/Persistence/Industriousness
- Perspective/Wisdom
- Prudence
- Self-Regulation/Self-Control
- Social Intelligence/Emotional Intelligence/Personal Intelligence
- Spirituality/Faith/Purpose
- Teamwork/Citizenship/Social Responsibility/Loyalty
- Zest/Vitality/Enthusiasm/Vigor/Energy

Although listed alphabetically here, the order of presentation for each user was randomly generated to prevent biasing the results toward the items at the top of the list. (This is why many ballots list candidates in random order rather than alphabetically; otherwise Aaron Aaronson would get an unfair advantage at the polls.) A note at the bottom of the screen directed anyone confused by any of the categories to a link leading to *The VIA Classification of Character Strengths*, a two-page document briefly defining each of the twenty-four Character Strengths identified by Peterson and Seligman. Another way of stating my research question, therefore, is “Which of the twenty-four Peterson/Seligman Character Strengths are most important to successful Writers and Researchers?”

Section/Screen 4

Q7: Which of the following Character Strengths do you think are most important to a successful RESEARCHER? Please check no more than FIVE.

[The same list appears here as for question 6, in a randomly generated order independent of the order of the previous list. The same note linking to the same explanatory document appeared at the bottom of the screen.]

Note: No personal identifying data was collected or stored as part of this survey. There is no way to connect the answers to any individual who took the survey.

How I Got the Word Out

On the Saturday morning after I finished drafting the survey, I posted a link to it in three different online venues: Facebook, Google Plus, and my personal blog. The message at all three venues read as follows:

Howdy, friends!

I'm doing an informal research project in the lead up to teaching First Year Composition in the fall. If you do ANY sort of writing OR research as part of your profession, please consider following this link to a brief survey:

[link appeared here]

No personal info is being collected as part of this research. Thanks in advance for all your help!

The total number of *possible* respondents is difficult to estimate. I have 365 Facebook friends, my Google Plus account has 2,841 followers, and 761 people subscribe to my personal blog. Since there is some degree of overlap of the three audiences, the total initial reach of the survey was less than 3,967 people, but more than 2,841. Furthermore, three Facebook friends and a Google Plus follower took it upon themselves to reshare the message. Also, my blog is syndicated to a small blogging network, the total readership of which is unclear to me.

The Raw Data

Two days after I posted the survey, I checked for responses. I had hoped for maybe 20 responses, so imagine my joy when I had 127 total sets of answers! Thanks to an option in Google Forms, survey responses are automatically dumped into a Google Spreadsheet, which time stamps each entry. The full data set (including any new additions; the survey remains open) can be found here: tinyurl.com/yauqrt32.

In order to count the items in questions 6 and 7, I copied the relevant column of data into a new Google Doc. I then used the Find (ctrl-f) function to search for each Character Strength. This function automatically returns the number of times the search term is found in the document. Because the word “love” is both one of the Character Strengths and also part of the phrase “Love of Learning,” I had to read every entry containing the word Love and do a manual count. As I was crunching the data for question 6, I received an additional response, which was incorporated into the data set for question 7.

What I Discovered

A summary of the Character Strengths of Writers as selected by the first 127 people to respond can be found listed on Figure 1.

Figure 2 shows what the same 127 people plus the one extra (mentioned above), picked as their top five Character Strengths for Researchers.

I suspect that there are lots of other questions that could be asked about my data set. Is there any connection between the profession of the respondent and their selected Character Strengths? Do some Character Strengths cluster together? For example, Fairness, Teamwork, and Social Intelligence might tend to appear together in the same answers for question 7, possibly because those respondents thought about research as a group activity.

Reported Character Strengths of Writers

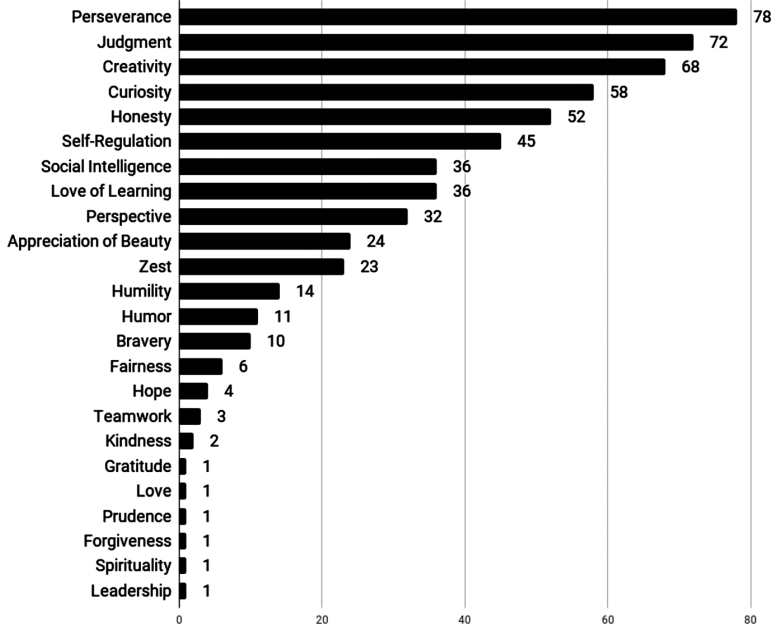


Figure 1: Reported Character Strengths of writers.

Reported Character Strengths of Researchers

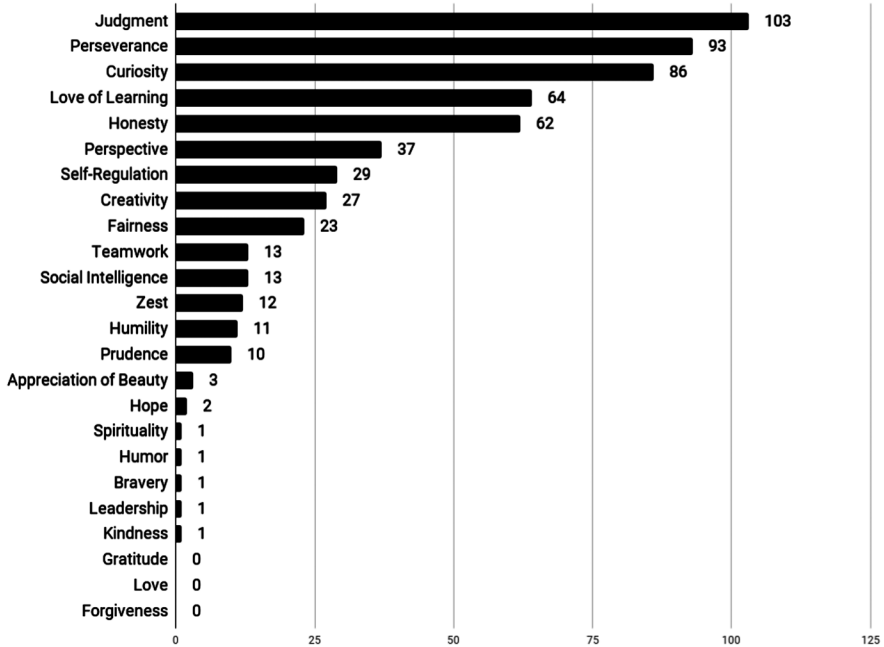


Figure 2: Reported Character Strengths of researchers.

What I Think It Means

Looking at Figure 1, a consensus profile for a successful Writer seems to emerge. Taken as a whole, my respondents clearly favored Perseverance, Judgment, Creativity, Curiosity, and Honesty as the most important Character Strengths for Writers. Not only does this seem to support my hypothesis that certain personality traits can be linked to success at writing, it gives us an idea as to what those personality traits might be.

I was not surprised to find Creativity among the top answers, because I think when you say Writer a lot of people imagine a novelist or other creative type. But I didn't expect for Perseverance and Judgment to be more popular choices. In our culture, we tend to think of Creativity as some sort of magical power that you either have or you don't. Good Judgment and Perseverance aren't made of pixie dust, nor are they obviously directly connected to writing in the same way you can draw a bright line from Creativity to a successful novel or screenplay or whatever. There's a lesson here, I think. Hard work and critical thinking skills are even more important to success as a Writer than whether or not you are a creative artistic type.

I also find it interesting that every single Character Strength is represented in that first batch of responses. For every one of Peterson and Seligman's Character Strengths, there was at least one person who considered it important to being a successful Writer. Looking at the raw data, all but one of those 127 people considered themselves a small double-u writer.² That suggests to me that the outliers (i.e. the individual people who suggested Gratitude, Love, Prudence, Forgiveness, Spirituality, or Leadership) aren't *wrong*. They just draw on different Character Strengths when they write. Or else they've observed that strength in a Writer they admire.

Looking at Figure 2, the Character Strengths of Love, Gratitude, and Forgiveness found no supporters. Apart from those three, the range of Character Strengths associated with the successful Researcher was nearly as varied as those for Writers. Perseverance and Judgment again emerged as the top two Character Strengths, only with their relative positions on the list reversed. Instead of Creativity in the number 3 spot on the list, though, we find Curiosity, followed by Love of Learning and Honesty.

These top Character Strengths for Researchers make a lot of sense to me. Research is often a long, laborious pursuit of new knowledge. Sometimes only tenacity and love of what you're doing will carry you to the end. And

²The lone exception self-identified as a Graphic Designer.

truthfully reporting your results guarantees that your research will contribute to the ongoing project of building a better, smarter world.

By the way, if you are interested in seeing how your Character Strengths match up with these survey results, try the Values In Action Character Strength survey at www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths-Survey.³ The results will order the 24 Character Traits, ranking them from those you most closely identify with to those that are less developed in you personally. Maybe some of them will line up with the top Character Strengths for a Writer or a Researcher. Or maybe you'll need to figure out a way to turn your own Character Strengths to your advantage when you write and research.

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³You'll have to register for an account, but they don't seem to be flooding my email with messages or anything like that.



Jeff Rients is a doctoral candidate in Illinois State University's English Studies program, where he studies the impact of changes in printing technique and technology on the formation of authorship in 19th century British literature. He splits his time between the English department and ISU's Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology, where he creates materials and programming for faculty development. When not working, he spends his time watching cartoons with his daughter or playing *Dungeons & Dragons*.

Coming Soon to Theaters: The Evolution of Horror Movie Posters

Karishma Verma

In this article, Karishma Verma uses the techniques of genre analysis to explore the evolution of horror movie posters. By looking into the history and examples of horror movie posters across time, she suggests that this seemingly simple genre actually involves more complexity than we think. From her findings, Verma reflects on how the choices that go into creating a horror movie poster can impact a viewer's perception of the movie.

You have probably seen them hung up outside of movie theaters letting everyone know about the upcoming attractions. When you walk inside to buy an overpriced ticket or popcorn, they are also lined up across the walls, strikingly darker than the other ones. Perhaps you aren't usually drawn to scary movies, but you cannot help but look at them due to the contrast against the others. If you haven't guessed by now, I am talking about horror movie posters.

Last year, I saw a post on Tumblr showing how all of the latest horror movie posters look the same—dark background, a creepy figure or person lurking in the foreground, and words such as “terrifying” bolded in a contrasting font. As someone who typically does not enjoy modern horror movies (they tend to make me laugh rather than cause me to have nightmares), I found this Tumblr post to be evidence as to why all current horror movies are the same. Fast-forward to two months ago, I saw the same post again online. Upon seeing it a second time, I thought about how this compared to classic horror movies. You see, I am a fan of classic horror and suspenseful movies.



Figure 1: Movie posters for *The Birds* and *The Witch*. Retrieved from *IMDB.com*.

In other words, if I see that Netflix has added an Alfred Hitchcock film to their instant streaming catalog, you can bet that I'm adding it to my queue! For this article, I decided to examine a question that sparked an interest in me ever since I saw the social media post—how have horror movie posters evolved across time?

Specifically, I decided to look at visual aspects (i.e., taglines, pictures, font size, background color) of horror movie posters and how these features have changed. To remind myself of what current horror movie posters look like, I decided to go to a couple of movie theaters in the Bloomington-Normal, IL area to check out the upcoming attractions that were displayed outside of the theater.

Coming to a Theater Near You



Figure 2: Poster for *Blair Witch*. Retrieved from *IMDB.com*.

I started my journey at AMC Starplex Cinemas in Normal on a September afternoon. It's important to note that since it was September, there was the annual surge of horror movies and re-makes being featured just in time for Halloween in the upcoming month. The first horror movie poster that was featured outside of the theater was *Blair Witch* (Figure 2), which is the sequel to the 1999 film *The Blair Witch Project*. The first visual aspect that I noticed was the sharp contrast between the bright red background of the poster and the black tree branches extending into the sky. The font color

for the text on the poster matched the tree branches, and the title of the movie was in all caps. Just by looking at the poster and not having any prior knowledge about *The Blair Witch Project* franchise, I figured that the setting for this movie was probably going to be in a forest or in the woods. Looking under the movie title, I discovered that I was right! The tagline, or the movie's slogan, said in all caps, "THERE IS SOMETHING EVIL HIDING IN THE WOODS." I also noted that unlike the movie posters that were featured outside of the theater for other movie genres, such as romances or comedies, the *Blair Witch* poster did not feature any of the actors' names.

The second horror movie poster that was displayed outside the theater was for *Don't Breathe* (Figure 3). This poster also had a bit of contrast in terms

of the colors. Similar to what I saw in that Tumblr post, the background color for *Don't Breathe's* poster is black. Both the image in the foreground and the text are a little bit brighter with hues of red and yellow, but the poster still seems to be screaming, "Hey, this is a horror movie!" The image on the poster is a woman with her mouth covered by someone else's hands, which goes along with the title of the movie. The text on this poster was also in all caps but was different than *Blair Witch* in that this poster had a tagline that read, "FROM THE CREATORS OF *EVIL DEAD*," followed by reviews for the movie. I noticed that the reviews on the poster put certain words in a larger font, such as "RELENTLESS HORROR MOVIES" and "VIOLENCE THAT'LL HAVE YOU SQUIRMING."



Figure 3: Poster for *Don't Breathe*. Retrieved from *IMDB.com*.

It seemed that the creators of these horror movie posters took into account the reception of the posters. Under the model of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) in Joyce Walker's article "Just CHATting," **reception** deals with how the audience perceives the text and how it can influence them (75). These posters are typically displayed both inside and outside of a movie theater amongst other posters. In order to stand out from the other posters so that people who are coming and going from the theater take a second to look at it, it seems that the dark backgrounds and scary/creepy images work to pop out from the romance or action movie posters. In my case, I was able to tell that these were horror movies just by glancing at them. Even the text displayed on the posters can give even the casual observer knowledge of what to expect from the movie. These particular posters displayed words such as, "evil," "relentless," "violence," and "squirming." I noticed that they seem to promise moviegoers the fact that they will be frightened.

Once I got a sense of the horror movies featured at AMC Starplex in Normal, I decided to venture to Wehrenberg Theaters in Bloomington. This theater also had similar movie posters as Starplex's, including *Blair Witch* and *Don't Breathe*. Since I couldn't find any other horror movie posters prominently displayed at Wehrenberg (or at the Normal Theater where I went shortly afterwards), I thought that I could do some online research and also explore some posters from older horror films.

You Can't Beat the Classics

The website that I took a look at was Rotten Tomatoes, which is known for film reviews and its "Tomatometer" that measures the quality of movies and TV shows based on both critic and audience ratings. I felt a bit overwhelmed



Figure 4: Poster for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. Retrieved from *IMDB.com*.

looking at all of the horror movies featured on the website, so I decided to search for the top-rated horror movies in order to narrow down my search. The top-rated horror movie on Rotten Tomatoes is the 1920 silent film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, with a Tomatometer rating of 100%. After looking at current horror movie posters, I could immediately see some noticeable similarities and differences. The poster for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Figure 4) also has a dark background (surprise, surprise!), with a contrasting foreground image and font. One difference that I first noticed was the fact that this poster featured a creepy-looking man carrying a woman in the dark. Unlike *Blair Witch* and *Don't Breathe*, the “villain” character of the movie is displayed right on the movie poster. The typography of the title only has certain words in all caps to grab our attention instead of all words, yet it is still in a creepy font. For this particular poster, there was no tagline.



Figure 5: Poster for *Psycho*. Retrieved from *IMDB.com*.

The next poster that I looked at was rated #5 on the Rotten Tomatoes list of top-rated horror movies, which was the 1960 film *Psycho* (Figure 5) that was released exactly 40 years after *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. *Psycho* is not only one of my favorite Alfred Hitchcock films, but it is also one of my favorite horror films in general. This movie poster struck me as particularly interesting because it uses colors outside of the blacks, grays, and reds that I was seeing from the previous posters. Since this article will be printed in black-and-white, let me describe the colors to you. While there is

a black background, the side of the poster with the names of the actors, director, and studio has a bright blue background. The title of the movie is in a bright yellow font, and the actors featured on the poster have color filters over their pictures. I thought that it was fascinating to see how the “victim” of the movie had a bright yellow filter over her picture while the “villain” of the movie had a brown filter over his picture. Even if you have never seen this film before, you can visually see who is the victim and who is the villain with just glancing at the poster—a similar tactic used in the modern posters I examined but in a different way.

The title of the movie, *Psycho*, is seen as having been ripped like a piece of paper, which is distinct from the other posters that do not alter the typography too much. The other noticeable difference in this poster compared to the others I analyzed was that *Psycho*'s poster displays names in a way that sticks out. This particular poster features names of the actors in the film, the director, as well as the studio. In addition to this, the last names of these people are in a slightly bigger font than their first names. This is a

film directed by Alfred Hitchcock, whose name has been popularized by his previously successful films. Due to this, the representation is aimed toward moviegoers who are a fan of Hitchcock's previous work. **Representation** deals with the ways people who produce a text think about it as well as all of the activities that help make the creation of the text successful (Walker 75). It seems that *Psycho*'s movie poster has the goal of generating excitement among audiences. This is also prevalent in the tagline for the movie, "A new—and altogether different—screen excitement!!!" With the word "excitement" and the multiple exclamation marks, this movie poster wants to create buzz for Hitchcock's new film, to say the least. The goal of exciting moviegoers also contrasts with the modern movie posters in that they are not outwardly trying to scare or creep out audiences with the poster since putting certain names on the poster, such as Hitchcock's, already promises that the film will be frightening.

In other words, the representation has changed. While early horror movie posters implemented the technique of drawing audiences in by emphasizing a director's name or using particular buzzwords, modern horror movie posters rely more on including explicitly "creepy" images to represent their films. This may also play a role in the reception of these movie posters as well. It seems that as time goes on, moviegoers are more acquainted with the horror movie genre than they may have been at the beginning of the 20th century. Due to this, the producers of the movie posters want to utilize other ways of grabbing attention through creating more frightening, straightforward imagery. For instance, instead of listing the names of A-list actors, a modern horror movie poster might include an image of an eerie forest.

After examining *Psycho*'s movie poster, I began to wonder whether or not emphasizing the names of the actors, director, or studio was the norm back in the 1960s. I decided to take a look at the #7 top-rated horror movie on the Rotten Tomatoes list. *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) is another one of my favorite classic horror movies, so I was curious to see how the layout of this poster compared to *Psycho*'s poster since these movies were released eight years apart. Unlike *Psycho*'s movie poster, *Rosemary's Baby* (Figure 6) sticks to eerily dark colors. The majority of the background of the poster is green and has the lead actress featured prominently. Under this is a black background with a silhouette of a baby carriage and the tagline for the movie, "Pray for Rosemary's Baby," in white font. While this portion of the movie poster is visually dark, the bottom of the poster is white and has black text that states the name of the lead actress, the production company, and the Paramount logo.



Figure 6: Poster for *Rosemary's Baby*. Retrieved from [IMDB.com](https://www.imdb.com).

Although it may not be as outwardly obvious as *Psycho*'s poster, it seems that this movie poster also wants to let certain names speak for themselves. It seems that the two names the people who created the movie poster for *Rosemary's Baby* wanted moviegoers to know about were Mia Farrow, a popular actress in the 1960s, and Paramount Pictures, which is the studio that produced the movie. I could not help but be curious as to why names aren't an integral part of horror movie posters as much as they used to be during the '60s. Surely, there are still big names associated with current horror movies. So why aren't they such a focal point for movie posters anymore? I turned to scholars to answer this question.

Studio's Choice

I went to Illinois State University's Milner Library online article search to find articles that could help me answer my question. After a while of not generating any results from searching terms such as "movie poster promotion," "movie poster production," and "1960s movie posters," I thought that maybe I was being too specific with my search. As a last-ditch effort to finding some results, I searched the term "movie poster tagline." This is where I found the article, "Three Words to Tell a Story: The Movie Poster Tagline" by Johannes Mahlkecht. I found that this article was a particularly excellent resource to look into not only the history and rhetoric of the movie tagline, but also to explore the information major studios wanted to provide for moviegoers. Success!

According to Mahlkecht, the main reason why taglines promoted both studios and the actors more "aggressively" in the past was due to the rise and fall of the major studio system. The major companies that ruled Hollywood during this time, such as Fox, MGM, Paramount, etc., had control over the actors, directors, distributors, and movie theaters. "Each studio had its own image to defend and to advertise. And since actors were contractually bound to a particular studio, selling their names and trying to increase their popularity was, for studios as well as actors, an investment that ideally paid off in later productions" (Mahlkecht 417). This explained why the movie posters for *Psycho* and *Rosemary's Baby* seemed to draw my attention to the names featured on the poster. During this time period when studios had control over the people involved in making and distributing movies, the movie posters were impacted by **ecology**, which involves the biological and environmental forces that exist and impact many factors of the text (Walker 76). Not only are the movie posters trying to sell the moviegoers the movie itself, but they are also trying to sell the names of the actors in the film (Mia Farrow, for example) as well as the names of the directors (Alfred Hitchcock) due to their contractual obligations.

I also thought it was interesting how Mahlknecht points out how movie taglines tend to utilize one of five appeals—story, genre, stardom, quality, and technical achievements. “Tagline writers choose to focus on the one element of the film they believe has the most potential to draw audiences. And while a tagline may relate to two or even all three of the above appeals simultaneously, one usually dominates. The tagline for a film with an unknown cast, for instance, will seldom refer to the lead actors. Instead, it will address genre or story elements” (Mahlknecht 415). I wanted to see whether or not this idea of using one of five appeals when writing taglines remained consistent over time, so I continued viewing movie posters on Rotten Tomatoes. I looked at the #24 top-rated horror movie, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) (Figure 7). This 30-year jump from the previous two posters proved to seem more similar to the two current movie posters I saw at Starplex. There are some pops of color on this poster with the eyes of the person featured, the insect on their mouth, and the title for the movie all in an amber color. Unlike the current posters, the names of the lead actors are on this one. I suspect that this is probably because it features a popular actress, Jodie Foster. The tagline on this poster of *The Silence of the Lambs* says, “from the terrifying best seller.” Going off of the appeals used in Mahlknecht’s article, it seems that this poster uses the stardom appeal in order to draw audiences in since it highlights the fact that particular actors are in the movie as well as the fact that this movie is from a “terrifying” best-selling novel.



Figure 7: Poster for *The Silence of the Lambs*. Retrieved from [IMDB.com](https://www.imdb.com).

I also found the 1999 movie *The Blair Witch Project* on the Rotten Tomatoes list at #62. Since I looked at the movie poster for its sequel, *Blair Witch*, I was curious to see if the posters were similar. While the poster for *The Blair Witch Project* (Figure 8) had the continuation of a black background with a couple of images (a forest and half of a person’s face) similar to the previous posters, this one had more text on it in terms of the tagline. This tagline reads, “In October of 1994, three student filmmakers disappeared in the woods near Burkittsville, Maryland while shooting a documentary. . . . A year later their footage was found.”



Figure 8: Poster for *The Blair Witch Project*. Retrieved from [IMDB.com](https://www.imdb.com).

It was interesting to see how the current movie, *Blair Witch*, used a genre appeal tagline where it used certain words to indicate that it was a horror movie. *The Blair Witch Project*, on the other hand, uses a story appeal in order to explain the plot to moviegoers. I figure that this discrepancy is because *Blair Witch* is a sequel of an established movie, so viewers may already know what

to expect. The goal for the sequel would probably be to just communicate to moviegoers that the sequel to this popular horror film is now in theaters. This differs from the goal of *The Blair Witch Project* movie poster, which seems to be to introduce audiences to a creepy story where they have to watch the movie in order to find out what happens.

Evolution of Fear

This exploration to see how the genre of horror movie posters has evolved across time was fascinating to me since I honestly did not expect there to be so much change. I always thought, “A horror movie is a horror movie, right? The elements must be similar!” It was interesting to see how the concept of fear has changed within horror movie posters in terms of how the movie poster creators used to outwardly display the villain (e.g., monster, the killer, etc.) to today where audiences have become familiar with these tactics and expect more ambiguous, yet creepy images on horror movie posters (e.g., a person with their mouth covered, trees in a dark forest, etc.).

I also did not expect to see much of an evolution in the color and typography used, especially since my **antecedent knowledge**, or prior knowledge, involved viewing a Tumblr post about how most modern horror movie posters look the same. As horror movie poster creators have become more drawn to the idea of whether or not a movie will terrify moviegoers versus selling who is in the movie, the utilization of intimidating fonts and typing words in all caps is now a norm. While I am still not a big fan of modern horror movies, you better believe that I will now have the compulsion to stop and look at horror movie posters whenever I go to the theaters, regardless of whether or not I am there to have a terrifying experience.

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The Global Positioning System: Or, In Other Words, the ‘Getting People *Somewhere*’ Device

Lexi Horras

Fasten your seatbelts, kiddos. We’re going on an adventure. In this article, Lexi Horras discusses cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) by picking apart the foundation of mobile GPS apps while sharing one of her own relatively comical personal experiences.

In half a mile, turn right onto Old Troy Road and make a U-turn.

“Shut *UP*,” my sister exclaimed, glaring at the device in her hands. Turning to me, she said, “I’m tired of being in this car. Let’s just go home.”

I could hear the desperation in her voice, and for a brief moment, I genuinely considered doing so. I was exhausted, hungry, and wanted nothing more than to lay down and relax, but despite all of these things, I was still determined to find the abandoned, graffitied bridge a mutual friend of ours had discovered and talked so highly of in the past. I initially thought this excursion would be fun, given our adventurous personalities, but somehow our originally seventeen-minute planned journey had quickly (and unexpectedly) turned into a forty-two-minute frenzy of frustration and pounding headaches.

It didn’t start off that way though. As we normally would do when trying to find a new place for the very first time, we punched the address that had been given to us into the mobile GPS app on our phones and hoped for the

best. Our only real job was to keep our eyes peeled and drive to wherever the monotonic, electronical female voice told us to go. Turn left here. Make a right there. Take another right after that one. Sounds simple enough, right? No. Wrong. You see, despite how convenient this mobile GPS app might have been to us during our previous endeavors, it failed to consider that certain roads had been closed or ceased to exist and did not provide us with alternative routes. For the first time (and certainly not the last time), technology had let us down, and being the two teenaged girls with absolutely no sense of direction that we were, we did not know which way to go.

At the time of this strenuous situation, I did not know what CHAT (cultural-historical activity theory) was. If you had tried to explain this theoretical framework to me while I was driving around those never-ending back roads and beaten-up dirt paths that particularly cloudy afternoon, I probably would have glared at you or have let out an aggravated sigh (or both, if I'm going to be honest) because key concepts such as production, reception, and ecology would have been some of the last things I would have wanted to talk about. Now, after taking an English 101 course at Illinois State University, I have a better understanding as to what these terms mean and can now apply them to that unforgettable journey that I had with my sister in a secondhand, golden SUV, much older than ourselves. In this article, I will discuss the importance of CHAT by picking apart the overall function and usage of a mobile GPS app while telling the tale of my wearisome quest to find a pretty and colorful bridge.

“This Thing Doesn’t Even Work, I Swear,” My Sister Insisted

Before I sat down and began working on this *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* article, I did not know anything about the GPS. Well, sort of. I knew that if I typed in where I wanted to go, it would get me to my destination one way or another. But aside from that, I was ignorant of the device. I did not know how it knew which roads to take, when there was traffic, or which landscapes were parks while others were lakes. I didn't even know what the letters in GPS stood for. Later, however, after reading an article published by an unknown author on the official NASA Space Place government website, I learned that the GPS, which is short for Global Positioning System, is comprised of three different parts: satellites, ground stations, and receivers (Figure 1). According to NASA, the location of these satellites is known at any given time. Ground stations use radar to confirm their locations, and receivers such as our phones constantly search for signals given off from these satellites. If multiple signals are found, the receivers can calculate and ultimately determine how far away they are from the satellites they contacted. In seconds, they can pinpoint our

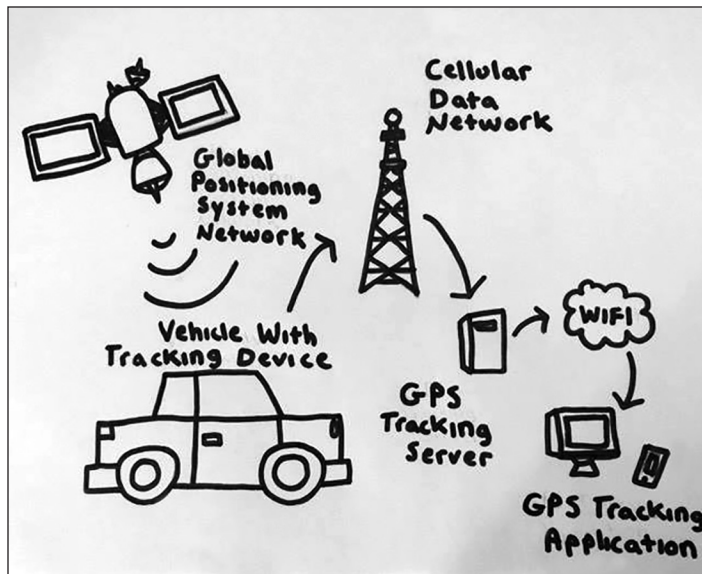


Figure 1: Diagram of how a vehicle with a built-in GPS can be tracked.

exact location in the world. It's a bit unnerving, if you ask me. Try not to think about it too much.

But how does this have anything to do with CHAT, you might ask? Production.

Production, one of the categories (or “chategories”) that pertain to CHAT, refers to all the little things involved in creating a certain type of piece or text. For example, as I write this, I am using my Dell laptop to type my thoughts and ideas onto a document that can be found in my Google Drive while I lay comfily in bed with a plate of cheese and crackers at my side. If it weren't for these personal and necessary resources, my article probably would have never been completed. Now, referring to my research, a lot goes into the production of creating an overall reliable GPS. In addition to the satellites, ground stations, and receivers that I mentioned previously, many other important factors such as the people who work at these stations and the tools or other forms of technology that they use to build these complicated devices are also crucial to the proper functioning of a successful GPS model.

“On the Map It Looks Like I’m Supposed to Turn Left, But It’s Telling Me to Go Right,” I Sighed, Melodramatically

Now that I have *explored* production, I will move on to representation and reception. While **representation** refers to the way in which information is

presented to an audience, **reception** is how a consumer perceives or interacts with a certain type of piece or text. Because these two CHAT factors are so closely related, they tend to overlap and affect one another. Now, for the sake of the discussion of these two “categories,” I will refer specifically to the mobile GPS “Maps” app that is automatically programmed into iPhone generations 4 through 7 (Figure 2). When users first click on this app, they are immediately given the options to search for a place or address and to select whether they are traveling by foot, transit, or car. If they tap on the ⓘ icon found in the top right-hand corner, they will be directed to a “Maps Settings” page where they can decide if they want to mark their location, add a place to their directory, and if they want traffic to be considered when choosing which route would be the fastest and most convenient (Figure 3). In addition to these settings, consumers can also choose which map layout they want to use. They have three options: Map, Transit, and Satellite. Map is simple and consists of town names and lines that symbolize roads. Although it does not look like much, each line is a pathway that leads to a new destination, a new adventure. Transit is like Map, but includes Amtrak routes as well. Lastly, Satellite displays a map composed of real-life, 2-D satellite images of actual buildings, roads, and other natural landscapes. Examples can be seen in Figure 4 on the next page.

Manufacturers ensured that “Maps” was user-friendly by not over complicating things or adding unnecessary components simply because they knew consumers would not use the app if it was inaccurate or was difficult to comprehend. As I briefly mentioned in the previous paragraph, representation and reception may influence one another because they are both concerned with how an individual visualizes and interprets a piece of



Figure 2: “Maps” app.

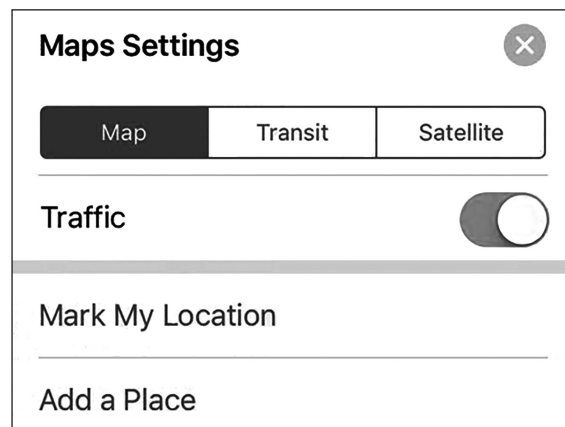


Figure 3: “Maps” settings.

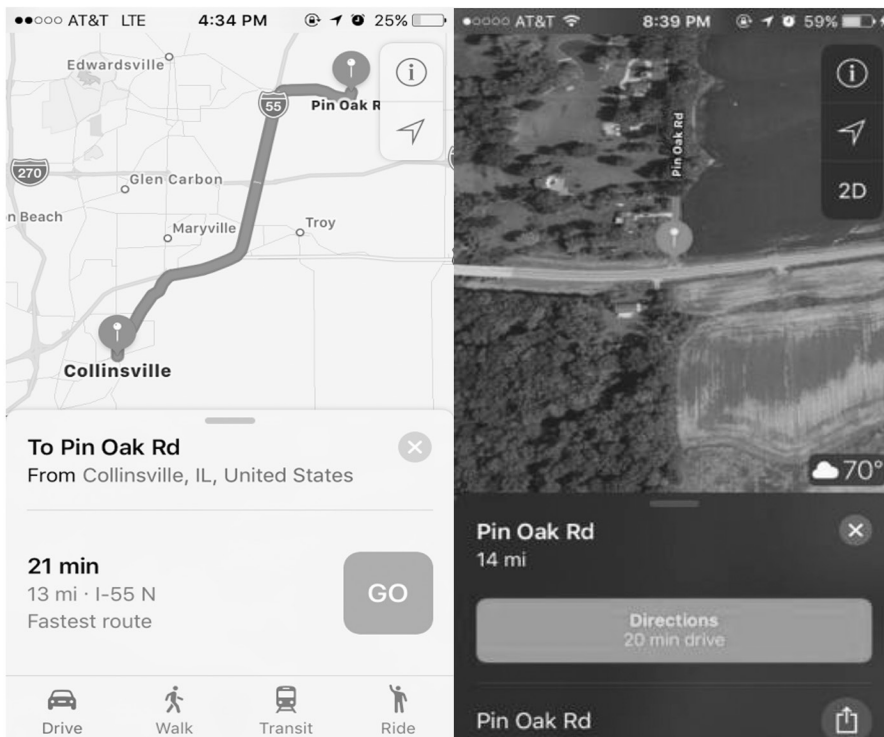


Figure 4: Example of a route using the Map (left) and Satellite (right) layout options.

text. In this case, as far as representation goes, “Maps” has certain software limitations that contribute to its overall proper functioning. However, because not every person interprets information in the same way, modifications (like those described earlier) can be made so consumers can better understand what is being presented to them. If there had only been strict limitations and zero flexibility, they would not have been able to get from point A to point B as quickly and efficiently as they would have if they had had options to choose from. Consequently, because the audience can customize what is being displayed to them, they are able to create their own reception and can therefore have an overall positive experience.

“Maybe We Should Have Bought One of Those Map-Book Things Instead”

A final CHAT term I will address is ecology. **Ecology** refers to the environmental factors that can affect how a text is created and how an audience receives a certain type of piece or text. When it comes to mobile

GPS apps, there are many different outside elements that can prevent a consumer from using them effectively. Because most, if not all, GPS apps require the usage of data or Wi-Fi to access their features, you're (pardon my French) shit out of luck if these connections are not available to you. In addition to this, not all phones have the option of downloading a mobile GPS app in the first place. This leaves the individuals who find themselves in this kind of situation to seek out a different method to obtain directions.

Although I had a general idea as to what other factors can influence GPS accuracy, I decided to browse the web and do a little more research to have a better understanding. According to the FAQ tab on the GPS Basics website, the more satellites your receiver identifies, the more accurate the distance and time between your location and destination will be. Consequently, if your receiver only picks up a few signals, your connection will be much spottier. The forum discussed other factors that affect the overall functioning of a mobile GPS app too, such as the act of not staying in one spot, as well as receiver quality. If you are constantly moving around, your receiver will be forced to pick up different satellites as you pass through different areas and landscapes. This will weaken your connection if your receiver had not already acquired ephemeris data, which is a set of parameters that are used to accurately calculate the location of a GPS satellite. So, what are you supposed to do if you don't have Wi-Fi, are not able to download the app, or have an overall crappy connection? Maps. Physical, foldable maps. The kind that you can buy at a convenience store or gas station. I know. It sounds horrifying, but maybe putting away our technology for a while isn't such a bad idea, especially if there is a place you desperately need to be.

“Wait . . . I See It. I SEE IT!” My Sister Proclaimed with Delight

In the end, we did manage to find the bridge we had been searching for. It was tucked carefully away in a cluster of trees at the end of an old, closed country road. I believe its tricky location was the reason for our misadventure. Because the road that led up to the bridge had been shut down several years prior, its coordinates ceased to exist in the GPS database and failed to show when using the Map layout setting. This might have been why the “Maps” app was not able to give us a direct path, but a general area instead. If I had changed my layout settings to Satellite, I probably would have been able to see the bridge in the 2-D satellite images and would have saved myself a lot of time and frustration. A poor connection may have also been the reason for our app rerouting multiple times throughout our journey. Either way, I'm

sure you can imagine the relief we felt when we did eventually see the bright, welcoming color of graffiti in the distance.

I guess you could say we lost a few things that day: our sense of direction, a half a tank of gas, an hour of daylight, and our sanity for a short while. But despite these things, it was worth it in the end. If our “Maps” app had not come in clutch and rerouted at the last second, we probably would have never found this secret gem. We wouldn’t have been able to show it off to our family members a couple days later, have had a hideaway to practice our own graffiti art, nor have gone to a unique place for me to take my high school senior-year pictures at as well. Fortunately, thanks to the production, reception, representation, and ecology involved with our mobile GPS app at that very moment in time, this was not the case.



Figure 5: Me and my aunt at Pin Oak Bridge.

Now that we’ve reached our destination, I hope I have given you an insight as to how the Global Positioning System works as well as a better understanding of the meaning behind a few of the key terms involved with CHAT. With this new information in mind, I encourage you to download or open that mobile GPS app on your phone (or pick up a hard copy from your



Figure 6: Me jumping at Pin Oak Bridge.

local convenience store) and to go on one of your own adventures. Just try not to get lost, like we did.

Happy traveling.

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Tumblng Part 2: Archives Edition, or, Tracking Tumblr's Genre Evolution Over the Years

Gina Stinnett

Stinnett delves into the depths of her Tumblr archives to analyze the ways in which Tumblr's activity system and communication among users have evolved since Shelby Ragan's 2015 analysis.

Ever since I first joined Tumblr in 2011, I have found the site fascinating. As a blogging platform, it is certainly one of a kind. If you want to make a post on Tumblr, you are not limited to just text posts—you can compose via photo, video, chat, link, and audio. Users will often combine different types of posts in order to create content. The site also emphasizes a more social twist on blogging—because of the ability to “reblog” another person’s post and add your own commentary, a post on Tumblr usually showcases interaction between bloggers. The multimodal and collaborative nature of the site makes it a truly unique form of composition. Given my fondness for the site, I naturally found myself drawn to Shelby Ragan’s article, “Tumblng Through Social Media: Exploring the Conventions of a Tumblr Blog” in issue 5.2 of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*. In her article, Ragan discusses how she applied writing research to a real-life context by observing how composition works on Tumblr and applying this knowledge to her own posts.

While reading about her experience with learning the sometimes-confusing conventions of Tumblr, I thought about my own experience joining Tumblr and how different things were when I joined versus when she joined. Although the basic conventions were still there, it was almost as though we

had each entered into a vastly different website. What truly blew my mind was how much *more* the website has changed since Ragan conducted her research in 2013. In just three years, Tumblr has gone through multiple cosmetic changes and has added and removed several features. Some features were given a complete remodel, adding not only improved functionality, but new tools to play around with when making a post. I started to wonder what may have caused these changes, and how they may have affected Tumblr as an activity system by changing the ways users can interact with each other. I decided that the best way to see these changes happening “in action” was to take a look at my own blog archive and conduct an “updated” genre analysis to see if I could track Tumblr’s **genre evolution**.¹ Through this analysis, I found that there were not only drastic changes in the site’s features and how members used these features, but changes in “acceptable” communication. These changes in “acceptable” communication often led to even more changes in the site’s features. What was so cool about researching the changes in this genre is that I got to see so many changes that I had barely noticed when they actually happened. I realized just how much power we have over certain genre conventions, and how skilled we are at adapting to evolving genres.

I originally joined Tumblr because I wanted to improve my writing, and I thought that blogging would be a good way to get some practice. All of my friends had a Tumblr account, so I figured I would join in on the fun and use Tumblr as my blogging platform. I used the website strictly as a place to write about my life, which reflected itself in the archive. When I jumped back to February 2011, I was shocked by the immediate difference that I could see in my blog based on the archive alone. My current archive is filled with pictures, GIFs, and short, humorous text posts, and I have been posting more often. However, in the first month of my blog, I only had four posts, and they were all longer posts about whatever was happening in my life. There was little to no interaction with these posts, as I had yet to establish any sort of “following.” I even included a title and a “signature” on all of the posts, which is especially foreign to how I currently use Tumblr. At first, I thought that I must have been an anomaly amongst other Tumblr users, so I decided to take a look at my friends’ archives to see how they were using the site at the time. I was surprised to see that, even though their archives were more **multimodal**² than mine, they were all still regularly posting long original posts. So, it appears that lengthy personal blog posts were still accepted as a use of the site back then.

This is a stark contrast to how Tumblr functions currently. Even though people still make the occasional personal post, everyone mostly “reblogs”

¹Genre evolution refers to the ways in which genres change over time as a response to their social, cultural, and rhetorical contexts.

²When a piece of composition is multimodal, it means that it uses many “modes” of communication. In Tumblr’s case, much of the composition is both written and visual.



Figure 1: A screenshot of a long thread on Tumblr—the urls represent users who have reblogged the post and added either a reaction GIF or “WOW” as commentary.

content. When someone does make an original post, it is often a very short quip about something that happened that day. These posts never have a title or a “signature” from the author, and will very rarely include tags. In fact, people seem to value the anonymity that Ragan discusses in her article even more three years later. It is rare to find a tagged original post—people value their privacy so much that they do not want their posts to be found in a tag. In the earlier days of Tumblr, people seemed obsessed with gaining as many followers as possible and producing viral content. Now, people would rather have a small audience and view viral posts as an annoyance since all of the notifications from a post tend to clog up the “activity” page. I remember feeling a little disheartened when no one interacted with my first few posts on Tumblr—nowadays I would be thankful for this lack of interaction! Many people have even asked Tumblr to add the option to make your blog “private.” Currently, all blogs are public by default, but many users would prefer to have their blog function as more of a social media profile where users can decide what content is public and private.

When I looked at the next two months on my archive, I could tell that I had started to dive into the **multimedia**³ aspect of blogging. My long blog posts were punctuated by funny pictures I reblogged from friends. What I found interesting about this stage of blogging is that when I clicked on the preview to see the full post, I noticed a long train of comments underneath the photo (see Figure 1). The comments did not necessarily add any sort

³Multimedia, as opposed to multimodal, refers to the various forms of media that can be used while composing (is it on paper? Is it a video? Is it a song?).

of real commentary to the photo—they were all just a bunch of people saying “haha!” or “lol!” or even “this!” I found myself a bit annoyed just by looking at it—why did everyone feel the need to add variations of the same comment? Why were people okay with having cluttery-looking posts with all of these comment threads on their blog?

I realized that this is yet another thing that has changed over the years. Back then, people still wanted some level of their own interaction to be present in anything on their blog. Since it was supposed to be more like a “traditional” blog, people felt as though they could not simply repost content without adding something to it themselves. However, the shifting nature of Tumblr has led to more separation between the posts and the person behind the blog.

This is a change that Ragan notes in her article—she notes that many people would save their commentary for the tags so it could not be spread around if someone reblogged the post. From 2013 to 2016, this phenomenon of putting commentary in the tags has become even more widespread. However, now it is less about privacy and more about the annoyance that I described earlier. People consider it almost rude to leave “unnecessary” commentary on the actual post, but if someone makes a comment in the tags, it is less noticeable and therefore more acceptable. Now, if people wanted to say a picture was funny, they would just say “haha!” in the tags instead of leaving a full comment on the picture. Or, if people were having a personal conversation that was not relevant to anyone else besides the people involved, it would take place in the tags (see Figure 2).

As more time went by and I became more accustomed to Tumblr’s unique form of blogging, I began to post a lot more. I was still posting a mix of personal posts and “reblogs,” but I noticed that I was leaning heavily toward the “reblog” side of blogging. I decided to click on the previews for some of the longer posts to see if they differed much from my original format, and I saw that the multimodality of Tumblr had extended even to

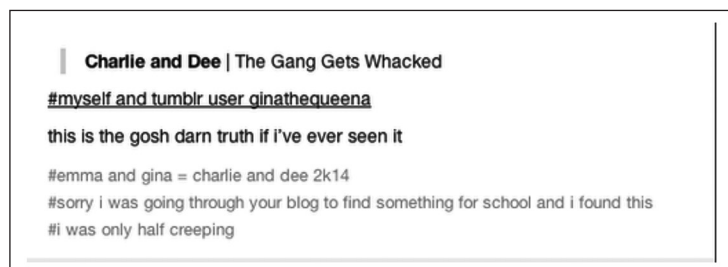
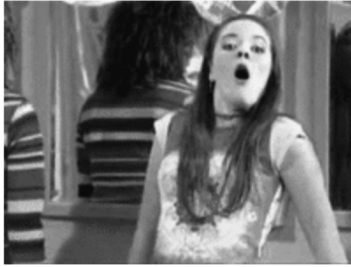


Figure 2: An example of a friend and I having a conversation through tags on Tumblr.

Literally the funniest thing just happened in the bathroom.

So, I'm walking out of a stall and I opened the door and Katie is right there and I screamed "OH MY GOD!" and jumped and grabbed onto the door. I don't know why I got so surprised but it was the funniest thing ever.

I was all like



And Katie's like



Figure 3: A post of mine from August 2012 that included reaction GIFs as a way to “spice up” the story.

my “traditional” blog posts! All of my original posts included lots (and I mean *lots*) of “reaction GIFs” (see Figure 3).

This is another trend on Tumblr that has all but completely died out. Tumblr users used to compose posts that sometimes included long trains of what were called “reaction GIFs” which were basically just GIFs of people showing any sort of emotion. Users would often comment with a reaction GIF, and it was not uncommon to see long threads with ten or more GIFs added as commentary. When commenting in general died out as a mode of communication on Tumblr, reaction GIFs were seen less and less in posts. Now, when people post GIFs, it is often out of artistry—users will make “GIF sets” of scenes from movies or television shows and play with the filters. Reaction GIFs have essentially died out as a form of communication on Tumblr.

These changes have reflected themselves in Tumblr’s features more than I initially realized. On an earlier version of Tumblr, users had the freedom to delete or modify posts when they reblogged them. This was useful for

long, annoying comment threads, but it also often manifested in humorous ways. A popular joke on Tumblr used to be to change posts from blogs like author John Green's personal blog, or Barack Obama's official Tumblr page in order to say out-of-character or funny things. In the aftermath of the 2012 election, someone reblogged an official post from the Obama campaign and edited it to make it say "S**k it, Romney" instead of the original content. Since anyone can click on the URL above a comment and get immediately taken to the original post, everyone knew it was fake, but it was funny to imagine that our president would react in such a way to winning the election. This joke resurfaced in an even more prolific manner in 2015 when John Green called out users for editing his posts and asked them to stop. Tumblr users did the opposite—they reblogged that very post and edited it. Because of the issues with people's posts being misrepresented, Tumblr changed their entire formatting for comments. Now, instead of block quotes, comments appear one after another, and users no longer have the option to edit previous comments. This means users are also forced to deal with whatever commentary might be on the post already since they cannot delete it. However, since almost no one is rude enough to leave unnecessary commentary, this has not been an issue (see Figure 4 for an example of what



Figure 4: An example of Tumblr's new format for commenting.

a typical post on Tumblr would look like now). Tumblr was able to take away that feature because the changes in communication meant that no one would have to utilize it anymore.

After noticing the major changes in how people communicate on Tumblr, I started to realize just how much has changed in terms of the site’s functionality. In my earlier years on Tumblr, I reblogged a lot of posts that joked about how bad the website’s video player used to be (see Figure 5). These posts would circulate almost constantly, but were especially popular whenever Tumblr made a seemingly “useless” cosmetic update to their site and, yet again, ignored the video player which was in desperate need of updating.

Posts like these were all too common until October of 2014 when Tumblr made a long-overdue update to their video player. These jokes at the expense of the player were so prolific that when the staff blog announced the update, they even referenced the slow update time (see Figure 6).



Figure 5: A joke about the slow loading time for Tumblr’s old video player.

A new video player (for web and mobile):

- **Pop-out video player.** Watch videos while scrolling through your dashboard for more videos to watch.
- **Auto-playing.** You only have to decide whether or not you want the sound on.
- **Vine and Instagram.** Properly embed your favorite six- and fifteen-second videos.
- **Looping.** Watch once, twice, forever, whatever.
- **Works.** Finally.

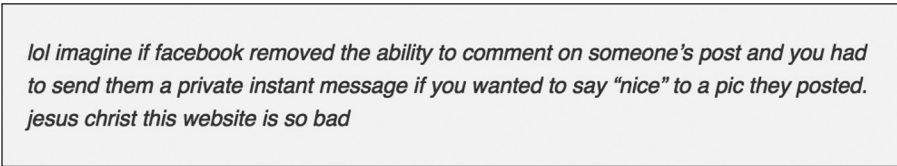
#features #finally

Figure 6: Tumblr staff jokes about the functionality of their former video player.

With this update, Tumblr encouraged the “cross-posting” that Ragan references in “Tumbling Through Social Media.” Users could now post Vines and Instagram videos with no issues, so videos became a much bigger form of communication on Tumblr. This is a change I definitely saw reflected in my archive. Prior to the update, I rarely reblogged videos—I could hardly even get them to work so I could see what they were, I naturally would not want to have them on my blog! However, with the new update, we were all able to finally enjoy one of the site’s key features. I noticed that my archive started to show more and more videos. Users also started to interact more with Vine and Instagram, and certain “Viners” even gained fanbases on Tumblr. Sometimes Vines would even reference “Tumblr jokes” due to their new exposure on the site.

This is not the only time that incessant pestering of the staff led to improvements. In December of 2015, the staff bizarrely decided to remove the “reply” feature, which allowed users to reply to each other’s personal posts and photos. This was a widely used feature, and users made sure to voice their disdain for the update. Users were not only creating posts that protested the removal of replies, but were also directly messaging the staff blog asking for them to replace replies (see Figure 7). Eventually, the staff gave in to the incessant pleas for replies to return, and in March of 2016, replies returned to Tumblr. Because the website had made such a drastic shift toward becoming a social media site instead of a strictly blogging site, the staff simply could not get away with removing a social feature.

This shift to a social media site is also evident in Tumblr’s newer features and in the features that did not quite make it as relevant features on the site. In 2011, Tumblr attempted to institute a “Fan Mail” option on the site. This would have functioned as a way for users to contact bloggers they were not necessarily friends with and tell them that they enjoyed their content. However, as Tumblr shifted away from an original content blog site, this feature became less and less relevant. When the Fan Mail feature became nothing more but a way for scammers to send links to blogs en masse, Tumblr finally deleted the feature in November of 2015. At first, I and most other Tumblr users did not even notice that it was gone, which speaks to how



lol imagine if facebook removed the ability to comment on someone's post and you had to send them a private instant message if you wanted to say "nice" to a pic they posted. jesus christ this website is so bad

Figure 7: A user expresses the irrationality of removing the reply feature from a social website.

underutilized the feature was. The fact that Tumblr was willing to delete a feature makes me wonder how long it will be before Tumblr removes the option to make a “Link” or “Quote” post. When I went through my archive, I saw a sharp decline in how often myself and others were reblogging these types of posts, until around July of 2014 when they disappeared from my blog altogether. Will Tumblr get rid of these features altogether like they did with Fan Mail, or will they remodel them into something more relevant for Tumblr’s current userbase?

A new social feature that has proven to be far more relevant and useful has been Tumblr’s new “Chat” feature. Tumblr introduced Chat in December of 2015 shortly after they removed replies. Users could previously communicate through the “Ask Box,” Tumblr’s messaging system that allowed users to answer messages either publicly or privately, but the general clunkiness of this form of communication led to a decline in usage. Even though Tumblr started out as a microblogging site, it had evolved into more of a social site, something the staff had clearly not considered when they took away the primary social features. Since, for many users, the point of using the site had become the social interaction, users opted to share other social media profiles in order to communicate more easily. The changes in the activity system of Tumblr led to its users being almost completely unable to communicate, and they were willing to jump ship because of this. Noticing this trend, the Tumblr staff opted to create their own instant messaging system within the site. This explicitly signified the site’s move to more of a social media site than a blogging site. The Tumblr staff now actively encourages direct communication and connections between users rather than a more distant connection through Ask messages and the now-defunct Fan Mail.

Through exploring my archive, I discovered just how much the site has evolved from its original purpose as a multimodal blogging platform. It is a shift that happened so gradually and naturally that I did not originally see it happening while this shift was in progress. Because of the compact nature of the archive, I was able to see five years’ worth of genre evolution within a few days of research. What fascinates me the most about this shift is that it occurred because of interaction between the staff and the userbase. I set out to analyze the ways in which the changes in the activity system affected how users communicate on the site, but I ended up discovering that this was much more of a two-way street than I originally thought—sometimes users adapted to new features by changing how they communicate, and sometimes the staff changed the website to more fully accommodate how its userbase actually communicates. For me, this is the coolest thing about genre evolution. As communicators, we have the power to change and ultimately improve the genres we interact with. I am particularly excited to witness

how the site continues to evolve—perhaps the staff will delete features such as the rarely-used Quote and Link posts, perhaps we will have the option to make our blogs private, or perhaps Tumblr will surprise us with brand new features we have not even imagined yet. I am especially eager to see how users adapt to these changes through new ways of communicating with each other. However, if there is anything that this research has taught me, it is that our own methods of communication, however quirky some of them may be, have the power to shape a website into something that truly works for what we want as writers—even if this is different from the website’s original purpose. We have the ability to make various genres work for our own communicative needs, and as we improve the genres we work with, we improve our own communication skills.

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What's the Buzz about BuzzFeed Quizzes?

Hope Fairchild

With our current obsession with the internet and social media, BuzzFeed seems to be the perfect platform to spread information. In this article, Hope Fairchild uses trajectory and CHAT analysis (specifically representation, distribution, and reception) to look into the depths of BuzzFeed, how it travels, and how people perceive it.

If you would have asked me what BuzzFeed was ten years ago, I probably would have thought it was some kind of strange food for bees. This was long before the BuzzFeed craze even began. Though it was created in 2006, BuzzFeed did not become popular until closer to 2011 (BuzzFeed). If you asked me what BuzzFeed is today, I would say it is a social media site used to keep the public informed through news articles and videos. On BuzzFeed's official website, they describe themselves as, "a cross-platform, global network for news and entertainment . . . [that] creates and distributes content for a global audience and utilizes proprietary technology to continuously test, learn, and optimize" (About). BuzzFeed is most certainly an entertainment site, and the part I find myself most interested in is its quiz section. Even though this media platform offers so much more than mere personality quizzes, the way I first discovered BuzzFeed was by taking a quiz.

Now, you might say I have always been a little, okay a lot, obsessed with personality quizzes. I still remember taking the ones offered on the American Girl website. Years ago, I sat at my boxy old Dell desktop for hours on end finding out what type of shoe I was or where I should travel over summer

break. As you can imagine, when I discovered BuzzFeed quizzes, I was ecstatic! What a great way to procrastinate! I have been an active BuzzFeed user for a few years now, and I have begun to wonder how the website travels to new users and how people accept this genre when looking at it for the first time.

Recently, I have been looking into the site's trajectory and how it relates to aspects of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT). I will delve deeper into CHAT and trajectory later in the article, but I will give you a brief overview of each of them now. **Cultural-historical activity theory** can seem like a tricky subject. It is a concept used in writing research to describe the production, distribution, reception, representation, socialization, activity, and ecology of a genre. It is simply an approach writing researchers use to study a genre or text recognizing its complex nature, and how the different aspects that make up the genre work together. **Trajectory** is basically the journey of a text. A writing researcher uses trajectory to trace a text or genre's origin and how it is spread to different people throughout time and space. Knowledge of these tools has helped me better understand BuzzFeed quizzes and how they affect people, including myself.

Tracing BuzzFeed Quizzes' Trajectory

Countless hours of my time have been spent taking BuzzFeed quizzes. What makes me want to spend my time this way? As I said earlier, it is a great way to procrastinate. On a more serious note, it is one of the only places to find out what *Friends* character you are without closing out of 10,000 ads. BuzzFeed makes it easy to compare answers with your friends and learn more about yourself by answering admittedly ridiculous quiz questions. Eventually, I began to wonder how they are spread throughout the population. In other words, what is their trajectory?

You may be thinking, *I still don't quite understand how trajectory works*. It is simpler than you would think. The way I understand it is that trajectory is, in a sense, where a text travels and how it adapts as it travels. Trajectory is all about discovering how a text reaches certain audiences and how it moves in relation to different spaces and people. I agree with Tharini Viswanath's article "Tracing the Trajectories of (The) *Humans of New York*" in which she argues that it is extremely difficult to trace the trajectories of information passed around on social media. In the case of BuzzFeed, users may choose to pass on information by sharing it with their friends or followers or choose to keep it to themselves. Therefore, there is no perfect way to find how and where BuzzFeed quizzes end up. However, through primary research, I do

know how and where I have seen them venture and adapt through social media.

I thought back to the first time I encountered a BuzzFeed quiz. It was probably about four or five years ago, around the same time I created a Pinterest account. For those of you who may not be as crazy about Pinterest as I am, it is essentially a virtual pin board where you “pin” different ideas, outfits, humorous GIFs, etc. onto categorized “pin boards.” This is also a website where I spend a lot of time procrastinating, so as you can imagine, I know my way around the site. One day while scrolling through the humor section, I found an image that read, “Which Disney Princess Are You?” And, of course, I had to find out. I continued to the quiz by clicking on the link that took me to BuzzFeed’s website where the quiz was located. After I finished taking the quiz (and finding out I am Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*, if you were wondering), I decided to look around this website I had never heard of before. Simply seeing a picture of Disney princesses led me to taking a quiz and therefore drew me into the complicated world of BuzzFeed. Now, this might be some manipulative advertising from BuzzFeed itself, but it still worked and it is still a part of trajectory. On top of seeing it on Pinterest, I also found out about BuzzFeed through my friend sending me links to the quizzes. I began to wonder: Does BuzzFeed even advertise their own website?

The quizzes, people, and other websites have seemed to be the portal and entryway into the world of BuzzFeed. Why is this? My conclusion is BuzzFeed relies on word of mouth and other websites to help promote its content. Turns out, I am correct in my assumption. BuzzFeed creates its own content and then has “in-house experts help the right audience discover a brand’s content across BuzzFeed and on social [media]” (BuzzFeed Advertise). These experts can track exactly where the content is spread and from there decide where it should go next. This is how they get so many people to look at their website.

You may be thinking, *but how can this be?* Don’t worry. I was confused at first as well. The simple explanation is that BuzzFeed’s advertising is not completely controlled advertising, but it still is in the sense that the BuzzFeed experts decide who sees their content first. From there, the select group of people is likely to pass on interesting quizzes and/or information to their own social networks; BuzzFeed depends completely on their users sharing and therefore spreading around their information. My world was turned completely upside down when I found out BuzzFeed barely advertises and is still so well-known and popular. Being involved with BuzzFeed only through Pinterest and my friends, I thought I was just missing all of the ads

they had put out there since I normally ignore them. However, I was not being oblivious; BuzzFeed truly has no advertising except through its users sharing its content. Apparently, I have done my own share of advertising for BuzzFeed when I share results of quizzes I take or send links to my friends. Most likely, you have taken part in advertising for BuzzFeed at some point if you have taken any of their quizzes or shared them on a website that is not their own. I must say it is an ingenious plan: advertising without really advertising. Who knew?

What Is CHAT and How Does It Relate to BuzzFeed Quizzes?

I realize cultural-historical activity theory can be somewhat hard to grasp at first. To me, CHAT is most simply bringing together aspects of culture, history, and activity to examine a certain text or genre. One way I can better explain CHAT is that it is a way to look at a genre through different eyes and see the different parts that go into making the genre the way it has come to be. There are seven main aspects that are explored through CHAT: production, representation, distribution, reception, socialization, activity, and ecology.

As you can see from Figure 1, there are many different aspects of CHAT to discuss. In my research of BuzzFeed quizzes, I have looked at specific parts of CHAT and found how they relate to this particular genre. In my research,

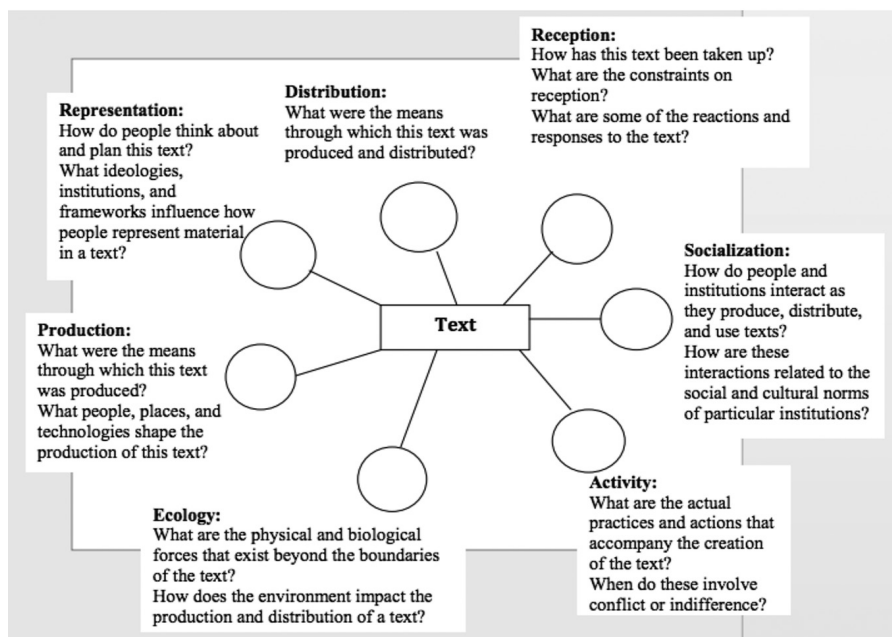


Figure 1: Visual representation of the aspects of CHAT. Retrieved from isuwritingfiles.wordpress.com.

I chose to put my focus on examining representation, distribution, reception, and their relation to BuzzFeed quizzes.

Representation

The quizzes on BuzzFeed are one of the website's main attractions. They truly represent BuzzFeed as a whole. (**Representation** is basically how the creators of a text plan a text and how it will look.) The quizzes are one of the first things people see on the website. As you can see in Figure 2, they are featured on the website at the top in the fast selection menu in order to give its audience easy access. Once you click on the "Quizzes" link, there are a myriad of quizzes available.

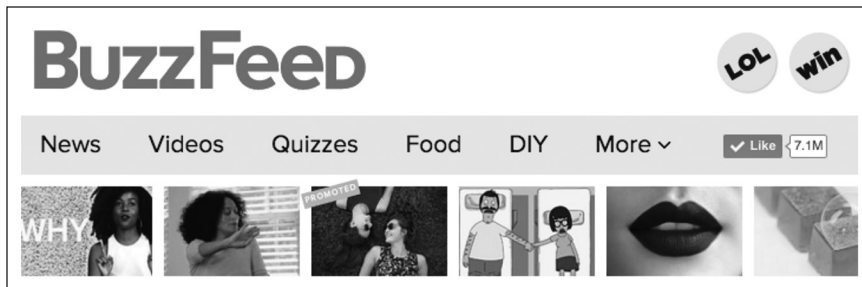


Figure 2: BuzzFeed's main website. Retrieved from *BuzzFeed.com*.

As I previously mentioned, the creators of these quizzes usually intend for them to be humorous and enjoyable, and this is noticeable in the way BuzzFeed represents their quiz section on their website. The quizzes themselves seem to be organized chronologically based on what time they were each uploaded to the website. Each quiz has its own graphic to represent the nature of its content. For example, in Figure 3, there is a quiz entitled "Is This A Teddy Bear Or A Toy Poodle?" with a photograph of a toy poodle and a teddy bear pictured side by side to show their resemblance. How could you not enjoy these two adorable creatures? I certainly do. That is the whole point! This particular quiz is quite humorous even at first glance



Figure 3: A quiz featured on BuzzFeed's website. Retrieved from *BuzzFeed.com/quizzes*.

giving comic relief to its audience. The BuzzFeed employees obviously want to make these quizzes enjoyable for their audience.

Searching through the assortment of BuzzFeed quizzes, I began to notice how all of the quizzes have strange names such as “Is This A Teddy Bear Or A Toy Poodle?” and “Only A Real Chocolate Lover Can Ace This Quiz All About Chocolate.” I thought these kinds of titles and eye-catching pictures were surely purposeful. Each title is unique and draws in a different audience. Even though you may not be a fan of Disney princesses or chocolate, you could want to know what Netflix show you should binge next based on your choice of cheese. Personally, I like to take every quiz I find interesting, the most recent one being “Only A True '90s Kid Can Get These *Reading Rainbow* Lyrics Correct.” Of course, not everyone will want to take every single quiz, but that is the whole point. Each and every quiz BuzzFeed produces is meant to capture the attention of different crowds of people. Some may be huge *Game of Thrones* fans and some may be longtime *How I Met Your Mother* fans. Whatever your interests may be, BuzzFeed has something for you, and if you find yourself interested and wanting more, you will be likely to share them on social media at some point.

Since BuzzFeed does not have any form of advertising, they must have to make the content on their websites appealing at first glance otherwise the visitor may become uninterested. BuzzFeed has to have some way to catch and keep people’s attention while giving them a substantial reason to stay on their website. Thinking back to my first visit to BuzzFeed’s site, I realized that the catchy quiz titles, bright colors, and humorous photographs most certainly caught my eye. Any website that doesn’t look like it was made from a template is eye-catching, and BuzzFeed certainly makes theirs look unique with its bright red font and unique pictures for news articles, quizzes, and more. I decided this site was worth at least a second visit, and after that I was hooked. BuzzFeed is constantly putting out new quizzes, and I always want to see if there are any ones on there I haven’t taken yet. (Once you’ve taken one quiz, I guarantee you will come back. They are quite addicting. I cannot speak for every BuzzFeed user, but my assumption is that most of them have had a similar experience to mine. What represents BuzzFeed is important. Since the quizzes are a part of this representation, it is vital they do their job well.)

Distribution

We have already touched on the distribution of BuzzFeed quizzes through our earlier discussion about their trajectory; distribution and trajectory are closely related. However, we can still talk about the many different means

in which these quizzes are distributed into the public through social media and the Internet in general.

Distribution is the way in which information is passed along. While I am looking at distribution, I am seeing where and how information is already being circulated. Since they are found online, or in other places such as Snapchat and the iPhone app, there are many different mediums in which people can distribute these quizzes. Some of these mediums include but are not limited to Pinterest, Facebook, and Twitter. These quizzes can also be shared through text messages and emails. As you can see in Figure 4, on the BuzzFeed app for iPhone users, you can send these quizzes to other people through Apple's AirDrop, text message, Twitter, and Facebook Messenger (not pictured). There is now even a section on Snapchat's Discover feature devoted solely to BuzzFeed which promotes BuzzFeed to a whole new audience. Although there are not any quizzes typically featured on this section of Snapchat, it still promotes BuzzFeed and might even drive some people who may not otherwise know much about BuzzFeed to visit the website to discover more of what BuzzFeed has to offer. Sometimes I send these quizzes to my friends just to show them how ridiculous they can be, and they will send ones they enjoy to me in return. Laughing at our ridiculous answers is part of the appeal of taking BuzzFeed quizzes. And, of course, by sharing we are contributing to the distribution of them. This leads me to another question: How do people usually receive these quizzes?

Reception

Reception is another part of CHAT relating to our discussions of trajectory, representation, and distribution. I see **reception** as the way people take in the information that is being provided to them (in this case, how they take in BuzzFeed quizzes). As far as first opinions, it seems that most people do not take these quizzes seriously. Seeing that my friends send them to me as a joke, I came to the conclusion that the general audience sees these quizzes as harmless, entertaining, and somewhat ridiculous.

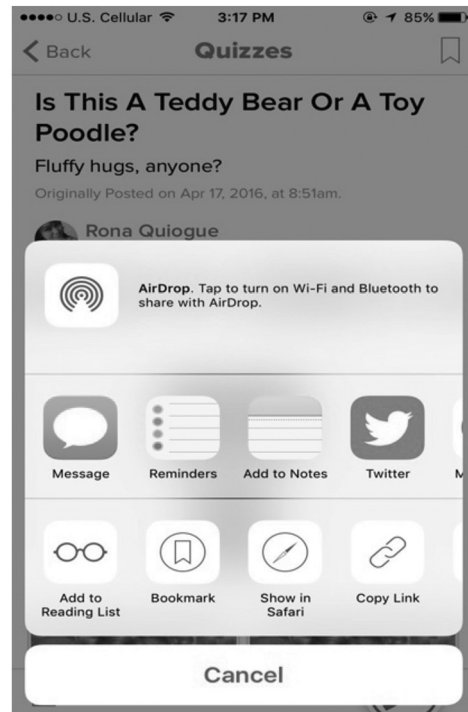


Figure 4: Where you can send a BuzzFeed Quiz. Retrieved from the BuzzFeed iPhone app.

There are many different types of these BuzzFeed quizzes: personality, zodiac, and knowledge-based quizzes. The personality and zodiac ones seem to be the ones I believe are quite bizarre. They are usually not extremely accurate or based on anything that would have a major impact on your life. For example, one friend and I each took the quiz “We Know Exactly What Your College Major Was.” This was a little strange since my friend and I are both still in college, but we were curious to see what BuzzFeed thought of us. It was almost completely inaccurate. My friend, who is a middle-level education major with endorsements in math and science, was told she was an English major. I am an English studies major, and I was told I was a theater major. Neither of us expected this particular quiz to be accurate because the questions (such as what is our birth month or favorite animal) did not pertain to our majors or career choices at all. I did not take my results seriously because the questions were not even closely related to what the quiz was measuring. Therefore, my reception of this genre and particular quiz was affected by its content.

However, this is why we believe these quizzes are fun—because they are typically utterly ridiculous. My friend and I did not have the opportunity to take a knowledge-based quiz, but these are the ones that test what you know about a certain movie, TV show, song, etc. These are usually difficult because of the minor details they ask about, but they are somewhat accurate in your knowledge on the subject. If anything, these quizzes are the ones that frustrate us because they are so difficult. All in all, people seem to receive these quizzes quite well. If they did not have a positive reception, BuzzFeed would not be trending the way it is now.

To Wrap It All Up . . .

BuzzFeed quizzes are definitely their own unique genre. They are seen as modern and typically received well by their intended audience based upon the number of responses and amount of sharing that goes on with them. My research has allowed me to see the complexity and intricacy that goes on behind the scenes. Looking at these quizzes through the eyes of trajectory and CHAT has forever changed the way I see this genre. Instead of seeing it merely as a website, I now see BuzzFeed as an entire web of connections that continuously reworks itself and grows day by day based on where its users decide to distribute it. I now know that trajectory is the framework for representation, distribution, and reception. BuzzFeed is unique in that it allows its users to choose how to share their results and where they are going to share them. It made me realize that there is no one way to distribute

these quizzes; it all depends on your personal preference whether you prefer to post your results on your Facebook page or send quiz links to your friends. I have found I am a part of this community of BuzzFeed users who receives its content well and decides to pass it along for others to enjoy. Since BuzzFeed is found on the internet, its trajectory is extremely complicated as we have discovered. However, that is what makes this genre unique: its unpredictability. There is no way to know how a quiz will turn out until you have reached the end, and your reaction can differ from quiz to quiz. Whether you decide to pass the quiz on to others or discuss it with your friends is entirely up to you. This is our generation. We have the ability to choose what we want to do with this genre. It is completely up to us. I believe this is what makes BuzzFeed quizzes what they are: a messy genre full of surprises.

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“Balderdash!” Or, Learning Perception from Deception: Challenging Antecedent Knowledge with Uptake Writing

David Hansen

What follows is an account of David Hansen’s journey from being an overly trusting college student to being a critical thinker. Through his research on the genre of “deception,” Hansen learned to examine his antecedent knowledge and how it was liable to give him a false sense of things. Hansen details the research methods and tools he adopted to chart his learning and uptake in order to better prepare himself to spot moonwalking bears (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Aforementioned moonwalking bear.

First, A Few Definitions

Before we get to the journey, let me define a few things first. When I talk about **uptake**, I mean “the process we go through to take up a new idea and think about it until it makes sense (if we get that far with it—sometimes we don’t!). Our uptakes are highly individual because we all have different past experiences that impact the way we see the world” (Sheets 136).

For the purposes of this article, you should think of **antecedent knowledge** as the information and experiences we all acquire over time that we use to assess new situations and ideas. It refers to what we know and, sadly, what we *think* we know. There’s a high probability of misinformation being jumbled in there, just waiting to jump out and smack you in the face. Finally, to make the best of our education, we need a way to map out our learning. For that I used an uptake journal (Figure 2).



Figure 2: My uptake journal.

We should deal with the fact that our minds are sometimes mush. To help with this we need to set down our thinking about . . . well, our thinking. An **uptake journal** is a place to write down not only what we learn, but how it’s affecting us, and gauge what’s changed over time. Writing acts like an external hard drive for your memory. I like to write a few sentences, maybe even a paragraph, about what I’ve observed and what it means to me. Down the road I’ll even respond to what I’d previously written. In other words, I keep a running dialogue with my younger self. It’s a way to look back and see how far I’ve come as a researcher. You have all that? Good. Let me start with where my learning began.

Where My Learning Began

I know everything. I have gone through twelve years of public school, four years of undergraduate learning, and a combined six years of graduate work. *Of course, I know everything.* I would have discovered any major gaps in my learning by now. Oh sure, I may not know how to build an airplane engine or how to figure out quantum mechanics, but I *know* that I *don't* know that, so it all evens out. If it's important, I have been exposed to the concept already.

Right?

(My future-self whispers in my ear.)

What?

(Whisper.)

What do you mean that I have no idea how my mind actually processes information?

(Whisper.)

What do you mean that people who know this can use it against me?

(Whisper.)

And no, while you're at it, I didn't see a moonwalking bear!

While I obviously never had this conversation (because I don't have a time machine), if I'm being honest, this sentiment is right about on the mark. Years ago, I felt that I already knew what was important, and I honestly believed that somewhere along the long and twisting path of education someone would have filled me in on everything that mattered. After all, what is education for if not to help shape the minds of generations of good citizens? I didn't realize just how bad my self-assessment tools were and how blind I was to the very simple way my brain synthesized information, which affects what information I take in and retain. I didn't know just how lazy the human mind naturally is and how it leaves one vulnerable. I thought I was ready for *anything*. In short, I didn't know where I was coming from and so I never could see where I was going.

The Journey Begins with B.S.! Or, How the Genre of Deception Lead Me to Illumination

I was just about to complete my graduate program in English/literature and prove to the world just how intelligent I was. I had taken all the classes,

completed all the tests, and the only thing left was to revise my thesis paper. Days before the big event, my roommate Matt came in and asked if I had ever seen the Penn and Teller Showtime TV series, *B.S.!* (Figure 3). I knew they were some sort of comedy magicians but not much more. We went ahead and watched the first episode, “Talking to the Dead.” And then we watched the second episode. Then the third. Maybe the forth? Several hours later, the series was over and I was furious. Not angry. Furious. Not at accidentally watching an entire season in one go, but at seeing how people were being tricked by con men into giving away their money and their dignity by falling for tricks that bypass our reasoning. I was furious because I hated seeing people get duped by these tricks. But I was also furious because I’d watched the types of shows Penn and Teller were debunking and, if I’m being perfectly honest, I’d fallen for them too.



Figure 3: Season 1 of *B.S.!*

In the episode titled “Talking to the Dead,” psychics would tell grieving people that the dearly departed were right there and that they still loved them. On the video, it actually looked as if the psychics were getting information about the dearly departed from the astral plane. They seemed to know about the person’s personality and details about their past. How could this be a trick? Actually, pretty easily. The psychics were using a method called “cold reading,” which involves reading a subject’s nonverbal communications. The psychic would ask their subject a series of vague questions and watched how they responded. When the psychics made a guess and the subject responded with positive facial expressions or body language, the psychic would know they’re on the right track and push on. If the person doesn’t respond, or

shows a negative attitude, the psychic will know they’re wrong and find a way to backtrack and try a new route.

This works because of something the famous 19th century showman P. T. Barnum noticed with people who came to see his Fiji Mermaid or his circus: “People want to be fooled.” We all need one thing or another to be true; it’s a compulsion. We’ll ignore any amount of mistakes a psychic makes and overexaggerate the amount of correct assumptions. This is called the “halo” and “horns” effect in interpersonal communications. Once you believe that you like or hate something, it takes a lot more energy to break that belief than it does to keep it going. In short, these grieving people wanted to speak to their loved ones so much that their critical thinking was shut down and they were thrown under the bus by their own desires.

Did I know any of this? *No*. My antecedent knowledge didn’t have anything stored up that would have helped me understand this. It was too filled with years of people telling me, “This is the right answer. Don’t ask questions, we don’t have time. Just trust me.” I trusted that there was a “right” answer and didn’t bother finding out for myself if that answer was actually right or not. Since I didn’t see what the trick was, it must be information from beyond the grave. I assumed it was all working perfectly, never bothering to ask why I thought the way that I did, *but here was a show proving I was wrong*. The rest of the episodes brought up more examples of my own biased antecedent knowledge, and I began to understand that when I said I had an opinion, what I really had was a *feeling* that I was attempting to justify, that I just had to trust my instincts. If I had nagging doubts that I didn’t really know what I was talking about, I ignored them.

I wanted to see what else I was missing. In an article Teller wrote for the *Smithsonian Journal*, “Teller Reveals His Secrets,” he talks about how magicians use people’s self-assessment techniques and biases against them. I wrote down the 7 points in a notebook I had at the time:

1. Exploit pattern recognition.
2. Make the secret a lot more trouble than the trick seems worth.
3. It’s hard to think critically if you’re laughing.
4. Keep the trickery outside the frame.
5. To fool the mind, combine at least two tricks.
6. Nothing fools you better than the lie you tell yourself.
7. If you are given a choice, you believe you have acted freely.

I just thought this might come in handy sometime down the road. Also, I just started to create a list of genre criteria for “deception.” I kept that information and have built on it year after year. That’s how my journaling began: I just wrote down something that was interesting to me. From there it grew until it became a full record of my uptake.

I had started to record the core aspects of “deception,” and now I needed to find out *why* these things happened and what I could do to stop them.

From B.S. to PhD: Or, Challenging My Flawed Antecedent Knowledge Led Me to Seek New Information

Teller’s partner, Penn Jillette, actually supplied the information about why my mind made the mistakes it did. At least, he pointed me in the right direction. In his weekly podcast, he talked about a book by Daniel Kahneman called *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (See Figure 4). Kahneman was studying how the brain processes information and how our self-image is made up of what we have decided are our main personality traits. We are who we think we are and any threat to that little groove will be met with sometimes violent resistance . . . and that resistance takes mental energy we physically hate to spend. If something tells us we’re wrong, we will grasp at anything that *sounds plausible* in order to convince ourselves we’re okay and get back to feeling that groove again. Hence the Barnum Effect. More information for my uptake journal!

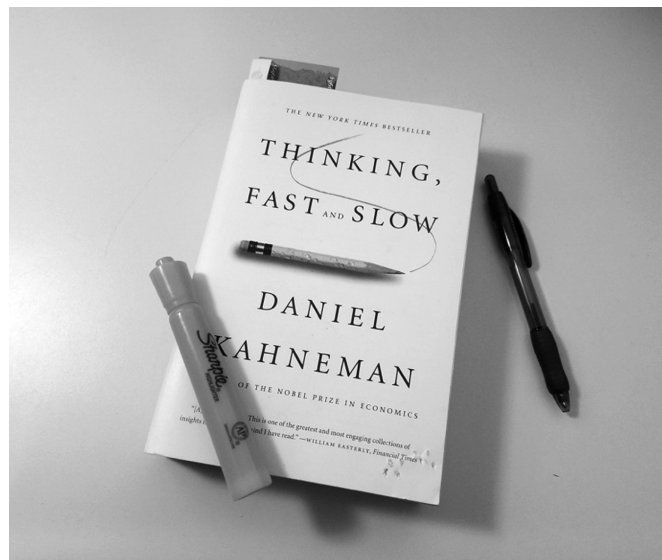


Figure 4: *Thinking, Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman.

Kahneman mentioned a video that showed how a mind can be programmed to fool itself. Two teams of basketball players are passing a ball around and the goal is for the viewer to count the number of passes they make. I watched the video on YouTube and tried the experiment for myself (type in “Awareness Test” on YouTube). Then it asked if we saw the moonwalking bear. *No. There was no moonwalking bear.* I would have known if a bear walked into the video and moonwa. . . . why are they rewinding the video? Why are they starting the video again? *WHERE DID THAT BEAR COME FROM?!*

It’s called Inattention Blindness. This happens when you tell your brain to focus on one thing and ignore everything else, including seeing someone in a bear costume moonwalking through the basketball players. This nasty trick happens because we have two systems for thinking: System 1 and System 2. These are mental constructs that show how we gather information and how we process it, retrieve it, and connect it to previously encountered ideas. In Kahneman’s book I got to see for the first time how these two parts of my thinking work in tandem and how if the mind is asked to work too hard it will stop thinking critically and just go for something quick and easy. (More information for what turned into my uptake journal; more chances to test how well my own antecedent knowledge was holding up.)

Pixy Stix Monkey and Jabba the Hutt: Or, How System 1 and System 2 Work for Me

Basically, System 1 is a monkey on Pixy Stix and Mountain Dew (Figure 5). Our Pixy Stix Monkey will throw information around without much actual thought because it’s hyper and has things to do. System 1 doesn’t actually critically think about the information since it doesn’t have time, and so it goes off its impressions, letting System 2 sort it out later. All in all, System 1 is there to make simple decisions that make getting through the day easier. The heavy lifter of your critical assessment is System 2.

System 2 looks at problems logically, compares and contrasts facts and ideas, and is the muscle of your mind. But, without proper exercise, it’s like Jabba the Hutt. System 2 hates to do work and will often just trust that the System 1 monkey knows



Figure 5: Pixy Stix monkey.

what it is doing. This laziness will have us trust our “feelings” and not worry about checking to see if the information is true or not. Kahneman says in his book, “System 1 is not prone to doubt. It suppresses ambiguity and spontaneously constructs stories that are as coherent as possible. Unless the message is immediately negated, the associations that it invokes will spread as if the message were true.” However, System 2 will eventually do the work and will even crave greater challenges, but not unless it is put on a mental treadmill for a few miles.

PhD vs. Scientists and the Media: Or, Just Because You Have a Degree, Doesn't Mean You're Always Right

After reading *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, I wanted to apply what I learned by looking at how other cons had worked and see if I could spot the *why did this happen* of the manipulation. Did my new and improved antecedent knowledge prepare me for new genre examples? It was time to find out. The Amazing Randi (another famous magician and debunker of psychic claims) and two teenagers were able to fool four scientists charged with investigating psychic phenomena under laboratory conditions.

In 1979, a millionaire named James McDonnell had set up a research program to look into claims of supernatural abilities and had supplied it with half a million dollars for its five-year plan. Two teenagers had been chosen by the program as the subjects of the tests based on their ability to manipulate metal spoons and have them bend with no apparent physical force. These teens had been coached by Randi himself. The plan Randi came up with to prove all humans are prone to the Barnum Effect was named “Project Alpha.” The purpose was to demonstrate how even scientists could be fooled using simple tricks.

Over the five years, the young men got in good with the scientists and were able to convince them to break the rules of the experiments one by one by claiming it would more easily “facilitate” their powers. In the documentary film, *An Honest Liar* (see Figure 6), Randi and his assistants hinted at some of the things they did to accomplish their tricks. By going back to my uptake journal, I could look at what Teller had said, add in what I learned about System 1/System 2, and ultimately put names to the psychological manipulations they were using. Some of my findings were that: 1) they used laughter to engage the halo effect, which allowed them to have the rules of the tests changed to their advantage, 2) they employed The Barnum Effect to play on the scientists' desire to prove that psychic powers

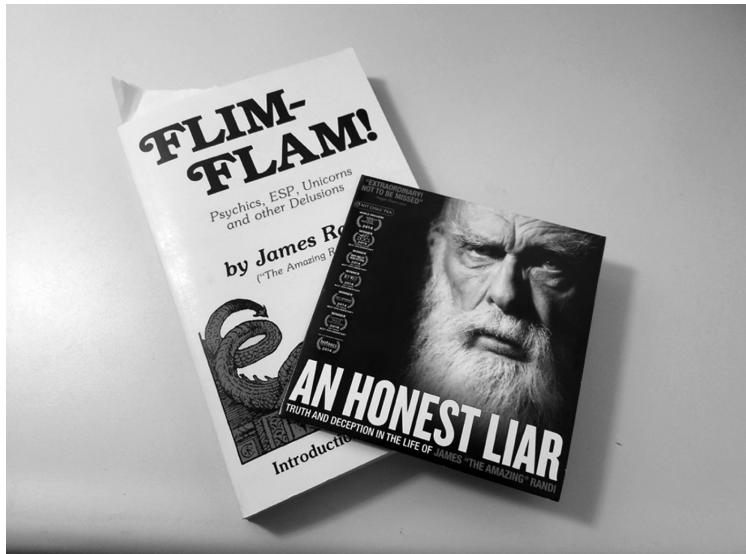


Figure 6: *Flim-Flam* and *An Honest Liar* by James Randi.

exist, 3) they used Inattentional Blindness by focusing the scientists in one place while manipulating their test objects in another. The teenagers fooled scientists just by exploiting their faulty thinking.

And *Now* the Answer You Have Been Waiting for: Or, Only You Can Prevent Sloppy Thinking

Alright, you have been reading this so far, and I'm betting you'd like to know what the overall answer is to fixing your own self-assessment. How do you make sure you are critically thinking and not just doing whatever the Pixy Stix Monkey wants? The answer . . . I don't know. The experts don't have a simple answer either. We're humans and we need automatic systems to get through the days or we'd lose our minds. Knowing about these things is a starting point, and looking at real world examples where screwy logic has taken over can give you something to compare to. But as for a simple fix, no one has found one. It all takes time, practice, and the willingness to change your own thinking pattern. The way that I've dealt with this was to create my uptake journal. It's allowed me to document what I am thinking and explore *why* and *how* I've arrived at my conclusion/opinion/feeling. I also review past entries and make comments on them. It's a way for me to engage with myself about my System 1/System 2 thoughts. It's helped me to embrace my inner researcher and collect information from anywhere and everywhere



Figure 7: My uptake journal materials.

(Figure 7). However, you will find your own methods to engage with yourself and your thought process. And, of course, always keep an eye open for your own moonwalking bears.

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Let the Round Begin

Nicole Hassels

In this article, Hassels explores golf scorecards through CHAT. She relies on her both her antecedent knowledge (of golf) and her antecedent genre knowledge (of scorecards) to help her explain the features of these cards and discusses potential problems that can arise when failures occur in the production and representation of them.

In order to achieve the best score that I can in a round of golf, before every hole I read the scorecard and check to see the yardage, pin placement, the par, and which direction the hole goes in. It was the beginning of the fourth hole at Pottawatomie Golf Course. We were playing a 9-hole match for my high school golf team. It was against one of our rival schools from the town over, St. Charles North High School, one of the best teams in the state. I was playing number one and against the thirteenth best golfer (Gianna) in the state. Before I started the hole, I checked the scorecard as I always did. It was a par three, and the scorecard said the distance to the hole was 112 yards. The wind was blowing slightly, so I decided to use less of a club than I normally would have. I decided to use my 9-iron. First Gianna went up to hit. She hit it considerably far beyond the green. Then I went and also hit it too far; it went in the water. We both hit it about thirty yards past the green. Remembering this event made me think about how much golf scorecards can be understood through cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT). In this article, I explain a little bit about golf, important terms that have to do with the sport, and how to read a scorecard. Finally, I explain what I discovered about golf scorecards and how they can be understood through CHAT.

Playing golf for the past fourteen years of my life, I have a lot of antecedent knowledge of the sport. I have also had countless encounters with scorecards, so I have a lot of **antecedent genre knowledge**. Many prior experiences have shaped who I am today and how golf influences my life. Through my previous antecedent knowledge from playing golf, watching golf, and even caddying, I have seen hundreds of scorecards. In golf, the scorecard is important for many different reasons, not only do you keep your score on it, but you also get much information about the course and each hole before you even play from it.

Course Overview: Some Things to Know About Golf

Before going into detail about the scorecard, I think it will be helpful for me to first explain some of the terms used about golf courses and some of the actual rules of golf. Figure 1 is a model of what a hole may look like on a golf course. Let me explain what each of the numbers (1–10) represent in the model. Each hole in golf is different and they all vary. In this particular example though, it shows just about everything a hole in golf *could* include.

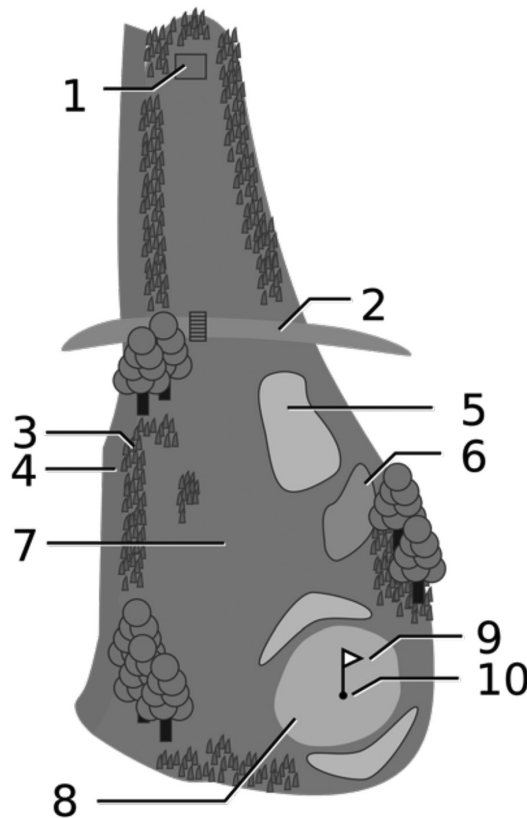


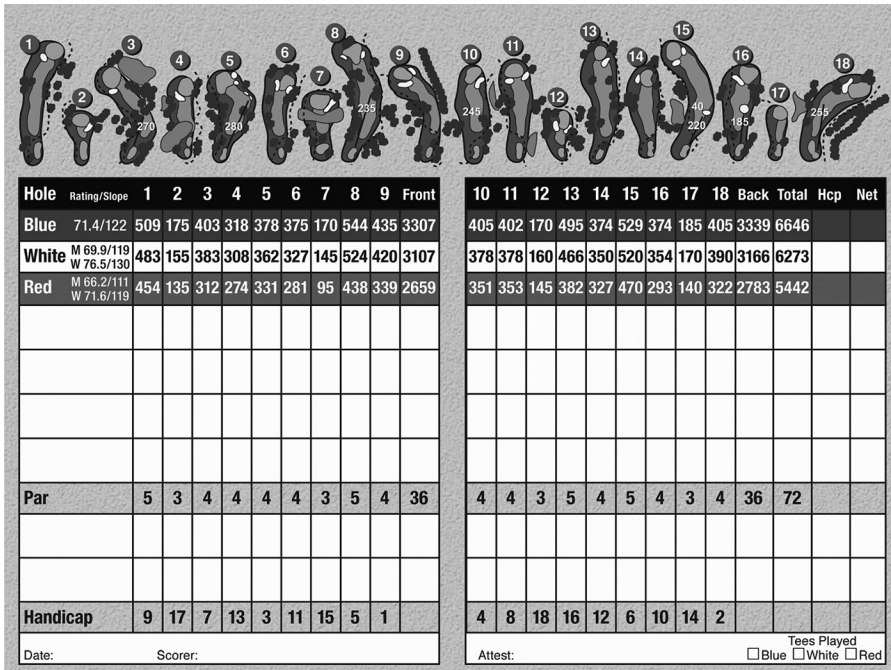
Figure 1: Model of a standard golf hole.

Looking at the model, the number 1 points to the “tee box.” The tee box is where the golfers hit their first shot from. Numbers 2 and 6 are “hazards.” In this case, the hazards are water and if you hit your ball into a hazard, there will be penalty strokes.

Number 3 is the “rough.” This indicates the area where the grass is thicker and can be tougher to hit from. Number 4 shows the “out of bounds,” which is the area you do not want to hit into. Out of bounds can be located all around the hole or not exist at all. Hitting out of bounds also results in penalty strokes. Number 5 is a “sand trap,” that is also considered a hazard but no penalty is included if you hit into the sand. Number 7 is the “fairway,” which points to where you want all your shots to go. The fairway is where the grass is cut the best and is the best location for your ball. Numbers 8 and 9 are the “green,” indicating the ultimate location of where you want your shot to end up. Finally, number 10 is the actual “cup” or hole that you want your golf ball to end up in. You are probably wondering how all of this relates to CHAT, but I promise that I will begin talking about that very soon!

Common Genre Conventions of Golf Scorecards

Figure 2 is an example of a scorecard from Litchfield Country Club and shows what a majority of golf scorecards tend to look like. Models of what



Hole	Rating/Slope	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Front
Blue	71.4/122	509	175	403	318	378	375	170	544	435	3307
White	M 69.9/119 W 76.5/130	483	155	383	308	362	327	145	524	420	3107
Red	M 66.2/111 W 71.6/119	454	135	312	274	331	281	95	438	339	2659
Par		5	3	4	4	4	4	3	5	4	36
Handicap		9	17	7	13	3	11	15	5	1	
Date:		Scorer:									

	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Back	Total	Hcp	Net
Blue	405	402	170	495	374	529	374	185	405	3339	6646		
White	378	378	160	466	350	520	354	170	390	3166	6273		
Red	351	353	145	382	327	470	293	140	322	2783	5442		
Par	4	4	3	5	4	5	4	3	4	36	72		
Handicap	4	8	18	16	12	6	10	14	2				
Date:		Attest:											
		Tees Played <input type="checkbox"/> Blue <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Red											

Figure 2: Scorecard from Litchfield Country Club.

each hole will look like will often appear at the top of the scorecards. Notice that these images are similar to Figure 1, just without the labelling. It gives a rough sketch of hazards on the hole, which illustrates any trouble you can get in on that hole, such as trees, water, sand traps, etc. The scorecard then shows the hole number and under that states the yardages (how far it is to the hole) from each tee. On the tee box, there can be several different colored tees. For example, on this particular card in Figure 2, it says Blue, White, and Red. The different colors are based on skill levels with the game. And, while my experience has been that the blue tees are where men play from, the white tees are usually the women's tees, and the red tees are usually where juniors hit from, this isn't always the case. Some golf courses have more than three colored tees, and some golf courses only have one colored tee. Adding more just means the course has more specific guidelines on scoring; the better you are, the farther back from the hole you will play, and the less experienced you are, the closer up you will play. This information is included on the card where it says handicap.

The handicap is a calculated number of how many strokes over par (explained below) a player usually scores. Handicap is something that is not important to most golfers, only very serious golfers have and keep track of their handicaps. The lower the handicap, the more talented you are and the higher your handicap is, the worse or less experienced you are. There are also a range of numbers from one to eighteen on every scorecard that rank each hole—one being the hardest hole and eighteen being the easiest hole. The scorecard also tells you how many yards the hole is from each of the tees for each hole. The last significant thing the scorecard says is the par. Par is the number of strokes a golfer should take to get the ball in the hole. The card states the par for each hole as well as the par for the overall 18 holes. Now that you have a basic introduction to golf and how scorecards are used, let's get back to how this is all related to CHAT!

Connecting CHAT to Scorecards

These particular details about the scorecard and the rules of golf are important for understanding how this relates to CHAT. In CHAT, **production** is anything that goes into making the text. After a golf course is built there are several different websites where you can create templates for the construction of the scorecard. The production of the scorecard is crucial for all golf courses, and as you can probably tell by reading my earlier discussion, so is representation. Without the scorecard, golfers cannot keep track of their score and won't have an idea of how the course is going to be. The nicer the scorecard is, the more detail it will show, and this can

affect golfers in different ways. For example, if the card is lacking details or information needed to navigate the course, this could have an effect on the golfers overall score.

Although I have had many personal examples with this topic, I also have had others tell me about their experience with the issues arising from the production and representation of golf scorecards. While I was telling my golf instructor about this article I was writing, he provided me with a personal example of when he encountered a mistake on a scorecard from a local course he played. The course had recently added a pond to one of the holes, but the card was not up-to-date with this new change. He was hitting his second shot over a hill and could not tell that there was a pond added to the hole. He hit his second shot as he normally would, but when his group got up to the end of the hole, they realized that a pond had been added in the middle of the hole. Not only did they not see the pond, but two out of the four players in his group hit their ball in the pond. This negatively affected their scores and also negatively affected their view on the course.

The production of the scorecard also affects other CHAT terms like representation, reception, and socialization. By looking at the scorecard, you can get a good gist of how the golf course is going to be. There are many things golfers notice when they are looking at the scorecard for a golf course. For instance, as you can see the scorecard example in Figure 3 is not as elaborate as Figure 2. This ties into the representation of the scorecard. **Representation** is how people think about a text and plan it. This scorecard is in black and white and does not include images like the one

HOLE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	OUT	P	L	A	Y	E	R	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	IN	Tot	
BLUE 72.5/131	345	519	425	202	499	393	186	365	358	3292							389	424	219	520	366	354	538	184	406	3400	6692	
WHITE 70.6/128	332	501	401	185	485	363	170	347	339	3123							375	387	189	498	340	330	502	165	386	3172	6295	
GOLD 51-65/8 124 1.7-2.4/150	524	478	393	133	475	346	151	316	319	2935							361	358	161	475	333	321	474	135	359	2977	5912	
MEN'S HCP	11	3	5	15	1	7	17	13	9								4	12	16	2	14	8	6	18	10			
PAR	4	5	4	3	5	4	3	4	4	36							4	4	3	5	4	4	5	3	4	36	72	
RED 71.1/124	317	433	362	110	401	331	130	292	292	2668							326	350	120	401	286	282	405	111	303	2584	5252	
LADIES' HCP	13	3	1	7	5	11	17	9	15								10	12	16	2	6	14	4	18	8			
DATE: _____	SCORER: _____										ATTEST: _____																	

Figure 3: Scorecard from Flying L Ranch Golf Club.

in Figure 2 did. In my experience, you can usually tell by the scorecard how fancy the course is going to be. You can also usually infer that the nicer, more detailed scorecards are from courses that have more money like golf clubs or country clubs.

There are different websites that people who are making the cards can go on to create scorecards, and of course, there are also many different options and styles for creating them depending on the amount of money you want to spend. There are little details like the thickness of the paper, the coloring, and the length of the scorecard that are all slight features that can mean a lot. From my experience, a standard scorecard looks like the one in Figure 3 and a nicer one looks like the one in Figure 2, but there are even some courses that have even nicer cards than the one in Figure 2. So, based on experience, by looking at the scorecard in Figure 3, I would predict this golf course is not as nice as the golf course from the previous scorecard.

All this information also has to do with representation in a different way. The people creating these cards assume that the people that will be seeing the golf scorecards at these courses are typically people who are very well educated on golf. As you can see, people who do not play the sport probably would have a difficult time understanding the scorecards. The author must consider who the audience is before writing the text. They need to think about who they are talking to. The authors of these scorecards are mindful of who they are writing to; they make the scorecards the way they do because they expect the audience will understand, without additional explanation, what the various components mean (such as the use of color codes for tees or the marking of hazards).

Not only is the visual production and representation of the scorecard important, but the accuracy of the information on the scorecard is perhaps more important. If the scorecard has the yardage wrong or the par is incorrect, this can change everything. Looking at the scorecard before you play and before you begin each hole can benefit you a majority of the time. At other times, it may be a disadvantage if it is hard to read or if something is misprinted. Golfers can sometimes have an advantage over their opponent if they look at the scorecard before the hole and their opponent did not. Golfers will receive the information in a negative way and will receive the information incorrectly if a scorecard is misprinted. This has to do with **reception** in terms of CHAT. Reception is what people do with the text and if they use it in the way that the author intended for them to use it. Just like the story that I mentioned in the beginning, we both hit the ball past the green and the author of the scorecard didn't intend on both of us hitting it that far.

Mistakes are often made on scorecards. Over the past fourteen years I have come across many problems on scorecards. I have seen the par wrong for the hole, and I have seen the yardage printed wrong. In my opinion, the production and representation of the scorecards not only affects the golfer and how they play but can also reflect poorly on the golf course. This ties in with socialization. **Socialization** is not only how someone uses the text but how they talk about the text and interactions people have with the text. When golfers see that something is printed wrong on the scorecard, they will probably talk about it amongst themselves, but also they might mention something to the owners of the course or the clubhouse workers. They might take it further than just talking and decide to write a negative review on the course. From past experiences with a variety of golfers, from caddying for older rich men to playing the sport with girls and boys my own age in tournaments, I know how determined and competitive some golfers can be. Competitive golfers take the sport very seriously, and if something is in the way of their score due to the information on the scorecard, this could really affect how they view that course. Of course, this would also affect players differently depending on the level of competitiveness. If the player was in a match or tournament they might not play the course again after that day. If the player was alone and not really playing very seriously, it might not have a huge impact on their game. Depending on the situation the golfer is in, this might change the way it effects their game.

On the other side of this, socialization can be positive; people may find a scorecard that is very well put together, and they may talk very highly about the course. They might play a course that has a very detailed and good quality scorecard, and unlike the previous scenario, they could write a very good review on the course and play the course more often. In my experience, scorecards have a huge effect on how people talk about the course and the reputation that the course maintains.

End of the Round

My study of golf scorecards explored the rules of golf, important terms, how the scorecards work, and how all these things can be understood through CHAT. In the process of writing this article I discovered how much knowledge is required to truly understand the game of golf. Going into detail about the model of a hole, particular terms, important rules, and everything else I explained in the article really put into perspective how much you need to know about the sport before you play. To research this topic, my background knowledge helped me significantly. Having examples of how scorecards

have affected me personally truly helped me organize and plan this article. Looking at the complexity of scorecards made me realize how significantly CHAT plays a role in the overall process. I found various connections with golf scorecards and antecedent genre knowledge, production, representation, and reception. With my past experiences and background knowledge, it was easy to make connections to the production of scorecards, the representation of the courses, and the reception of the players. The connections I found with golf scorecards and CHAT were interesting. Nonetheless, doing this research made me realize how much actually goes into this sport and how elaborate golf can be. I plan on playing golf for the rest of my life, and from this point on, I will keep in mind how CHAT can always play a role in understanding the aspects of golf and the scorecards.

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Nicole Hassels is a junior at Illinois State University. She is a fashion merchandising and design major. Although a girly girl, she loves sports and especially golf! She has been playing golf her whole life and just recently joined the Illinois State Club Golf Team.



Spreading Roots Presents:



Writing a Minigrant Proposal: The Story of How Not Wanting to Do Work Actually Made Me Do More Work

Olivia Brown

In her article, Brown discusses her minigrant proposal writing process. Her process includes forgetting to do her work, frustration, and sarcastic comments. Brown offers a look into her eighth-grade classroom in her article, and explains how she wrote a “successful” minigrant proposal.

I walked through the doors of my 9th period English Language Arts (ELA) class ready to learn. I loved school, I was excited to research a new genre, then write it. *Actually, no.*

When I walked into ELA on a Thursday, I was tired, and I was complaining about science—my least favorite class. I was not at all ready to write another genre; I was actually dreading it. When Mrs. Kieffer (my teacher) announced we would be writing minigrant proposals, I had no idea what she was talking about. But I did know that it meant I would have to do more of this awful thing called research since we are supposed to be “writing researchers.”

Writing researchers look up anything they don’t know, and I don’t mean a quick Google search. A **writing researcher** thoroughly researches any genre they do not know how to write. You could say writing researchers are pretty self-sufficient, but they also ask for help if they need it, and they ask anyone they know about the genre they are looking to write.

Being the actress I am, I have been able to pull off this “writing research” character, even though research is my least favorite thing in the world (besides science, Johnny Depp, and tomatoes). So, I pushed through my sleepy haze and turned on my computer. Mrs. Kieffer explained to us that when you write a minigrant proposal, you are requesting money for a project, and in this case, a writing project. She told us we would all be writing a minigrant proposal, and we would actually be competing for the money.

All I was thinking was, *Oh great, more work. Another project, wonderful.*

Mrs. Kieffer also told us that since we were writing a proposal, we would need an idea to propose. She told us to have that idea by Monday. In class, we started to fill in what we could of the minigrant application (our names, teacher, etc.), until it was time to go home. I was overjoyed for the weekend ahead, and as usual, I forgot that I had any homework at all. When I came to class on Monday, Mrs. Kieffer asked for our minigrant ideas. I started freaking out, I hadn’t thought about the minigrant since ELA on Friday.

(*Okay, I thought to myself. Ideas, ideas, ideas.*) Of course, my table partner was always prepared and already had his idea all figured out; he always has his life together. Mrs. Kieffer drew closer to my table as I struggled to think of an idea, then she appeared next to me.

“Do you have an idea, Olivia?” She asked me. *No, I totally forgot about this whole project,* I thought, but you can’t say that to your teacher so I said: “Well,” I glanced at the bookshelf. “Maybe, uh, we could write a book with all our favorite words in it.” (Whew, I was saved.) “And what does that have to do with CHAT?” Mrs. Kieffer questioned. *Awwwwe, no.* I did NOT know that this had to be an actual, real, good idea, relating to CHAT. “Uh, I don’t know,” I said. It was the best answer I could come up with. “Keep thinking,” she said. Then she started to talk to my table partner, who of course, was prepared and had a good idea.

As Mrs. Kieffer moved to the other tables, I thought about what my *real* idea should be. What do I like to do? If my idea got funded, what would I want to spend all my time on? And how could I incorporate CHAT into whatever I was going to propose?

Mrs. Kieffer announced that it was time to go, and I spent the rest of the day pondering the idea that I didn’t have.

I came into class on Tuesday feeling confident, still not happy to be at school, but confident. My idea came from out of the blue when I wasn’t even

thinking about it. I knew what I was going to do. Class started, everyone opened up their Chromebooks and headed to Google Classroom. There, we found our class, clicked on the assignment that said, “Final draft of the minigrant proposal” and started to work. Mrs. Kieffer brought her red stool over to my desk. “Do you have an idea, Olivia?” she asked. “Yes, I actually do, for once.” I answered, nodding my head. “I want to write a children’s book to teach kids about CHAT.” “I think that that is a great idea; it would be highly fundable,” she said. “Thank you,” I said, as she dragged her stool along to the next person.

“Well ya sure got out of that one,” my table partner said. “Shut up,” I said, “That was my real idea.” “Honestly, it is a pretty good idea. I think you’re gonna get it funded,” he told me. “Well, thank you, but I honestly hope I don’t. So much more work,” I groaned. I turned to my computer, and opened up the minigrant application form (Figure 1).

Okay, I thought to myself. Start at the beginning: title. I typed in “CHAT for kids” in the blank space for the project title. That sounds good, I thought. “CHAT for kids,” I said quietly. Okay, got that down. What’s next? Project description, okay. 100 words or less, not okay. I started to worry when I saw the 100 words or less. I am not a “short story” writer. I can’t just write 100 words, when I have so many thoughts and ideas. This description is going to take a lot of revision. I started my description with “Kids learn in multiple ways through apps, teachers, and books” (Brown Minigrant Application 2). Okay, sounds good. How many words is that?

Application Cover Sheet	
Project Title:	
Applicants:	
Course and section:	ELA4
Instructor:	Deb Riggert-Kieffer
Project Director or Co-Directors:	Olivia Brown
Name:	Olivia K. Brown
E-mail:	obrown@d52schools.com
Project Budget:	
Project Description:	100 words or less
Itemized Budget:	promotion, materials, supplies, etc.

Figure 1: The work I did before I had my idea.

I highlighted my opening sentence and did a simple control, shift, C, word count. *Ten words, I'm doing good.* I started to type out more of my description, and let me tell you, once I start writing, I don't stop until I have to. I finished my first draft of the project description:

Kids learn in multiple ways, through apps, teachers, and books. My idea is that we can write a picture book about writing; we could teach kids all about CHAT. We would have to make it kid friendly because CHAT would be a hard concept for a second grader to grasp. This project will take a lot of creativity and materials. (Brown Minigrant Application 2)

I read through my description and decided it sounded good. *But how many words?* I thought. I did the very, very familiar word count procedure. *65, not bad. Means I have room to add things in and take things out if I need to.* Mrs. Kieffer announced that we needed to have our cover sheet done by Thursday, revisions and all. It needed to be ready to propose. All I had to do now was finish my budget and revise my description.

Okay, let's see . . . I have musical practice after school but nothing besides homework after that, and this is my last class, and I don't have THAT much homework. Soooo, I could probably do my budget tonight and work on my revising in class tomorrow, where people can help me.

My thought process went from homework to Dylan O' Brien in a matter of seconds. But, I'm not going to include that in my article because I'm sure you—the reader—won't want to hear me go on and on about adorable actors (even though I could). I shut down my Chromebook and put my papers away in my folder and headed out of class, and of course I forgot all about homework.

“Olivia, do you have any homework?” my mom asked, interrupting my Instagram scroll. “Uh, maybe, I don't know” I answered, paying more attention to a picture of a giant pizza. “How do you not know? Why don't you check?” she advised me. I put down my phone and started to rack through my brain. I usually remember homework by going through the order of my schedule.

Okay, math? No. PE? Ugh, I hate PE, but I have no homework. Media? We never have homework in media. Band? No, but I probably should practice. Chorus? I should probably practice that too. Science? Ewe, yes, I have science homework. But do I have to do it? I probably should. ELA? Oh! My budget, I should probably do that.

I got out my science homework and got it done as quickly as possible, not really doing it for real at all. Then I opened up my Chromebook and

signed in. “Okay,” I said aloud. (I talk to myself a lot, it’s not weird.) “Let’s see, cover sheet.” My clicker hovered over my cover sheet doc; I clicked on it. “And budget. What do I need to pay for?” *Book publisher, obviously*, I thought. “Okay, I’ll look that up.” I said to myself. I opened a new tab and stared at the colorful Google logo. “What was I going to look up?” (I forget things easily.) “Oh, book publisher, right.” I typed “book publisher” in the search bar.

I started to scroll through the lists of websites until I saw one titled Studenttreasures Publishing. It said, “Our free student publishing programs have helped over 6 million students publish a book. Publish your students today with our FREE K–6 Student Book . . . Parents - Teachers - Create A Book Online” (*Studenttreasures.com*). *Oh, it’s free. I would have money to spend but I’ll look into it.* I started to scroll again, and another website caught my eye. This one was called Classroom Authors. I clicked on the link and it took me to the home page that said, “Receive a free book for your class library when you publish with 10 or more student authors. See how easy it can be to publish in your classroom” (*ClassroomAuthors.com*).

Receive a free book when you publish ten or more? I don’t think we will need that many. But maybe that’s just a one-time special or something. I decided it might be useful in the future, so I bookmarked it. I went back to the Google search and bookmarked *Studenttreasures.com* too. I continued to scroll, then I saw Schoolmate Publishing. *That’s probably not too bad.* I clicked on it, the words “Fast & Easy Student Publishing!” lit up the screen (*SchoolmatePublishing.com*). “Well, isn’t that perky?” I said to my computer while rolling my eyes. I hovered over the “Classroom Books” bar and clicked on the pricing option. A little girl with a big smile on her face popped up, and the speech bubble above her read: “Classroom Books are only \$19.95¹ each” (*SchoolmatePublishing.com* Figure 2).



Figure 2: A small child is overly excited about the price of books (*SchoolmatePublishing.com*).

Why is this website so happy? “This is not going to work for me,” I said, answering the question in my head. I bookmarked it anyway. “It looks like

¹ When I first did my research, the price was \$14.95.

book publishers range from like zero to fifteen dollars,” I said, biting my lip. I clicked back to my cover sheet. I typed “Book publisher and shipping \$0.00 – \$14.95” in the designated space for budget. “What else would we need to pay for?” I asked myself. *Well, children’s books have pictures, and we have a few artists in our class so . . . maybe new art supplies?* “Yeah, new art supplies, sounds legit.” I told myself.

I typed in “*Target.com*” in the Google search bar, and got a wonderful message from my network administrator telling me my access was denied (Figure 3). *What?! Access denied?! Ugh, school Chromebooks.*

“Okay, well, let’s see. Walmart?” I typed in “*Walmart.com*,” and what a surprise . . . access denied! *Michaels has a bunch of art stuff, it’s just pretty expensive, which is good because I want to make this look as expensive as possible.* This time I was braced and ready to be denied again, but when I typed in “*Michaels.com*” it actually took me to *Michaels.com*. “Finally, it’s about time,” I told my computer. I scrolled through the millions of brands of colored pencils, markers, and crayons until I found some I thought would be useful. I typed up my request for art supplies and then proceeded to do some simple addition.

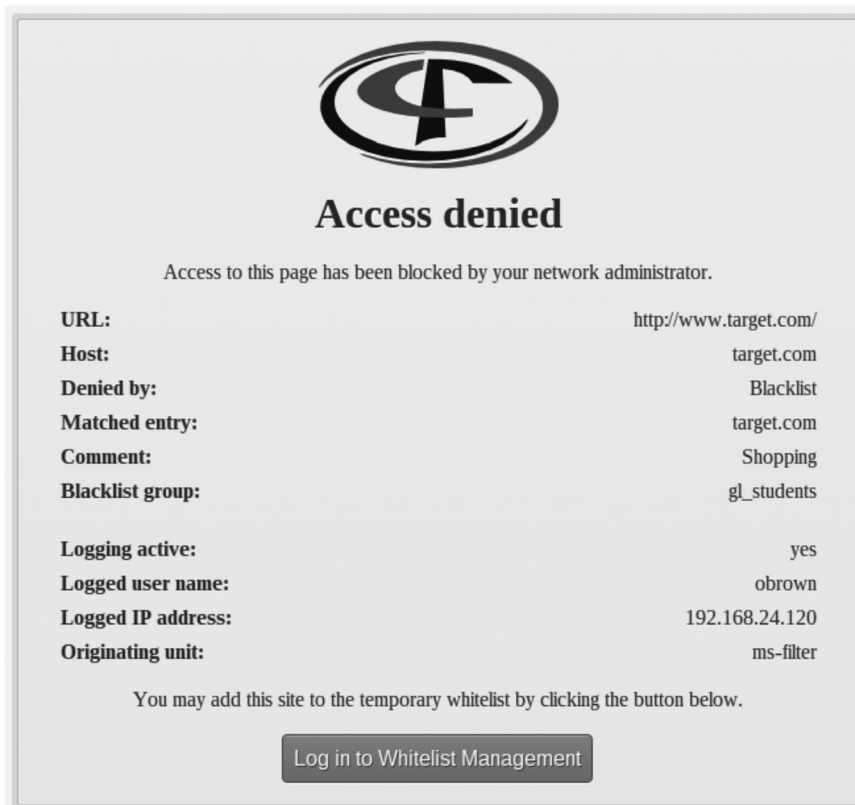


Figure 3: The school loves to control my life.

“Okay, everything combined adds up to \$37.95. I’ll ask for \$50, just in case anything goes wrong or we end up changing something” I said. *That looks good, looks like I’m done. Yes!* I shut down my Chromebook and put it away. “Goodbye schoolwork,” I said.

Thursday was another Science day, which meant I was not happy when I came into ELA. I slammed my folder on my desk and slumped down in my chair. *Ugh, school.* I rolled my eyes. “Today you need to have your partner read your description. You need to comment on your partner’s description and help them revise it,” Mrs. Kieffer explained to us. *Okay, this should be easy,* I thought. I got out my Chromebook and found my partner’s description. His idea was to use the money to research literature around the world. It was a good idea really. “This is good,” I said. “I like it, I would definitely do this project.” Traveling is one of my interests.

My partner didn’t answer until he finished reading my description. “Yours is getting funded,” he said as soon as he finished. “Uh, I don’t think so” I said. “Uh, yeah it is.” “What I mean is, I don’t want it to get funded” I explained. “Why? You could put this on your college application. Do you know how much this could do for your future education?” He sounded like he was a salesman trying to sell something to me, but I honestly think he was being real. “Whatever, but thanks, by the way. Is there anything I need to change?” I asked. “Um, maybe make it flow better? It seems a little choppy.” He pointed to his screen where I could see my work being displayed. “Okay.” I turned back to my computer and started to revise. About fifteen minutes later, I had come up with this:

Kids learn in multiple ways, through apps, teachers, and books. My idea is we can write a picture book about writing, we could teach kids all about CHAT. We would have to make it kid friendly, because CHAT would be a hard concept for a fifth grader to grasp. We could put this book into the middle school after we publish it. We can go through the classrooms and read it to the kids, and make sure they learn all about CHAT. This project will take a lot of materials and creativity. (Brown Minigrant Application 2)

That sounds good. Looks like I can just send this in now. I heard lockers starting to slam—my cue that class was over. My computer screen went blank and so did my head; all thoughts of school vanished as I walked out of the WMS doors.

“Okay, today we are going to write our minigrant narratives” Mrs. Kieffer said, “But first, you are going to write a memo to the person sitting

next to you about the kind of feedback you would like to receive.” “Minigrant narratives?!” I whispered to my partner. “Yeah,” he said. He already had his Chromebook opened to his application. He scrolled down under his cover sheet, revealing a page of questions. *So, I have to answer all those questions?! Well, doesn't look like I have a choice so I might as well get started. Memo first though, I thought.*

I unzipped my Chromebook case and thought about my memo. The first memo we wrote was about the memoir we had to write. The memoir was our first genre, I wrote mine about my shirt flying off when we ran the mile in 2nd grade (it was not my best day). I remembered that memos were supposed to be about a page long and were a formal genre, usually used in office workplaces. I navigated myself to Google Classroom, where Mrs. Kieffer had four questions for us to answer in our memo. I started to write the “To/From/Subject/Date” in a separate document. *Okay, first question: “What is the most important thing Dr. Walker should understand?” I don't know, why are we doing this again?* I started to answer the first question, and soon my whole memo was finished (Figure 4).

<p>To: Mrs. Kieffer, Christian Buck From: Olivia Brown Subject: Mini Grant Date: October 5, 2015</p> <p>The most important things Dr. Walker should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I am trying to teach kids about C.H.A.T. so we can't include everything. ● This is a project I actually want to do. This is something I think most people in our class would enjoy. ● If we can put our book into the public library so many more kids can learn about C.H.A.T. <p>I am doing well in these areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ideas. I came up with a great idea for this mini grant. ● Description. I think I am doing a good job at describing how we can accomplish this project. <p>The following things aren't working out for me:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grammar. Grammar has never been my best area of writing and I haven't really improved in this area. ● Run-on sentences. I use commas a lot where there should be periods. <p>The feedback that would be helpful to me:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Critical. Critical feedback is always good, as long as it's helpful, and usually helps out my writing a lot. ● Praise (or the opposite). I like to know whether I'm doing a good job or not.
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Figure 4: My finished memo.

I then opened up my cover sheet, and prayed that maybe—just maybe—my cover sheet would not have the narrative questions attached. But, sure enough, when I scrolled down the questions were right there, waiting for me. “Please complete the narrative in a separate document. Please provide answers to each of the questions below” (Brown Minigrant Application 3). The words taunted me, as if there was a big emphasis on *each*, and I have to say, I was a bit overwhelmed. *Okay, it’s now or never.* I told myself. I made a new document and named it “Minigrant Narrative.”

I answered the first question: “Describe the project: who, what, where, when, how, etc.” (Brown Minigrant Application 3). I started my narrative as a story, with me walking into class, almost like how I started this article. It wasn’t until the next day in class that I realized it wasn’t supposed to be a story; it was just supposed to be written in paragraph form like a narrative. After banging my head on the table, a few frustrated sighs, and repeatedly hitting the backspace button, I was back where I started. *Alright, let’s do this right.* I told myself. I was *not* going to end up redoing this, again.

I started to answer the first question, properly this time:

My project is aiming to teach kids 5th–6th grade all about CHAT. To do this we will write a picture book, making CHAT extra kid friendly. To write a book we have to find a publisher. I have found many inexpensive options to write and publish a class book. I have at least two people in my class who are wonderful at drawing, so illustrations won’t be a problem. Everyone in my class is very innovative, so I have no doubt that we could write a book. After our book is published, we can read it privately to a few classes at the grade school, and then put it in their library. We can even put the book into our community library. (Brown Minigrant Narrative 1)

I thought the library part was a good addition; if we did put it in the library, everyone would have access to it. I scrolled back to my cover sheet and read the next question. “*What are goals for this project?*” I read in my mind. *Well, I thought, to teach kids about CHAT, obviously. But also for kids to learn about writing, and make it easier for their future teachers. I think it would also be a very good learning experience for the people writing the book. Yeah, I think that sums it up pretty well.*

I translated my thoughts onto the paper and moved on, I continued this process until class ended about 45 minutes later. I really wanted to have this done soon, but I didn’t want to do it at home. I decided that I would just work on it in class, and try my hardest not to get distracted—I get distracted a lot, even yesterday I was trying to write this paper, and I ended up looking at *The Flash*. (I can do research on Grant Gustin).

I opened my Chromebook and started working on my narrative straight away. I typed fiercely and channeled all my negative energy towards this project into productiveness. I used the fact that I just wanted to be done with the minigrant as motivation, and soon enough I finished. I read the ending to my narrative, “I think that if someone wants to write about a bunch of eighth graders teaching kids about CHAT, then yes, it is very suitable for the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*” (Brown Minigrant Narrative 2). *That sounds like something I would say*, I thought. I like writing how I would talk. It makes me seem more original as a writer, rather than just writing something exactly how someone else would write it. I decided after rereading my whole narrative that it would be done—after peer editing and revising of course.

I walked into class, ready to near the end of the minigrant application process, and this time the end really was near. “Read your partner’s memo, and then their narrative. Give them helpful feedback, not just dumb comments,” Mrs. Kieffer said. “Send your stuff to me,” I told my partner. “I already did,” he said. *Of course you did*, I thought, rolling my eyes. I logged on to my computer and shared my things with my partner. I started to read his memo. By the time I finished he was already reading through my narrative and taking notes. Actually, everyone had finished their memos and were commenting. *Wow, I am a really slow reader*, I thought. I read through his narrative and almost everything was perfect, as always.

As ELA 4 ended Mrs. Kieffer said: “If all of you are finished we can send these in tomorrow.” *Yes! Finally, FINISHED WITH THIS*. A wave of relief washed over me when she said those few words.

The next day we turned in our final drafts to Mrs. Kieffer, who would then turn them into Dr. Walker, the director of the ISU writing program. “This is it,” my partner said to me. “Unless yours gets chosen,” I said. “Ha, I wish. But there’s no way mine is getting chosen.” “Whatever,” I said. I don’t remember what we did the rest of the day in class, but I remember feeling relieved, and a bit nervous. Would my project be accepted?

A Couple of Weeks Later . . .

Mrs. Kieffer’s classroom phone beeped. “Mrs. Kieffer?” The person on the line said. “Yes? I’m here.” Mrs. Kieffer said. “Could you please send Avery

Fischer and Olivia Brown down to the office?” “Sure, they are on their way,” Mrs. Kieffer said. The person hung up. I felt nervous as I stood up from my chair. Avery and I left ELA and headed down the hallway. It seemed like time was moving slow, like at a snail’s pace slow.

When Avery and I arrived at the office, we were handed white envelopes, with the ISU writing program logo stamped in the corner. We left the office and started on our trek back to ELA. “You know what these are, right?” I asked him. “Yeah, I think so,” he said. Avery ripped his envelope and read his letter right then and there, in the middle of the hallway. As for me? I waited a little bit. I didn’t want to know what my letter said right away. I wanted to leave it unread for a while. Finally, when I couldn’t wait any longer, I ripped my envelope.

“Dear Olivia,” was all I had to read and I knew. It was my project, my proposal. It was real now, and it was happening. Even though this whole time I had been dreading this, I have to admit I was excited. And I was going to face this project head on.

Originally, I was going to include the book writing process in this article. But, the due date told me otherwise. I was only three days away from having to turn in my final draft, and I was still writing about the minigrant proposal. I was also starting to get very frustrated with this article, it just would not be finished. So I decided to just write this article about the proposal. The minigrant process was, however, a learning experience for my whole group. Below is a response from a survey I took:

How do you think our group worked and interacted with each other?

I think that our group worked together pretty well. Since we sat right next to each other our communication and interactions with each other were also good, because we could easily distribute our ideas and thoughts into our book. Even though we may have gotten off topic with M&Ms, we were able to shove that aside and finish the book in time. With our minigrant:

1. We wrote the book together
2. We did research together
3. We wrote a survey together
4. We wrote the draft together
5. We drew the pictures together

Please explain your process of the minigrant project, "CHATing with Chili":

1. Looked at examples to get an idea of what a typical children's book looks like
2. Sent out a survey to get an idea of what 6th graders like to read
3. Decided how we were going to convey CHAT to our readers
4. Decided the characters, traits, storyline, plot, etc.
5. Wrote the first part of story
6. Stopped writing the story to work separately on the different CHAT terms
7. Came back together to write the story and fit all the terms into the story
8. Reviewed and edited
9. Had peers review and edit
10. Got the story into the publisher "app"
11. Looked at and drew pictures
12. Got the pictures into the publisher "app"
13. Sent it to publisher

This project had its rough spots, but we got through them and made a book easily explaining CHAT to kids and adults, *CHATing With Chili* (Figure 5). And that, my friends, is how 8th graders do things that nobody thought we could.

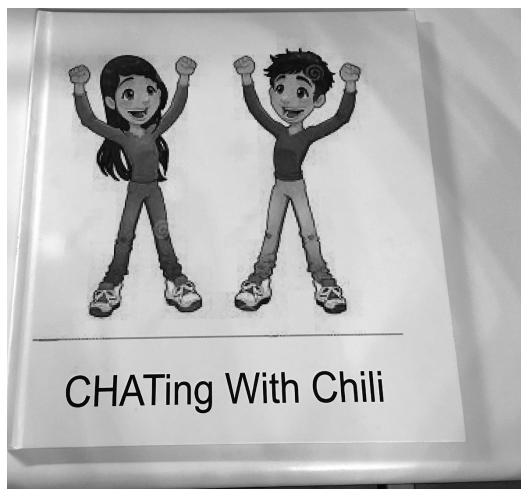


Figure 5: The book we wrote with our minigrant funds, *CHATing With Chili*.

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When writing this article, **Olivia Brown** was an 8th grade student at Washington Middle School (WMS). She enjoys reading, writing (sometimes), music, and most definitely NOT science. She gets distracted easily—wait, is that a picture of Ansel Elgort?—and is extremely happy to FINALLY be done with this article.

Through the Grapevine: Writing as a Tool for Non-Profit Musicians

Maddi Kartcheske

In an interview conducted in collaboration with the Illinois State University Writing Program's Outreach Initiative, Maddi Kartcheske talks to Seth Bernard, a Michigan-based musician, about the writing that he uses on a daily basis. Through the course of their conversation, they discuss the writing he uses in nonprofit organizations, music education, and as a public figure on social media.

MADDI: To start, could you please introduce yourself and explain what your job is?

SETH: Yes, my name is Seth Bernard, and I am a musician, educator, and activist, and I'm the founder of the Earthwork Music Collective.

MADDI: Awesome! What kind of writing do you do as part of your work? Not necessarily words or long chunks of writing but any written or visual ways that you communicate.

SETH: Okay, well I use writing a lot, all day long, every day, and as a singer/songwriter I use language coupled with music to convey multidimensional thoughts and emotions and stories. I also communicate with a pretty large network of people on a daily basis, some of which are members of the Earthwork Collective or partners that we work with. I do a lot of after-school music workshops and school assemblies. I'm involved with different advocacy campaigns at any given time, and also, I am a producer, so I am constantly in communication with people. A lot of it is minor details, so I do a lot of texting—just quick yes or no answers or getting information back

and forth. For example, today, I'm texting with two different people that work with partner organizations that are doing board retreats this weekend: Joe Voss with Creative Many and Caroline Barlowe with Blissfest. I'm also coordinating with my team with the festival that I started, the Earthwork Harvest Gathering, so using language to be very clear and concise about details related to planning and organizing events. I communicate with people constantly relating to gigs, booking, presenting myself and my work to others, looking for sponsorships and funding for different projects that I'm doing. I relate to all kinds of different colleagues: some people that are involved in governance and policy, people that work for larger institutions, lots and lots of musicians. I work with lots and lots of kids too, so I'm constantly modifying the way that I communicate to relate to people and meet them halfway with my understanding of how they like to relate. And that also goes with how I communicate with people. I know that texting is good for me, but sometimes I find that I can only really get ahold of this one person on Instagram, so I'll go over there to get ahold of them, or Facebook Messenger, or email, or especially some of the elders that I work with really appreciate a phone call. And that's more just communicating than writing, but the formatting for the different modes of communications is different and that's something that is changing rapidly, and it's fun for me because I think you get to be creative with it in some ways and sort of develop your own unique way of expressing yourself while maintaining concise functionality.

MADDI: That leads perfectly into the next question! So, the ways that you've found most effective for communicating: was this something that you learned on the fly, or do you have a standardized practice that's worked since the beginning? Maybe talk about that process a little more.

SETH: Yeah, it's definitely been, some of it, learning on the fly. I mean, when I started, I didn't have an email account, and I would book gigs by making phone calls and sending letters back and forth with venues, so it's changed quickly; and in the time that I've come of age and started the Earthwork Collective, the music industry has turned itself upside down, and there was a huge collapse of the record companies right around the time I put out my first album and started the Earthwork Music Collective. Not only have I been figuring out how to communicate in the digital era on the fly, and as someone that didn't grow up with a computer, too—my parents were pretty much Luddites in terms of introducing us to digital technology—but I got a lot of other very valuable tools in terms of writing. My mom was the editor for the local newspaper. She was a real stickler on grammar and spelling, and my dad is a good communicator too, so that was valued in my family; education was valued. That said, entering into the digital era as an independent artist on my own, I definitely learned a lot on the fly, and I

would just ask a lot of questions to friends. And since a lot of elders that helped me actually learn how to play music were in the same boat as I was in terms of how the industry was going to reorganize itself and how to build a website and use email and, y’know, there were chat rooms back in the early days, too, so it’s just like: “How do we navigate this?” For me, it’s really helped distilling it down to relationships and friendships and how to relate with someone. And if I can figure out how to relate with one person, then we’ll have that communication that’s open. One of the biggest obstacles for me in upholding my integrity as a communicator is casting too wide of a net because I have a large network and a lot of projects going on, so sometimes it takes me awhile to get back to people, and that can be problematic. That’s something that I’m trying to work out between saying “no” more, and managing my time better.

MADDI: So, were there any moments where you had an epiphany about why you were writing in a certain way or where it clicked for you on how to communicate most effectively with clients or networking individuals?

SETH: Hmm, that’s a good question! These are all good questions. I think really settling into just being myself more and feeling comfortable presenting myself where I was at and not feeling like I had to—for example, to book a show at a club that may have seemed out of reach—to oversell myself and to make myself seem more grandiose than I was as an artist at the time or to try to use language in a more professional way (my concept of what it would be like to be professional). Getting more experience in communicating with people in different realms helped me realize that I can do both: I can present myself where I’m at and feel proud of it and comfortable with it and not feel like I need to be validated by this one person or this one relationship, because I have taken more time and more years to establish myself as an independent artist and educator. You know, it’s like you’re entering this big sea, you don’t exactly know how things work, and then you develop relationships and allies; and I think, for me, realizing that I could have some fun with it and *that* can be contagious was nice, and that being real and being myself and being friendly can also coexist with being professional and being prompt in getting back to people. And then it helped me have more fun with my work and feel like I can be myself. That’s also been part of a relief in realizing how much freedom can come with being an independent artist existing, in some way, outside of the larger industry.

MADDI: Going along with that, what sort of outside bodies (like bosses, organizations, or legal terminology) control the way that you write? You talked a little bit about how you grew into your writing and communication voice, so what dictates that voice?

SETH: Yeah, I think the purpose and the audience. So, what's my intention for writing whatever it is I'm writing, and who's the audience for it? So, if I'm writing my own bio, I might have the bio on my website that people can look at, but if I'm going to do a TED Talk, I'm going to change the bio and it'll be different than if I was doing an acoustic music festival. And I'm thinking about who's going to go to the music festival or if it's going to be something permanent on a website forever; these are considerations that go into my mind. If it's a new relationship with a larger institution—for example, I'm emailing today with a woman who's the Director of Education Programs at the Henry Ford Institute in Detroit; it's a big institution, and they have a lot of resources—but she and I have already met in person and we already have a good rapport and we made each other laugh in Austin, so I have that going into the further communication that we have. I feel I can be a little bit more informal with her and personal, but also, through her, meet other people within her organization and I might use modified language with them. A lot of it is intuitive. A lot of it is going with feeling. I love people and I have a desire to connect with people and understand them, so I let that guide me and that's very helpful. I think, also, I'm an extrovert, but writing is a great way for introverts to communicate and formulate their thoughts outside of the energies of a social construct, and to be more intentional about it. I think there's also an introvert in every extrovert, so it's nice for me to go into that side of myself in solitude and be more thoughtful about the way I use language to relate to people.

MADDI: Could you explain where you fit into the hierarchy of your job (who reports to you, who do you report to), and then how that affects your writing?

SETH: Okay, yeah! Well that's interesting because being a collective, Earthwork Music is a collective, so one of our philosophies is that we're all equals in solidarity with each other. In terms of decision-making, leadership, and the history of the organization, I'm the founder and the director. Ultimately, especially with the Earthwork Harvest Gathering (the big festival that we put on), decisions come through me, but I try to do my best to delegate and empower people so that it all doesn't have to be funneled through me and that there's this sense of shared leadership. Within a certain project that one person is delegated to be the leader of, I would defer to their leadership. That said, I'll work with various non-profit organizations to do work in schools, and that's more of a layered thing. I'm the director of the program that I'm doing, the Artistic Director, but then there's an Executive Director *and* a Director of Youth Operations with one non-profit that I work with, which is SEEDS. They interface with various schools, so on Monday I'm in Rapid City schools; they have their own

principal, and they have a site coordinator for their program. I'm working *for* SEEDS. There are multiple people with the SEEDS organization there, but their leadership is in Traverse City. So, I'm assuming leadership of the Artistic Director role: if there's something that I have to navigate in terms of the school leadership or how to deal with a sensitive situation, sometimes I would defer to the leadership of a child's parents if it's at that level. Some of that stuff is tricky to navigate for me because I don't just have one job where I'm clocking in and out and the leadership is crystal clear. It's exciting because I'm my own boss and ultimately responsible for whether or not most of the things I do succeed or fail. *But* I collaborate with a lot of people and a lot of them are my friends, so that's tricky to navigate in terms of employee/boss dynamics. I really try, like I said, it's one of the founding principles of the organization to do things cooperatively and collaboratively and as a collective to really feel like there's shared ownership, so I don't feel like I'm doing my job as a leader if too much of the power and attention is focused on me.

MADDI: Great! So, how much do you think that mechanics, style, grammar, and spelling affect your daily operations or on a large-scale level?

SETH: Well, I mentioned already that some of this is ingrained in me through my mother, and I was under tight surveillance in terms of all of those things (mechanics and spelling and grammar), which was to my benefit because I started realizing early on, even just applying to colleges, that it's really important to have good technique as a writer. I was really into basketball as a kid—so it's pretty obvious right away, if I wrote a few sentences, it would be pretty obvious to a professional writer whether or not I was educated—just like if I went out on the court, within one minute people would know whether or not I knew the game, if I had any skills, and what parts of my game were not tight. So, it's important to me, and it is something I observe in other people. That said, there's a lot more of a license to be sloppy these days because of so much content. People are oftentimes in a rush, responding quickly. I'm in touch with certain authors and writers who are at the top of their field, but they might be so inundated with email that there's a couple spelling errors or typos in a quick response that they give me. I can navigate that pretty easily, but especially if I don't know the person and we're introduced to each other through writing and not in person, it's really important. And also, it's just like with music, like if I am really sound and I've practiced and I know my skills and I know the neck, it's so much more freeing for me, and I have so many more ways to express myself. So, learning that stuff, the elements of style and everything, it can be boring at first, but then you've gone through this empowerment and you have way more skills, more of a bandwidth.

MADDI: Could you talk about your experience in schooling and the sort of writing that you did, and how that affects the writing that you're doing now outside of an educational setting?

SETH: Man, I had a great English teacher in high school. She let us call her "Rupe," Jackie Ruple was her name. She was so fun, and she was in love with stories and language and novels and writers. She was very skillful at drawing out our interpretation of what we were reading and then helping us come into a heightened awareness of what we were taking in. We read a lot of classics; she helped me understand and appreciate some Shakespeare. Once that channel was open, it was like a lot of other things from that era were accessible, when before it was almost like a foreign language. My high school English teacher really helped me. Then I went to Interlochen as a postgrad, and I mostly did arts education. I did a poetry class with Michael Delp, who's a wonderful poet from Northern Michigan, and I did a lot of writing. He helped guide me in terms of expressing myself with poetry. The Jim Harrison quote that I love about poetry is, "Poetry is the language your soul would speak if you could teach your soul to speak." At first, I was writing stuff that was really kind of demonstrative and over-the-top "poetic," and he was like, "you definitely have the heart of a poet, but try not to be too 'poetic.' Just say how you feel with as few words as possible." It was empowering, but it was also a good critical atmosphere where we were workshopping what each other did, and he was trying to draw out the best of what I could do. And then after that, I took a year off, and I was an independent freelance person. I did a lot of different jobs. I did a job setting up equipment in New York City at all these venues in New York. I was only 19, but I was doing three different things on any given day. I would do songwriting and hang out with songwriters and do a songwriters' circle, which was also outside of institutional training, but it was kind of "in-between schooling" for me, so it informed what I was heading toward. It was a thing where I was the youngest person there, at 19, and I think the oldest guy there was probably 70, but people of all ages and of all experience levels playing a new song for everybody else and bringing one sheet of typed lyrics for everybody to read, and you just had to be open to whatever critiques anyone would have to say. And it had to be a new song, it couldn't be something that was tested. That really helped me hone things in and learn how to edit better. I was coming in with, like, a first draft, and people would be like, "Okay. Edit it. Change this, this, and this. Tighten this up. You're saying the same thing twice in this verse. There's a *lot* more you can do." Then after I was there, I went on tour with the National Theatre for Children, and that was a lot of communication with schools, helping me learn how to be more professional and coordinate things and do logistics efficiently. Then I went to U of M, and I took another poetry class at U of M that was really cool. Then I took theatre, and I studied theatre at Interlochen

as well, and that involved reading a lot of plays and scripts and doing a little bit of writing, too. So that's a whole other can of worms in terms of how writing and language goes. But it was fascinating, and I got to direct a play once, too. So, reading various one-act plays and choosing one to bring to life was a cool way to interact with language. I also had a couple friends who were screenwriters at the time, really getting interested in that, so I got to sort of "be nice" to their process. My best friend at the time was really into writing short films. At U of M, more theatre, and then I started to create my own degree, which was going to combine the performing arts and the studies of ecology and the environment. Then I made my first album, and I got the opportunity to go on tour. I had kinda had that year off between post-grad and college which gave me a thirst for travelling and learning in the world, so I took another year off, and I never went back to U of M, never went back to college. Shortly after that, I started the Earthwork Music and the Harvest Gathering.

MADDI: Our next question deals with the nonprofit SEEDS. So, we know that areas of your life where music specifically does more to reach out into communities rather than just for the act of performing. We read that in your work with SEEDS and through other programs that you do a lot of work with kids and music. Can you tell us a little bit about how writing plays a part in that work?

SETH: Okay, yeah, wow! Well, it's interesting, because right now I just started a new program that's poetry and music. Historically, I've just done a music program, but it's collaborative songwriting. So, it's a lot of experience in using writing to facilitate a group collaboration in a short amount of time. That's been *really* fun. I can briefly describe it. The basic process that I developed that works the best starts with going around the circle and doing a quick intro so people are kind of . . . like an icebreaker/warm up, checking in. And then we go around the circle and everybody names one word or phrase, and I write them all down. And then I recite the words back and have the kids close their eyes so they're hearing the words and visualizing them. Then, we do another round of brainstorming, one word at a time, and usually on the second round the whole group has already sort of formed some sort of a picture of words that connected with each other during the first round. The process sort of subconsciously lends itself to people associating with each other, like, free association with a pattern of words and what they evoke. So, after the second round, we look at all of the lists of words almost like letters on a fridge. What's already here? What can we organize a little bit better? We start drawing lines between words or drawing asterisks next to themes. We recognize the themes, and we can start to talk about a story arc. I try to keep the container really strong and encouraging,

but also encourage democracy. If people want to guide it in a certain way, we vote on it. That turns into creating a song structure: verses, choruses, bridges, different elements of songwriting. That can lead to all kinds of stuff. Sometimes a group really finds their flow and they work together and people aren't as nervous about sharing ideas. Other times, there's a lot of push and pull, so I have to navigate and facilitate it and sometimes make a decision for them. But for the most part, it flows pretty well, they get into the world of their collective imagination and things are moving quickly. It's good because we have a limited time, so I'm kind of guiding them into a flow to prevent it from stagnation. As a songwriter, I know that if I don't have a timeline or a deadline, things can gestate and marinate for a long time. That type of work, right when I'm in the field, when I'm doing the workshops, we're writing the whole time, and I'm trying to get everyone to participate. In that situation, I might ask more questions of someone who's an introvert or is quieter or is maybe not feeling like they're as much a part of things and try to take their ideas seriously. Sometimes if it's a young person, you have poetic license (especially in folk music) to use bad grammar. I try to at least explain that if we're going to use slang and bad grammar, that we're doing it with intention. Writing with the kids, with songwriting, kind of takes care of itself. With poetry, I'm finding that I really have to have a good understanding of where the group is at and have a couple adults in place to take dictation. I'm working with some really young kids right now, and to introduce poetry to a kindergartener is wonderful and magical in some ways. There's one little girl in particular that I'll mention in Mesick (Michigan) that I talked to yesterday. We do a freewrite at the beginning of each period. I'll give them a theme, and then I'll play guitar for three to five minutes, instrumental music while they write. The theme was "if I were a bird." So, "if I were a bird" today, what would I be, what would I do? And her poem was so great, and she just sat there, and thought about it, and then whispered her ideas into the ear of her teacher, and her teacher would write it down and say it back to see if she got it right. She just really took her time, and she wrote a poem! It was really sweet and wonderful, and it really helped me realize that I didn't really have a teacher in place to do that ahead of time. The teacher just knew her and knew that that would be supportive, so that's going to reorganize the way that I work with littler kids now and try to plan ahead to have the right person there to draw out—it's an important thing—a lot of kids are just really, really ready, and all they need is someone to show up to encourage them to be creative and to be artists, to be poets, musicians, songwriters, but if they have a bad experience with it, first of all, it can be tragic. There are a lot of kids who've had a bad experience the first time they tried to learn an instrument or something like that, so I take it really seriously. A lot of times, like I said before, it goes back to relationships being really important. Another

thing that we do with kids, sometimes I'll play a popular song or a really silly song, and I'll ask them to come up with lyrics. So, they're not "writing," but they *are*. It's a way to "trick" them into being songwriters without being "a songwriter," y'know? Maybe I'll ask if any of them are songwriters and nobody will raise their hands, and then we do that, and afterwards I'll say, "we just *all* wrote a song right there." It's not as hard as it seems; it's not a big deal. And that was part of what made me feel empowered as a writer and as an entrepreneur who is an artist but has to write as an independent business person, too. It's just to feel like it's accessible and that I can do it. Does that answer your question?

MADDI: Oh, yeah! Absolutely! So, then, as a performer with a lot of followers on social media, are you especially conscious, in our current troubled political climate, of how what you write impacts people? Can you also give us an example of this?

SETH: Another good question. Yeah, it's . . . the word is very powerful, y'know? At the root of "spelling" is "spell." So, you're casting a spell when you spell things out. It's something that all of us have to do . . . if we spend time on social media, everybody is a spellcaster, and sometimes you wish you hadn't seen stuff, or you see something that brings you down, and makes you want to react to it; and then sometimes, if you act from a *reactive* instead of a *proactive* standpoint, as a writer, you're generating more trouble for yourself and others. I have been trying to learn more about de-escalation in general and creating opportunities for nonviolent communication to take place, and, therefore, greater understanding and empathy to take place. My neighbor, right across the street from the farm where I grew up (he and I grew up together) we don't see eye-to-eye *at all*, politically. We often communicate with each other on the Internet, on Facebook, and he'll sometimes be the first to respond to something that I post, and he'll just use a lot of capital letters and exclamation points. But I know him, and I know that we're friends and we love each other and respect each other. But sometimes we'll really get into it, and I wonder what people think, so I try to . . . it's actually a great opportunity to, I guess, demonstrate how to be . . . and I don't always get it right, but I do take it seriously, being able to create an example of how to disagree with someone respectfully. Not to insult them as a person but to defend my position totally authentically and honestly while showing them respect and actually listening to them—not belittling them. It's so easy to belittle people on social media, and we have way too much shame culture, which has left us feeling very divided and a lot of people feeling very isolated. I also, genuinely, try to be fascinated with people who have a different point of view, and it's an opportunity for me to learn why they hold that position. I try to draw more information out of them and be inquisitive and let them

know that I'm glad that they're sharing what they're sharing, and I don't feel threatened by it, but I *do* want to learn more and ask some clarifying questions. And then sometimes other people will jump in and things escalate again, quickly, and I can't manage everything. Things can get pretty hairy, quickly sometimes, on social media when you're talking about politics and other hot-button issues. I try to be a peacemaker without stifling dialogue. I think that getting into better habits of public discourse is really important right now. Even if it's just in our own neighborhoods, it's absolutely essential, and we have to learn how to do governance at every level. It's very hard to do. Making decisions together is challenging for families, it's challenging in a band, but it's absolutely essential. Otherwise things are totally dysfunctional, and you get into a situation where people feel disenfranchised, and that's a danger right now, too. So, I think, especially with young people, I try to set an example of being very strong in why I hold a position, if I hold it, but then also being open-minded enough to hear other people and allow myself to be corrected, if that's what needs to happen, y'know? Being a man in this society, a white man, too, to respect women and people of color and to allow myself to be educated *by* women and people of color about how their experience is in this society and how it's different from my experience, I think that's really important right now.

Maddi Kartcheske is a junior at Illinois State University majoring in creative writing and minoring in civic engagement and responsibility. She loves her home state, North Carolina, large bodies of water, and studying the English language. Her goal is to attend graduate school and eventually teach writing at the college level.



CHATting about Design

Kelsey Lewis

In this article, Lewis finds the connection between the development and delivery of a project created with graphic design and CHAT, something she learned in an English class. She explains how each of the different factors that make up CHAT are easily relatable to her process when it comes to design.

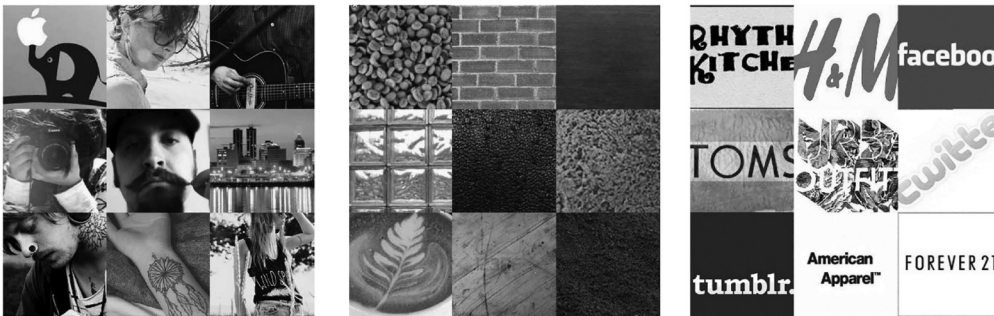
We see graphic design everywhere without even thinking about the process behind it or who created it. Most people are not even really sure what graphic design is. Designer Juliette Cezzar would describe *graphic design*, or *communication design*, as “the art and practice of planning and projecting ideas and experiences with visual and textual content.” Design comes in many forms, physical or virtual. Design could have images, words, or even graphic forms. Currently, I am studying for my bachelor’s degree in graphic design, and until this fall, I had no idea what CHAT (cultural-historical activity theory) was. After learning CHAT, I came to the realization that I use CHAT all the time when it comes to my design process and execution.

As a designer, I use CHAT to create the text by involving myself in activity, such as writing, sketching, or making word maps. Then I move on to the production of text on my computer. During the process, I have to think about the representation of my piece and how I plan it. Representation could also include the hierarchy of the text itself or even a consideration of where I plan on placing my piece. Socialization and reception also come into play, especially during critiques from others. Lastly, there is ecology, which

deals with any curve balls that may occur in my designing process. A lot goes into design work. It's not just mindless thinking and hoping it turns out for the best.

Activity, Production, Representation and My Design Process

So, before a project is started, I have to first engage myself in **activity** (all of the things that go into producing a text). After receiving from the client an idea of what they want designed (this could be a logo, brochure, poster, anything really), I need to start brainstorming. Before digging in, I like to create mood boards that are a collection of images, colors, text, and textures. Mood boards not only help me as a designer to stay motivated and inspired, but they also help my client understand the direction I am going without taking up too much time on a direction that may not work. The mood boards (examples shown in Figures 1–3) help me with my target audience, textures/ colors I may want to use, and logos with type that my target audience may see in use often.



Figures 1–3: Examples of mood boards.

According to the staff at Creative Bloq, mood boards “exist as a designer’s tactile and visual sandbox, a place where they can openly experiment with the different facets of a design.” Once my mood boards are created, I can start sketching and using mind maps.

A mind map is “a graphical tool that can incorporate words, images, numbers, and color, so it can be more memorable and enjoyable to create and review” (Pinola). Typically, when I create mind maps, I stick to strictly words. Figure 4 shows a mind map I created for a poster I designed for the 2012 TypeCon convention—“an annual conference presented by the Society of Typographic Aficionados (SOTA), an international organization

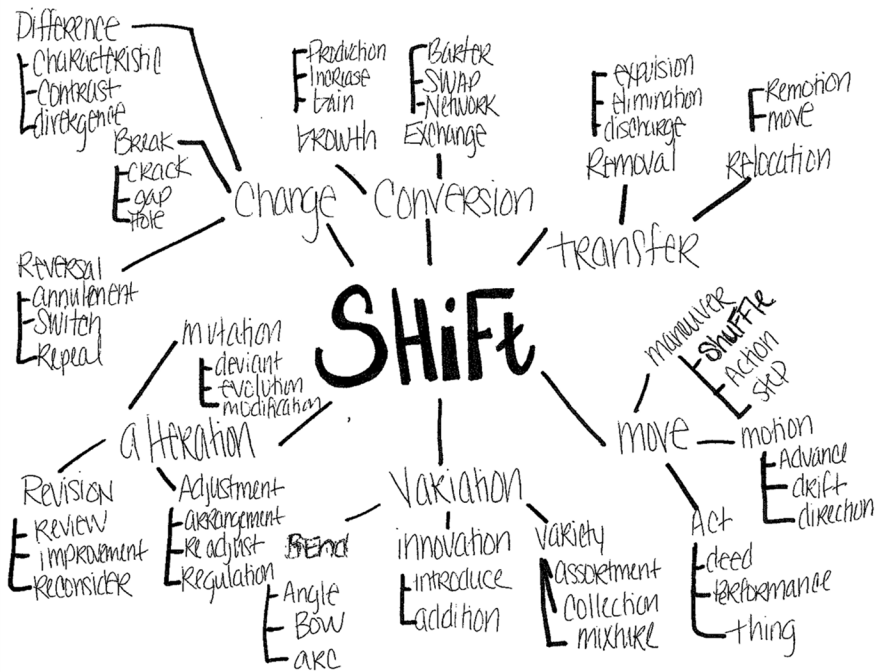


Figure 4: Mind map

dedicated to the promotion, study, and support of typography and related arts.” The theme for the 2012 convention was “MKE SHiFT,” so my idea behind this map was to find a word to work off of that was a third degree different from “shift.” This provided me with the word “shuffle,” and from there I was able to create the image for my poster in Figure 5.

Once I have my ideas sketched out, I can move onto **production** (or the process by which the text is actually produced, which includes the use of tools). This part of the process is where I can move onto my Mac. When creating a design project, I have several options of programs to use. There are three main Adobe programs I use, which are Illustrator, InDesign, and Photoshop; most of the time I am using two or three for any one project. Illustrator helps me create vector or digital images, like logos. InDesign is where I create publication designs such as posters, fliers, or brochures. Photoshop is an image-editing program. This is also where **representation** (the way I plan out how the text will look) is also used.



Figure 5: Shuffle image developed through my mind mapping process.

With representation and production in mind, I need to think about both how I am going to produce my text *and* what I want it to look like (which includes thinking about how it is going to be used). There are several variables that contribute to how the text is produced. For example, am I designing a brochure? A brochure would require a lot of text that I would have to write. Or is it an image created out of text? Or am I designing something else? Also, I have to consider how I am going to get the viewer to think about the text.

For example, many people do not realize the importance of fonts or typefaces when creating typography. For designer Dan Mayer from *Smashing Magazine*, “selecting the right typeface is a mixture of firm rules and loose intuition.” Mayer also compares picking typefaces to getting dressed. He believes “just as with clothing, there is a distinction between typefaces that are expressive and stylish versus those that are useful and appropriate.” Picking the right typeface helps the viewer understand the message I am trying to convey. My go-to font is the widely popular Helvetica, not because of its popularity, but because it is a very readable font. A typeface such as Helvetica has a large font family that can express a range of tone and emotion. A font family includes a number of weights like light, bold, regular, etc. and/or cuts including italic, condensed, etc. Figure 6 is an example of fonts in the Helvetica font family expressing emotion. As you can see, the variation in font weight allows “I love you” to have a nice airy feeling, whereas “I hate you” shows the boldness behind the statement.



Figure 6: Example of different font weights.

Continuing on with typography, I then determine the representation of the text. In design, text is never placed carelessly. In Figure 7, the viewer can see right away that this poster is about TypeCon. Then we see the theme, data, and location. Next, we see body copy along with other bits of information, like a schedule. All of this data is set at different scales of type and subtype. The system shown here is called hierarchy, which is a system for

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TypeCon is an annual conference presented by the non-profit Society of Typographic Aficionados (SOTA), an international organization dedicated to the promotion, study, and support of typography and related arts. Since the inaugural conference in 1998, TypeCon has explored type for the screen, printing history, Dutch design, type in motion, Arabic calligraphy, the American Arts and Crafts movement, experimental typography, web fonts, and much more. Special events include the Type & Design Education Forum, and an exhibition of international type and design.

The mighty Milwaukee, WI has been selected as the host city for our 14th annual conference next summer. We are very excited to be working with folks at the historic Hamilton Wood Type & Printing Museum - in nearby Two Rivers, Wisconsin - on several special events and workshops for the conference.

MAIN CONFERENCE PROGRAM
 Friday, August 3rd-Sunday, August 5th
 Full Length Presentations (40 minutes)
 Type in 20 Presentations (20 Minutes)
 Panel Discussions (45-75 minutes)

PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS
 Wednesday, August 1st-Thursday, August 2nd
 Full day Workshops (7 hours)
 Half Day Workshops (3.5 hours)

TYPE & DESIGN EDUCATION FORUM
 Thursday, August 2nd
 Tours & Special Events
 Tuesday, July 31st-Sunday, August 5th

Figure 7: An example of the use of hierarchy.

organizing type that shows the importance of data. Hierarchy also allows the reader to find what they are looking for by guiding them through the content. Considering these elements is crucial to how I plan out the representation of the text.

In Carrie Cousins’s article “Every Design Needs Three Levels of Typographic Hierarchy,” she explains the importance of having three basic levels of hierarchy. She begins with the primary level, which is all the big type, such as headlines. The primary level is the biggest level the viewer will see, unless the design was meant to have typographic art. Next is the secondary level. The secondary level has the tidbits of information that can easily be scanned over. These can include the subhead of an article, captions, quotes pulled out, or other small portions of information. These elements are on the larger side, but not as large as the primary level. Next is the tertiary level of typography. This is the portion where all the body copy is of the design. This is usually the smallest type but also sizable enough to read legibly. The typeface used in this section needs to be simple and consistent throughout. Cousins also mentions other levels of typography that include “effects applied to the tertiary level of type for small areas of impact.” These effects include using bold, italics, underlining, or even color to grab attention to areas, but they are used sparsely. The different levels of hierarchy are connected to representation because hierarchy is all about the

careful consideration of where and how text is placed and how the audience might take it in. Hierarchy, as a part of representation, also acknowledges how text can convey more than its intended purpose.

Another important aspect of typography is designing for readability (another facet that is critical to consider in representation). Readability is one of the top concerns when it comes to any design project involving text. If it can't be read, then why have it in the first place? There is a difference between readability and readable/legible text. Someone may be able to make out the text, but that doesn't exactly mean that it is readable. Readability is the easiness with which text can be read, and comprehension is the main point. Text that can be scanned quickly is readable text. There are some visual standards that come with readable text. Lines of type that are too large can be hard to read as they come off in blocks and cause odd breaks and

When type is set in short line-lengths, the amount of words that fit into a line means that people generally validate the text. This creates a problem as type that is forced to fit into such a small form doesn't naturally work. During which word-spacing and letter-spaces suffer.

hyphenation, and they also take longer to read. Line lengths that are too short also cause awkward breaks such as in Figure 8. Also, hyphenation that is used in short lines creates too many words that are hyphenated. Text needs to have a happy medium where it should be large enough to read easily but not so big that it makes the whole thing weird.

In addition, a key component to readability is appropriate contrast and leading. Lettering should be in its own space, and the color of text against the background must be different enough to be detectable. The spacing between the lines of type, known as leading, must also be carefully considered. When determining the correct size of leading, a general rule of thumb is to use leading that is 3–5 points more than what the font size is. For example, for clear, readable text for body copy, designers use a font size ranging from 9 points to 11 points;

Figure 8: An example of awkward text.

usually 10.5 is best, but I prefer 9. So, in Figure 9, I set my body copy in 9-point font, then I made my leading 14 points. Setting leading in design is the equivalent to setting up a word document with double spacing. These basic rules do *not* always apply. Sometimes it is okay to break the rules and have fun with text, like famous designer Neville Brody did. There were times where he would not use leading for a quote and would make the type large in black. Designers must also think about contrast. Leading is one way to create contrast, but color could do the same. Imagine if I wrote this article all in a light gray. This would be really hard to read, right? A popular choice for contrast is using black text on a pale background because this helps distinguish the text from the medium. For blocks of text, it is best to use neutral colors like black or white. Colored type can be used but works well with large text.

How leading is used in a block of text affects the readability. There is a small difference between type being either too close together or even too far apart, since leading is all about the consistency of type. Blocks of text tend to be easier to read when the leading is expanded as this will help guide the eyes naturally across the page and then down. Also following the instinctive flow of spacing from dark to light. This will also feel proper for body copy that requires a lot of reading such as many websites and printed publications. Leading is the key to understanding the message you are trying to convey with type and adjusting it to match appropriately.

Figure 9: An example of leading.

Now there is another component that I feel does not get mentioned enough, and that is kerning (which also helps to highlight the connection I am seeing between representation and the use of typography in design work). Between each letter in every word is a space. This space between letters can be adjusted to make the words more appealing to the eye and can help prevent misreading. Frequently, a font's default kerning is not optimal for the combination of certain letters. Kerning is where designers manually adjust the spacing between letters or characters in a piece of text, such as in the text shown in Figure 10. Notice how ADVANTAGE looks odd without kerning; the space between the letters before kerning looks uneven and



Figure 10: An example of kerning.

greatly spaced out. Letters are like puzzle pieces: they have different shapes that need to be fit together but in a way that works well with each other. Kerning may not seem like such a big deal. Most of the time we can slide by without having to kern words that we are using. There are times, though, that kerning is a must, otherwise we get lovely signs and products like Figures 11 and 12. If you notice, some of the words seem to be saying something other than what they truly are. Since kerning was not used, “click” appears to be saying “dick,” while “flickering” looks like “fuckering.” Overall, I hope you can see through this discussion that there are many aspects of representation that can be understood through an examination of the work of graphic designers.



Figure 11: Bad example of kerning 1.



Figure 12: Bad example of kerning 2.

Reception, Distribution, and Ecology in My Design Process

While designing for a project, along the way I also have to stop and receive critiques from others. This is part of the **reception** aspect of CHAT (or how the reader receives the text). Designer Cassie McDaniel remarks that “the critique is a corrective step in the process that allows different ways of thinking to reach common ground.” In class, my peers listen to me explain my idea for my project and any changes I have made or may do, and then they are asked for their opinion. Critiques are a way for my peers to give me feedback. They can tell me what is working in my project and what is not. They may even offer ideas for changes that could be made to make my project great. After hearing these critiques, I tend to write down any suggestions offered. I make changes to my project based on my peers’ thoughts and continue tweaking until I feel my message is being conveyed. I want to make sure that if my project involves text, then my viewers are able to take away the message being conveyed by that text. Sometimes the text is being taken away mentally, but sometimes it is physically taken away as well. One such project was a box that I will later mention, which had a slot at the

top where students were able to rip off paper with information on how to register to vote.

How text is being taken away (or received) is another aspect of reception. I have to think about what kind of outcome I want when a viewer sees my project. For projects where I create posters, my viewers are reading the information I have provided for them. Depending on the poster, the viewer can gain knowledge with the information, or I can make them interested in attending an event. The viewer can also engage with the text by picking up whatever it is that I have created, like my box or like the package shown in Figure 13. With packaging design, I want my viewer to see the package and want it, to take it with them, to use it. If they don't take it with them for whatever reason, I want the viewer to at least keep thinking about the project, eventually returning to it.



Figure 13: Thirty-thirty Coffee packages.

And, in relation to **distribution** (or how and where the text will be distributed), I need to contemplate where I will be placing my piece. One semester, I had created a piece that was set up in Milner Library. For this project, I wanted my target audience to be adults 18–29 years old. I am mentioning my target audience because this helps me determine where my project will physically be placed. So, this project I created was for “Get Out the Vote” and was a box that provided information about election judges and how to register to vote. When creating this box, placement was key. The box had to be in a place where students would be in order for them to see it. If it were not for the fact that the project was in a display case, it would have originally been placed somewhere students would come across it, such as on a desk or a table in the library.

During my design process, to me, **ecology** (or the physical or environmental forces affecting the production, representation, reception, distribution, or socialization of my text), represents anything that may take me off track from my goal of completing a project. From a design standpoint, an example of this would be working with clients. Sometimes clients will give you a brief on what they want done for a project, but then when you produce the project, they think it is all wrong. When that happens, a lot of reworking has to get done in a short time frame. There can also be miscommunication with clients that can set me back as well. Other examples would be things

such as basic mess ups. Mess ups can include failing to proofread, not saving files correctly, not packaging files (packaging files is where I save the project and any links in the document all into one file, which helps me to not lose anything), forgetting to add a bleed or crop marks (bleeds are where the color of the project spills over so when I cut or “crop” the piece, I will not have any white areas), and just basic printing mistakes. In my case, printing and not proofreading are my biggest downfalls. I either always forget to proofread, then catch it after I print, or I just simply print on the wrong paper, print the wrong size, or forget how to print double-sided so that the images are going in the same direction.

Conclusion

Now you can see how I understand that CHAT and graphic design are in relation to each other. CHAT is often used in my process and execution. Sometimes the different elements are separate throughout the process, but sometimes they work together. In the beginning, I start with writing, sketching, and creating mind maps; this is the activity needed to start the design. Once on my computer, I work on the production of the text and my plan for how it will all come together. Once my plan is in motion, I consider representation of the text, such as hierarchy and placement of the project. Before finishing the project, I am critiqued by my peers and, as a result, I have to consider the future reception of the text. I need to consider the distribution of my project and how I hope my viewer is engaged with my project. Lastly, I sometimes have to deal with ecology and any detours it might cause with the project.

Like I have said before, design is not just mindless thinking. A lot of planning, writing, working, and reworking are involved in design—just like writing this article. Never did I think that something I learned in an English course would help me further understand something I already use all the time.

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Kelsey Lewis really hates writing bios, as she tends to overthink what to write. So here are some of her likes and dislikes. Likes: her husband (most times), traveling, music festivals, and watching shows about the paranormal. Dislikes: almost everything.

Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*

GWRJ Editors

Our Mission Statement

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

General Information

Submissions

Articles can be submitted to the *GWRJ* at any time. However, we do have deadlines for upcoming issues. For issue 10.1, which will come out at the beginning of the Fall 2019 semester, articles must be submitted by May 15, 2018. The deadline for consideration in our 10.2 (Spring 2020) issue is January 15, 2019. Please contact the Associate Editor at grassrootswriting@gmail.com with queries about possible submissions and to submit your work.

Queries and Drafts

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

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

Honoraria

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

Style and Tone

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

1. The readership of the *GWRJ* is writers. It is not “students,” even though the journal is used by writing instructors and students. (The *GWRJ* remains the primary text for Writing Program courses at Illinois State University, and it’s also used by teachers and students in other programs as well.) *GWRJ* articles should attempt to provide valuable content to writers who are engaged in the activity of “learning how to learn about” genres.
2. “Teacher narratives” are not acceptable as *GWRJ* articles. We are interested in material that looks at literate activities from the position of a “writer” or a “researcher,” but articles that discuss ways to “teach” people about writing are not appropriate for this journal.
3. Language and style that is overly formal or “academic” may be unappealing to our readers.
4. A tone that situates the author as a “master” writer is often problematic. (We call these “success narratives,” which are often how-to type articles in which the focus is on the author’s learned expertise.) Authors should remember that no one “learns” a genre completely or in a completely simple way. 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 www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html for Fair Use guidelines.

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

Researching for *Grassroots*

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

But what does it really mean? In more practical language, it means finding some situation where humans are doing things that involve language (which can mean composing in genres that are oral, aural, visual, etc., not just

writing on paper) and thinking, “Hey, that looks interesting,” 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 engage in the activities of finding and offering work.

To help researchers who might be thinking about or engaging in literate practices that they’d like to investigate, we’ve created this list of 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”), it is important to remember that we really can’t talk about an activity like “revising,” for example, as if it’s something that a person does the same way in every kind of situation.

Literate Activity in the Wild

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

the ways that textual production is interactive—how it involves all kinds of interactions between different people and different objects, tools, and other entities over time. This kind of research can involve the interactions of people and genres and different cultural norms and practices.

Case Studies of Individual Literate Practices

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

Linguistics Writing Research

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

Global or Intercultural Literate Practices

It is only within a few issues of the journal that the *GWRJ* has been able to publish research on literate practices as they move across cultural and/

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

The Researcher’s Process

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

Step One

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

Step Two

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

Step Three

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

Step Four

Because *Grassroots* articles are a fairly unique kind of writing, authors may find it useful to consider past writing experiences that they might be able to

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

Step Five

It can also be important to think about “target genres,” or types of writing that might be used as examples during the research and writing process. Obviously previously published *GWRJ* articles can be useful in this way, but it can also be interesting to think of other kinds of writing that might serve as examples. Writing research in the field of rhetoric and composition can be useful (for example, books and articles found on the WAC Clearinghouse website at 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 do that research. Will it be necessary to visit sites where writing is happening? Interview people about how they produce or use different kinds of writing? Find historical examples of types of writing?

Step Eight

If the article is going to include observations of people’s writing activities 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: isuwriting.com/.

Step Nine

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

Step Ten

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

Works Cited

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