Instructor’s Manual

Deborah Weaver
Lindee Owens
with Matthew Bryan

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INTRODUCTION

How to Use the Text

The third edition of *Writing about Writing* is organized around five *threshold concepts* — ideas central to understanding writing:

1. Writing is not just something people do, but something people study.
2. Writing is impacted by our prior experiences.
3. Writing helps people make meaning and get things done, but there are always constraints.
4. “Good” writing is dependent on writers, readers, situation, technology, and use.
5. Writing is a process, all writers have more to learn, and writing is not perfectible.

These concepts, born out by writing studies research, are often at odds with ideas students learned in earlier educational settings. A primary activity this textbook facilitates, then, is students wrestling with their misconceptions about writing as they work to “cross” these conceptual thresholds. When they do, Wardle and Downs assert that students will experience, think about, and understand writing differently, and they will be on the road to becoming more effective and empowered writers.

The readings, most of which are articles written by composition scholars, will challenge students because many of them use unfamiliar vocabulary and present sophisticated research studies; in addition, the concept of studying writing as a discipline like biology or history will be new to most of your students. For these reasons, some students will be resistant at first. By the end of the course, however, we hope you’ll discover, as we did, that students do come around and appreciate learning about writing.

In the following sections, we provide general advice for using the text. At the end of this introduction, you will also find an explanation of what is included in the Instructor Manual and how that material can help you plan and teach your course.

How to Navigate *Writing about Writing*

Each chapter in *Writing about Writing* considers one *threshold concept*, and the chapters are intentionally sequenced to build off one another. The book opens with a robust first chapter that begins to familiarize students to the threshold concepts and prepares students to think about writing as an object of study, as well as how such study can apply to their own writing practices. The subsequent chapters (Chapters 2–5) focus first on the individual before moving on to the ways that texts create meaning and get things done in particular communities.
and situations, and the book concludes with an exploration of how texts are actually composed. A threshold concept underlies each chapter’s goals and informs the order of the readings within that chapter. In addition, you’ll find that chapters reach into other chapters, making reference to specific ideas, writers, or readings. All of this is to connect and echo threshold concepts across readings, activities, and assignments.

Because the new Chapter 1 thoroughly explains what threshold concepts are and how important they are to understanding Writing about Writing, we suggest you assign it as your students’ first reading. It really does frame everything that follows and gives students both a preview and a foundation to read from. The chapter now includes activities that you can assign as homework or use in class to start students reflecting on each concept from the start of the course, allowing them to build their knowledge through practice and familiarity with each concept. Moreover, this chapter also provides a rationale for why they’re being asked to study writing in this way, which we have found is key to student buy-in.

We understand that teaching every chapter in this book in a single quarter or semester is unlikely. So consider having students start by reading Chapter 1 to establish a foundation for what the book is about and how to get the most from the work they’ll be doing. Next, have students study their personal literacies and attitudes about literacy (Chapter 2), and then how texts mediate group activities and construct meaning (Chapters 3 and 4). Complete the course with students understanding how texts are created (Chapter 5). Although you might not teach every chapter in its entirety, as separate units, or sequentially, there are excellent readings that tie to multiple threshold concepts throughout Writing about Writing, and the book’s flexibility allows you to choose readings and teach them in the order you wish. The two sample syllabi on pages xxiii and xxviii provide examples of grouped readings that we think work well together in two rather different course sequences. In planning your syllabus, you might also start by selecting the major writing assignments you’ll want students to complete from the examples provided at the end of each chapter; then you can select readings that lead directly into those assignments. There is enough material in Writing about Writing that you will be able to design a course that aligns with the needs of your institution and your values as an instructor.

Instead of deciding how many readings are sufficient, think about the outcomes from each chapter that are most important to you and which readings can best meet these outcomes. As a general guideline, we suggest you select a reading for each outcome described in a chapter. Usually, this means you will select three readings per chapter.

### How to Use the Reading Assist Tags

Each chapter after the first includes a tagged reading that guides students through foundational or challenging selections. These readings include Assist Tags that appear in the margins near the text they complement, which is either bracketed or implied as the beginning of a long passage related to the tag. In the left margin, blue tags identify genre conventions typical of writing studies
How to Use the Discussion and Journaling Questions

After each reading in the text is a section called Questions for Discussion and Journaling. These questions target multiple ways to analyze and reflect on the reading. The questions also provide a way to ensure that students are accountable for the reading. Expecting students to show up for class having digested this material, without asking them to do some preliminary writing, will result in unproductive class discussions. The questions provide a framework for discussion and a way to isolate areas of confusion students may encounter when reading. Because our experience suggests that most first-year students do not know how to read critically, we have included the following approaches to better facilitate your classroom discussions:

- Each time you assign a reading, select four or five focus questions for students to respond to in writing. In class, divide students into groups and have each group discuss one of the assigned questions. Allow time for students to compare their responses. Then have each group share the responses with the entire class. This activity allows you to cover more material if you have limited time to discuss a reading.
- Assign one or two questions and have students write a response to that question. Have students bring the responses to class to begin discussion. Having a written response in front of them during class discussions gives students the confidence to enter a conversation.
- Have students make a brief oral presentation that explains their response to one of the journaling questions. You might ask students to provide a single PowerPoint slide or visual aid to represent their response to the reading.
- Assign a reading response journal at the beginning of the course where students respond to one or two assigned questions for each reading. Ask students to support their responses with direct references to the reading.
These logs can be collected periodically to see if students understand the major concepts in a reading.

- Encourage students to draw on their own specific experience as writers when responding to questions about the readings. Assure them that it is perfectly acceptable — and helpful, even — to question, disagree with, and “talk back” to authors.

How to Use the Applying and Exploring Ideas Questions

Like the Questions for Discussion and Journaling section, Applying and Exploring Ideas is found at the end of every reading. This section has great ideas for either homework or in-class activities. Sometimes the activities are extensions of research explored in the reading. Sometimes the activities call for students to find supplemental sources to demonstrate the concepts or goals of a particular reading. For example, in Chapter 4, an activity asks students locate and rhetorically read a text that seems purely informational (e.g., an instruction manual or test directions). They are asked to figure out the writer’s intentions and the audience’s needs, and to find ways the text goes beyond information to argument. Through this activity, students can apply and understand what Haas and Flower discussed in their article, “Rhetorical Reading Strategies and the Construction of Meaning.” The rationale for the readings becomes more apparent if you use this section of the text. More ideas for supplemental activities are included in the corresponding chapters of this Instructor’s Manual.

Teaching Tips

- Recognize how hard students are working by explicitly praising their work. Do not, however, apologize for the length or difficulty of the readings. By the midpoint of your term, students will acknowledge that they are “getting smarter.” They may not like to write any more than they did the first day of class, but they give testimony that they are learning about writing in ways that are more meaningful and applicable than ever before — something they didn’t expect to happen in a composition class.

- Always assign the Chapter Introductions and Framing the Reading sections that begin each reading. These previews organize and contextualize the chapters and readings, and the Getting Ready to Read sections offer students bulleted lists of what to focus on and read for. These lists also make good homework assignments and prompts for freewrites and/or class discussions.

- Assign a Tagged Reading early in the semester both to introduce the Assist Tags to students and to encourage them to be mindful about the approach they take to reading scholarly articles. It will be useful to have a conversation about reading tips and strategies with your class, and considering the tags the editors have provided (and why they chose to mark the places they did) can make for a productive opening to that discussion.
• Limit the take-home points to one or two that you find most important in each reading. Keep those intense discussions of methodology and theory back in graduate school. If you try to discuss every aspect of the assigned articles, students become overwhelmed, they forget the essential points, and you will not have enough time to connect how the readings apply to the larger writing assignments. In each chapter of this manual we have provided **Take-Home Points** for each reading to help you identify and focus class discussions.

• Use the activities from **Applying and Exploring Ideas** to practice and demonstrate the objectives of the larger writing assignments.

• Look to the **Meta Moments** following each reading for ideas for short in-class freewrites or discussions. Students sometimes struggle to connect the ideas in a reading to their own lives or the threshold concepts approached by each chapter, and so the Meta Moments provide questions that turn the ideas they’ve read about back on themselves.

• Give short vocabulary quizzes at the beginning of class. You will be introducing students to new types of language and ways of thinking about writing, so you have to consciously discuss the vocabulary that they need to know to enter the conversations. We find that it works best to ask in your quizzes for examples rather than definitions of the new vocabulary. Be sure to point out that there is an excellent **Glossary** of terms included in the textbook, and, as always, encourage students to consult a dictionary for other terms they might not understand. (This Instructor’s Manual lists key vocabulary words and phrases at the beginning of each chapter.)

• Encourage first-year students to connect their own experiences to those of the subjects of the writing research they’ll be reading about. Most students enjoy the fact that the authors of these scholarly articles are researching and writing about students like them and that the subjects of these case studies and ethnographies are versions of the challenges they have struggled with their whole writing lives.

• Point your classes toward the student-authored texts that appear in **Writing about Writing**. There are two included in most chapters. These texts are valuable because they provide a perspective on key concepts that students may find more immediately relatable, and they serve as potential models for how students might apply these ideas to their own lives. You can also find other student work based on **Writing about Writing** in online journals like **Young Scholars in Writing** and the University of Central Florida’s **Stylus: A Journal of First-Year Writing**.

• Demonstrate how to search for supplemental texts. Some of the short assignments in **Applying and Exploring Ideas** require students to locate a variety of texts, ranging from editorials to class syllabi to other scholarly articles. Don’t assume students know how to find appropriate or relevant texts. Bring in a sample or two, and give suggestions for where students can look to find supplemental material. Depending on how your program is set up, you might want to arrange a presentation by a
reference librarian or do a short presentation yourself on library holdings and the ground rules for using them.

What’s in this Instructor’s Manual?

This Instructor’s Manual starts with a list of frequently asked questions that often arise when instructors teach with *Writing about Writing* for the first time. Next are two sample syllabi, each emphasizing different major writing assignments, different readings, and different in-class activities.

Following these resources, the manual has five chapters that correlate to the five chapters in the text. Each chapter includes the following sections:

- Chapter overview
- Key vocabulary
- Summaries and take-home points for each reading
- Supplemental activities

Chapters 2–5 also identify key student outcomes and readings in each chapter that teach to the specific outcomes.

Frequently Asked Questions

*Writing about Writing* represents a fresh and exciting approach to teaching college writing, one that has been successfully instituted in many classrooms across the country. Teaching with *Writing about Writing* for the first time, though, can be a rather profound departure from the norm for many composition teachers, who often have questions about how to begin using the book in their courses. We’ve compiled some of the most common questions and our answers below.

1. **Most of the readings in *Writing about Writing* (as well as the underlying approach to teaching writing) come from the academic discipline of writing studies. What if my background isn’t in writing studies?**

   You’re in good company. Teachers from many different academic backgrounds have found success with a writing-about-writing approach to teaching composition. These have included English literature, creative writing, TESOL, English education, and more. College composition instructors bring a wide range of writing experiences and knowledge to their classrooms, and one of the qualities that makes *Writing about Writing* stand out is that it invites everyone in the classroom (students and teachers alike) to share their perspectives about how writing works. The ideas and readings in the textbook are not framed as the authoritative views on writing, but rather as viewpoints that can be tried, tested, and built on or even revised. Your years of experience writing and thinking about writing in school and elsewhere — as well as your training in closely examining how language works — make you well-prepared to teach using this textbook.

   While you might not need a Ph.D. in writing studies or rhetoric and composition to teach with *Writing about Writing*, do not be surprised if you
Frequently Asked Questions

have difficulty grasping the takeaways or significance of some of the book’s scholarly readings. Some of these authors’ language, methods, and ways of understanding writing and research are highly specialized. We think, though, that coming at these readings from an outsiders’ perspective is actually an asset for teachers using this book for the first time. You’ll be approaching the readings from a similar position as your students, and the conversations you will have around the ideas presented in them should be engaging and informative for everyone, even when you find yourself disagreeing or feeling ambivalent about a particular author’s ideas.

Moreover, Writing about Writing provides almost as much support for instructors as it does for students. The book’s apparatus—Framing the Reading sections, Questions for Discussion and Journaling, and Applying and Exploring Ideas activities included with each reading—should provide you with ample starting points for assignments and activities as well as ideas for facilitating useful discussions about readings and course concepts. The book’s overall structure, too, and the ways it encourages students to grapple with key questions about how writing works present possibilities for organizing your course as a whole. The major writing assignment samples included at the end of each chapter offer compelling ways for students to apply, test, and extend the ideas they’re learning about. Even if you’re new to the writing-about-writing approach or writing studies more generally, you should find plenty of ideas of what to do when using this book.

2. **The readings resemble what I read in grad school. Aren’t these too difficult (not to mention boring) for first-year composition students?**

While there are indeed selections in Writing about Writing that some students might encounter in graduate programs, we think you and your composition students will use them quite differently. Whereas graduate students and researchers might read a particular scholarly article and focus on aspects like the review of literature, the researcher’s methods, or the theoretical frameworks underpinning the research, we generally recommend composition students focus on the takeaways of that research. These are typically particular findings, conclusions, and implications the authors discuss. Such takeaways create opportunities for conversations around very specific ideas about how writing works. Students might, for instance, compare their writing processes to those of a writer profiled in a case study, or consider whether they agree or disagree with some conclusion an author has drawn about how literacy is acquired.

This is not to say, however, that you should attempt to simplify the readings by only having students read particular excerpts or only discussing the relevant takeaways. Literature reviews and discussions of methods might seem daunting to students, especially at first, but they provide useful context for understanding authors’ ideas. Reading these texts gives your students the opportunity to work through and learn how to best make sense of this kind of difficult material. Your class might, in fact, be the only class where your students receive explicit instruction and advice on critically reading scholarly texts. Helping students learn how to parse these readings and understand why they are written the way they are provides a useful chance to
apply concepts like genre while developing reading strategies. In fact, there’s a whole section in Chapter 1 dedicated to helping students understand what genres are and then using that concept to help them see why these scholarly articles are constructed the way they are.

Finally, in terms of relevance, you might be surprised at how engaged your classes are when reading and discussing selections from Writing about Writing. Students frequently enter college writing classrooms without having much explicit instruction in or discussion about how writing is actually used for purposes other than exams. Moreover, Writing about Writing encourages students to bring in their own experiences as writers and readers, and it allows them to project how they might use writing in their future classes, careers, and civic lives. Students are often eager to talk about these subjects, particularly when they can see how the concepts they’re studying might help them later on.

Writing about Writing doesn’t speak down to students. That can make for a challenge at times, but it’s usually a challenge students come to appreciate, and it’s definitely one they are up for. Students who have completed a composition course using Writing about Writing often report feeling impressed by how much they’ve learned over the course of a semester, and one area they consistently point to is their growth as readers. They often enter these classes with little or no experience reading scholarly articles, and so Writing about Writing — with its direct emphasis on understanding how these sorts of texts function and why — makes for a useful first encounter.

3. I noticed the book is organized around central concepts rather than particular types of writing. What exactly are students producing?

A key tenet of the writing-about-writing approach is that it does not focus on teaching students how to write particular kinds of texts. Instead, the goal is to help students think about how writing works, so they leave your course with useful knowledge (and perhaps revised conceptions) about writing. This means that the content students produce — what they have to say about writing and literacy practices, discoveries they make about particular genres and discourse communities — is ultimately more important than the form it takes. In turn, you might compare two classes using Writing about Writing and notice that what the writing students are doing looks vastly different, even while students are achieving the same learning outcomes.

You have a good deal of flexibility in how you choose to teach with this textbook. The Applying and Exploring Ideas activities after each reading can serve as useful scaffolding assignments, in-class activities, and smaller writing projects. Plus, each chapter typically ends with three to four suggested assignments, and these are good places to start when you first begin teaching with Writing about Writing. You will find a wide variety of assignments in these suggestions: narratives, research articles, letters, collaborative histories, analyses, reflections, profiles, and more. Still, these are by no means the only assignments that work with this textbook, so you should also look to design assignments that make sense to you and that achieve the learning outcomes you most value.
4. If the goal isn’t for students to produce specific types of writing, how do you assess students’ work and learning?

_Writing about Writing_ is organized around threshold concepts, with the goal of helping students to “cross” those thresholds. As Wardle and Downs explain in Chapter 1, crossing such thresholds typically constitutes a major shift in identity and how one sees the world. This can, of course, take time. It’s probably not realistic to expect your students to cross all of these thresholds in a single semester, and, even if they did, you cannot assess students on changes in their attitudes.

What you can look for, then, is how well students engage with the concepts being studied and how effectively they apply these ideas. This can show up in student writing, research, and discussions. Much of the work _Writing about Writing_ encourages students to do is highly reflective. This can be seen in both low-stakes and optional activities (Getting Ready to Read activities, Meta Moments) as well as larger writing assignments and projects. These reflections provide opportunities for you to gauge and respond to student learning.

We also encourage you to build revision into your courses. Since many of the ideas in _Writing about Writing_ will be new for students, it may take time for them to unpack the readings and fully understand their implications. Further, since the ideas throughout the textbook are interrelated, students might find useful connections back to something studied earlier in the semester. When students make these sorts of connections on their own, you should feel confident that they are learning.

5. The readings and many of the assignments seem to emphasize academic writing. But students need to be prepared for different types of writing and writing purposes, right?

Absolutely. There is value in students seeing academic writing as a conversation that they can join, contribute to, and perhaps even change. This understanding can help students immediately in the context of their college experiences. But it is indeed only a narrow slice of all the writing that happens in the world. That said, it would be impossible for any textbook to address all of the writing students might face, just as it is impossible for any single course to adequately prepare students for that writing. Instead, Wardle and Downs have been selective in focusing on particular concepts — ways of thinking about writing — that students will likely find helpful in other forms of writing.

The academic nature of many of the readings and assignments reflects the writing studies scholarship that informs the writing-about-writing approach — a key threshold concept of this book is _writing isn’t just something people do, but something people study_. But students are by no means limited to reading, investigating, or writing scholarly texts when they’re using _Writing about Writing_. We’ve seen students consider everything from writing used as part of the chat system in online video games to dance instruction to military recruiting ads. The work that students produce can be just as varied. Students working out of _Writing about Writing_ have produced narratives, written plays, created websites and videos, and much more. Two
of the threshold concepts at the heart of Writing about Writing are writing helps people make meaning and get things done, and “good” writing is dependent on writers, readers, situation, technology, and use. Given these assumptions, it only makes sense that the writing students can consider and create is expansive.

6. This approach seems to encourage students to become writing studies scholars. What do students who do not plan on becoming this sort of researcher gain from Writing about Writing?
While a number of the readings and associated activities do encourage students to take on the perspectives of or employ methods used by some of the researchers they’re reading, the goal of these activities is not to prepare students to join the writing studies discipline, but rather to closely examine writing and associated practices in potentially new and hopefully useful ways. We believe this sort of thinking – approaching a writing task with curiosity and an understanding that it can be investigated – can serve them well as they learn to write in the new situations they encounter after their composition course has ended. Moreover, the objective of these activities is never to simply study writing for the sake of studying writing; instead, this work is linked to guiding students toward revising their own conceptions of how writing functions or even discovering some of the qualities of the types of writing they may need to use in the future in any discipline, career, or community.

7. Where does teaching about writing style and grammar figure in? There doesn’t seem to be much discussion (if any) of these matters in Writing about Writing.
Early in Chapter 1, Wardle and Downs note that “avoiding errors that get in the way of the readers’ understanding is only one small part of writing. Writing is about communicating in ways that work, that do something in the world. In this view, writing is much more than grammar, and it’s also much more than the final text you create; writing is the whole process of creating that text” (pp. 3–4). This philosophy carries throughout the textbook, and so you will find little in the way of explicit instruction on matters of style, grammar, and usage. In Chapter 5’s “The Phenomenology of Error,” Joseph M. Williams raises some thoughtful questions about how such matters are taught and demonstrates that error might not be as black and white as we traditionally assumed. His article can inform a useful conversation with your students about the role grammar and style play in writing.

Another way to approach these concerns using Writing about Writing can be seen in Chapters 3 and 4. Here, the readings encourage students to think of writing as situated within particular social contexts for specific audiences. In lieu of pointing students to the “right” way of using a particular style or format convention, you might ask them to investigate how that convention changes across different genres and communities. In doing so, they’ll learn something both about that particular convention as well as how what counts as “correct” varies from situation to situation.
8. **This is a lot of content. How do you fit it all into a single term?**

It is unlikely that any class — no matter how efficient — will be able to cover all of the content in *Writing about Writing*. If you teach in a fifteen-week semester, you might reasonably ask students to complete three or four major writing assignments. You might look at three or four readings leading up to each assignment. That means there is a lot of the book students will not touch, but we think that’s okay. You should select readings and assignments that best fit with the learning outcomes you most value, and then spend plenty of time on those. Rushing through complex readings and difficult assignments is a recipe for disaster, so err on the side of “less is more.”

You might also encourage students to treat the readings you don’t read together as useful, additional resources and avenues for further research. If, for instance, a student’s assignment touches on some issues not raised in class but discussed in another reading in the textbook, you might advise them to consult that reading (and its list of references) for more ideas.

9. **What do you do the first day of class to introduce students to *Writing about Writing***?

Since the writing-about-writing approach will likely not be what your students are expecting out of their college composition class, it is important to quickly establish what the course is about, why it’s about that, and why you feel students can benefit from this approach. The first day is, of course, a chance for you to meet your students and them to meet each other, but if you can start making some of these arguments and begin the work of the course, too, that’s even better. Chapter 1 presents many good reasons for why learning about writing can benefit students, particularly the section “Introduction to the Conversation.” You might share and discuss these with the class. You might also invite students to begin reflecting on some of their current conceptions about writing. *Writing about Writing* doesn’t attempt to tell students how to think about writing, but rather encourages them to reflect on their own experiences and perspectives in light of the research and ideas they read about. Having them take stock of their ideas early on is a valuable way of reminding them that their ideas matter. It’s also a nice way to get to know them. The activity on the very first page of Chapter 1 (p. 1) presents some specific prompts you might use:

- Writing is. . . .
- Research is. . . .
- Reading is. . . .
- Good writers do or are. . . .
- Good writing is. . . .

10. **How do you share this approach with others, or even adopt *Writing about Writing* as a program?**

The nature of every composition program is different, and so what works for one program may not work for another. In general, though, an effective way to share *Writing about Writing* with others is to first identify interested
teachers and then work through some of the readings together. Depending on their backgrounds, they may not be familiar with this research, so reading some of these selections together creates opportunities for conversations around what writing and research are. As when you work with students, the goal here is not to tell other teachers what they should believe, but rather to invite them to discuss which ideas resonate with them, which ideas do not, and what their own experiences have been. The writing-about-writing approach is capacious enough to allow for many styles of teaching, and *Writing about Writing* itself is diverse in the topics it covers and the sorts of writing it asks of students. While sharing examples of assignments, activities, and student work helps illustrate what the curriculum can look like in action, it’s important for instructors to have flexibility in tailoring their course to their own strengths and interests. If you need to quickly explain *Writing about Writing* to another teacher, sharing Chapter 1 (in particular, the first three sections of that chapter) should give them a good idea of what the curriculum asks students to do.
# Sample Syllabus 1: Understanding Yourself as a Writer

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<th>In-Class Activities</th>
<th>Homework</th>
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<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
<td>Introduction to the Study of Writing</td>
<td>Have students record their answers to the five prompts at the beginning of the chapter <em>before</em> reading. Have class discussion (or diagnostic writing activity): Why study writing? Discuss Questions for Discussion and Journaling 1, 2, 3, and 4 in Reflecting on the Ideas of Chapter 1. Introduce Major Writing Assignment: <em>Challenging and Exploring Your Conceptions about Writing, Reading, and Research</em> (p. 62).</td>
<td>Assign question 1 from Applying and Exploring Ideas in Reflecting on the Ideas of Chapter 1.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 2</strong></td>
<td>Cataloging and Comparing Conceptions of Writing</td>
<td>Discuss Questions for Discussion and Journaling 5, 6, and 7 in Reflecting on the Ideas of Chapter 1. Discuss reading and annotating scholarly articles. If time, begin working through a tagged reading together. Have students record their answers to the five prompts at the beginning of the major writing assignment <em>after</em> reading, and exchange their answers with a partner.</td>
<td>Assign question 4 from Applying and Exploring Ideas in Reflecting on the Ideas of Chapter 1. <em>Challenging and Exploring Your Conceptions about Writing, Reading, and Research DUE.</em></td>
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<td>Weekly Topics</td>
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<td><strong>Chapter 2 — Literacies: How Is Writing Impacted by Our Prior Experiences?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Week 3</strong> Defining Literacy and Exploring Histories as Readers and Writers</td>
<td>Chapter 2 Introduction Deborah Brandt, “Sponsors of Literacy”</td>
<td>Introduce Major Writing Assignment: Literacy Narrative (p. 262).</td>
<td>Assign question 1 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Brandt's article.</td>
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<td>Discuss questions 1, 2, and 3 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Brandt's article.</td>
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<td>Collaborate (first in small groups, then as a class) to develop a working definition of literacy based on Brandt’s discussion, the chapter introduction, and Chapter 1.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 4</strong> Exploring the Connection between Literacy Practices and Identity</td>
<td>Vershawn Ashanti Young, “‘Nah, We Straight’: An Argument Against Code Switching”</td>
<td>Discuss questions 1, 3, and 4 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Young’s article.</td>
<td>Assign question 3 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Young’s article.</td>
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<td>Work on question 4 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Young’s article.</td>
<td>Students should begin to further develop particular stories for their literacy narratives.</td>
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<td>Draft stories about encounters with literacy inspired by Brandt and Young. Share and compare. What do these stories indicate about the class’s experiences with reading and writing?</td>
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<td>Weekly Topics</td>
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<td><strong>Week 5</strong></td>
<td><strong>Comparing Stories and Looking at Literacy Development across Contexts</strong></td>
<td>Discuss questions 2, 4, and 5 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Mellix’s article; 1 and 2 following Cisneros’s; and 4 and 5 following Pasqualin’s. Work on question 3 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Pasqualin’s article. Compare the three readings. What do they tell you about the forms literacy narratives might take? What ideas do they give you? Compare students’ stories. What themes are beginning to emerge? Why might these narratives matter? What can be learned from them?</td>
<td>Assign question 1 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Pasqualin’s article. Ask students to bring in drafts of at least three literacy-related stories.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 6</strong></td>
<td><strong>Developing Narratives and Revising</strong></td>
<td>Discuss what students value in feedback on writing and how they can use Straub’s ideas to enhance peer review. <strong>Peer Review</strong></td>
<td><strong>Literacy Narrative DUE.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Richard Straub, “Responding — Really Responding — to Other Students’ Writing” (Chapter 1)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Week 7</strong></td>
<td><strong>Thinking about How Groups Use Writing</strong></td>
<td>Introduce Major Writing Assignment: Reflection on Gaining Authority in New Discourse Communities (p. 445). Discuss questions 1, 4, and 5 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Johns’s article. Work in groups to unpack and find examples of the qualities of academic writing Johns discusses.</td>
<td>Assign question 1 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Johns’s article.</td>
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<td>Weekly Topics</td>
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<td><strong>Week 8</strong> Navigating Multiple Discourses</td>
<td>James Paul Gee, “Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction”</td>
<td>Discuss questions 1, 5, 6, 7, 12, and 13 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Gee's article.</td>
<td>Assign question 3 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Gee's article. Students should draft stories about times they had (or didn’t have) authority in a discourse community.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 9</strong> Joining New Communities through Writing</td>
<td>Elizabeth Wardle, “Identity, Authority, and Learning to Write in New Workplaces” Perri Klass, “Learning the Language”</td>
<td>Discuss questions 1, 2, 5, and 6 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Wardle's article and 1 and 2 following Klass's. Collaborate in groups to synthesize what the authors from this unit have had to say about “authority” and develop your own working definition.</td>
<td>Assign question 1 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Wardle's article.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 10</strong></td>
<td>Peer Review</td>
<td>Reflection on Gaining Authority in New Discourse Communities DUE.</td>
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**Chapter 5 — Processes: How Are Texts Composed?**

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<th>Weekly Topics</th>
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<th>Homework</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 11</strong> Researching Writing Processes</td>
<td>Chapter 5 Introduction Sondra Perl, “The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers”</td>
<td>Introduce Major Writing Assignment: <em>Autoethnography</em> (p. 873). Discuss questions 1, 3, 4, and 5 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Perl’s article. Work on question 1 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Perl’s article. Demonstrate think-aloud method in class.</td>
<td>Assign question 3 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Perl’s article.</td>
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<td>Weekly Topics</td>
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<td><strong>Week 12</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td><strong>Class Activity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Homework</strong></td>
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<td>Considering the Impact of Environment and Audience on Writing Processes</td>
<td>Carol Berkenkotter, “Decisions and Revisions: The Planning Strategies of a Publishing Writer” and Donald Murray, “Response of a Laboratory Rat — or, Being Protoled”</td>
<td>Discuss questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Berkenkotter’s and Murray’s articles. Work on question 3 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Berkenkotter’s and Murray’s articles. Identify ways to build on Perl’s and Berkenkotter’s methods. Practice coding sample data.</td>
<td>Assign question 2 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Berkenkotter’s and Murray’s articles. Students should begin devising research methods.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 13</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td><strong>Class Activity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Homework</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Establishing Research Questions and Revising Methods</td>
<td>Stacey Pigg, “Coordinating Constant Invention: Social Media’s Role in Distributed Work” and Alcir Santos Neto, “Tug of War: The Writing Process of a Bilingual Writer and His Struggles”</td>
<td>Discuss Questions for Discussion and Journaling 2, 3, and 5 following Pigg’s article, and 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7 following Neto’s article. Work on question 2 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Pigg’s article. Develop codes and begin coding in class. What does the coding reveal?</td>
<td>Assign question 3 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Neto’s article. Students should begin collecting data.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 14</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td><strong>Class Activity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Homework</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Comparing and Reconsidering Writing “Rules”</td>
<td>Mike Rose, “Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and the Stifling of Language: A Cognitivist Analysis of Writer’s Block”</td>
<td>Discuss questions 1, 2, 3, and 5 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Rose’s article. Look at examples of how authors have presented coded data to get ideas for drafting. Consider the “so what?” of this research. What’s been learned?</td>
<td>Assign question 1 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Rose’s article.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 15</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td><strong>Class Activity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Homework</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Identifying Takeaways</td>
<td>Peer Review</td>
<td>Class Wrap-Up.</td>
<td>Autoethnography DUE.</td>
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## Sample Syllabus 2: Investigating How Writing Does Work in the World

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<th>Weekly Topics</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>In-Class Activities</th>
<th>Homework</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction to Studying Writing</strong></td>
<td>Introduction to the Conversation Threshold Concepts of Writing Threshold Concepts That Assist Academic Reading and Writing</td>
<td>Have students record their answers to the five prompts at the beginning of the chapter before reading. Have class discussion (or diagnostic writing activity): Why study writing? Discuss Questions for Discussion and Journaling 1, 2, 3, and 4 in Reflecting on the Ideas of Chapter 1. Introduce Major Writing Assignment: <em>Challenging and Exploring Your Conceptions about Writing, Reading, and Research</em> (p. 62).</td>
<td>Assign question 1 from Applying and Exploring Ideas in Reflecting on the Ideas of Chapter 1.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cataloging and Comparing Conceptions of Writing</strong></td>
<td>Stuart Greene, “Argument as Conversation: The Role of Inquiry in Writing a Researched Argument” Using This Book</td>
<td>Discuss Questions for Discussion and Journaling 5, 6, and 7 in Reflecting on the Ideas of Chapter 1. Discuss reading and annotating scholarly articles. If there is time, begin working through a tagged reading together. Have students record their answers to the five prompts at the beginning of the major writing assignment after reading, and exchange their answers with a partner.</td>
<td>Assign question 4 from Applying and Exploring Ideas in Reflecting on the Ideas of Chapter 1. <em>Challenging and Exploring Your Conceptions about Writing, Reading, and Research DUE</em></td>
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<td><strong>Chapter 4 — Rhetoric: How Is Meaning Constructed in Context?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Week 3</strong> Introduction to Rhetoric</td>
<td>Chapter 4 Introduction Doug Downs, “Rhetoric: Making Sense of Human Interaction and Meaning-Making”</td>
<td>Introduce Major Writing Assignment: <em>Mapping a Rhetorical Ecology</em> (p. 697). Discuss questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Downs’s article. Work on question 4 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Downs’s article. Practice mapping a rhetorical ecology together as a class (preferably some current, local example of interest — e.g., a campus news story).</td>
<td>Assign question 2 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Downs’s article.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 4</strong> Considering How Texts Move</td>
<td>Jim Ridolfo and Dânielle Nicole DeVoss, “Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery”</td>
<td>Discuss questions 2, 4, 5, and 6 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Ridolfo and DeVoss’s article. Discuss in class/writing/small groups: How does the notion of rhetorical velocity add to the ideas Downs presented? In groups, ask students to find an interaction online and begin mapping the rhetorical ecology. What does this mapping reveal that they had not previously considered? Brainstorm ideas for major writing assignment.</td>
<td>Assign question 3 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Ridolfo and DeVoss’s article. Students should identify 3–4 possible interactions they would like to map and begin investigating them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 5</strong> Invention as Social/ Collaboration and Tools in Rhetorical Ecologies</td>
<td>Stacey Pigg, “Coordinating Constant Invention: Social Media’s Role in Distributed Work” (Chapter 5)</td>
<td>Discuss questions 2, 3, and 7 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Pigg’s article. Compare initial maps. What might the author consider next?</td>
<td>Assign question 1 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Pigg’s article. Students should craft an initial draft of their maps and bring them to class.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 6</strong></td>
<td><strong>Refining and Developing Analysis/Considering the Implications</strong></td>
<td>Richard Straub, “Responding — Really Responding — to Other Students’ Writing” (Chapter 1)</td>
<td>Discuss what students value in feedback on writing and how they can use Straub’s ideas to enhance peer review. <strong>Peer Review</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Chapter 3 — Individuals in Community: How Does Writing Help People Get Things Done?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Week 7</strong></td>
<td><strong>Introduction to Discourse Communities</strong></td>
<td>Chapter 3 Introduction Ann M. Johns, “Discourse Communities and Communities of Practice: Membership, Conflict, and Diversity”</td>
<td>Introduce Major Writing Assignment: Discourse Community Ethnography (p. 440). Discuss questions 1, 3, 4, and 5 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Johns’s article. Work on question 2 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Johns’s article. Share and develop ideas for discourse community ethnography.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 8</strong></td>
<td><strong>Studying Genres</strong></td>
<td>Tony Mirabelli, “The Language and Literacy of Food Service Workers”</td>
<td>Discuss questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Mirabelli’s article. Work on question 1 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Mirabelli’s article. Compare initial data collection. What worked? What didn’t?</td>
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<td><strong>Week 9</strong></td>
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<td>Moving between</td>
<td>Lucille P. McCarthy</td>
<td>Discuss questions 1, 3, 4, 5, and 7 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following McCarthy’s article. Ask students to compare course syllabi in light of discussions about genre and discourse communities. Look at data from the perspective of Johns, Mirabelli, and McCarthy. What would each researcher be interested in?</td>
<td>Assign question 1 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following McCarthy’s article. Students should continue collecting data about their discourse community.</td>
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<td>Discourse Communities/</td>
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<td>Presenting Results and Drawing</td>
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<td>Peer Review</td>
<td>Discourse Community Ethnography DUE</td>
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<td>Conclusions</td>
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<td><strong>Chapter 2 — Literacies: How Is Writing Impacted by Our Prior Experiences?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Week 11</strong></td>
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<td>Defining and Researching Literacy</td>
<td>Chapter 2 Introduction</td>
<td>Introduce Major Writing Assignment: <em>Group Analysis of Literacy History</em> (p. 264). Discuss questions 1, 4, and 5 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Brandt’s article. Collaborate (first in small groups, then as a class) to develop a working definition of “literacy” based on Brandt’s discussion, the chapter introduction, and Chapter 1. How might that definition be developed by considering ideas about rhetoric and discourse community from the previous chapters?</td>
<td>Assign question 3 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Brandt’s article.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 12</strong></td>
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<td>The Changing Nature of Writing</td>
<td>Jeff Grabill et al., “Revisualizing Composition: Mapping the Writing Lives of First-Year College Students”</td>
<td>Discuss questions 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Grabill et al.’s article. Work on questions 2 and 3 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Grabill et al.’s article. Discuss and code self-studies. Begin forming into groups.</td>
<td>Assign question 4 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Grabill et al.’s article. Have students complete the self-study section of the Group Analysis of Literacy History assignment.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 13</strong></td>
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<td>How Prior Experiences Shape Literacy Practices</td>
<td>Liane Robertson, Kara Taczak, and Kathleen Blake Yancey, “Notes Toward a Theory of Prior Knowledge”</td>
<td>Discuss questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey’s article. Work on question 2 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey’s article. Brainstorm research questions and methods.</td>
<td>Assign question 1 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey’s article. Each group member should begin to collect relevant data.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 14</strong></td>
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<td>Why Researching Literacy Matters</td>
<td>Arturo E. Tejada Jr. et al., “Changing Our Labels: Rejecting the Language of Remediation”</td>
<td>Discuss questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 in Questions for Discussion and Journaling following Tejada Jr. et al.’s article. Work on questions 1 and 2 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Tejada Jr. et al.’s article. Group collaboration and initial sharing in class.</td>
<td>Assign question 3 from Applying and Exploring Ideas following Tejada Jr. et al.’s article.</td>
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<td>Identifying Takeaways</td>
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<td>Peer Review Class Wrap-Up.</td>
<td>Group Analysis of Literacy History DUE</td>
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Chapter Overview

This first chapter of *Writing about Writing* both establishes the focus of the textbook and models the sort of writing and thinking tasks that it asks of students throughout. The key threshold concept here is that **writing is not just something people do, but something people study.** In exploring this concept, Wardle and Downs present a compelling case for inviting students to join the conversations about how writing works that have been furthered by scholars in the field of writing studies. Along the way, they also introduce the notion of threshold concepts — those frequently troublesome ways of thinking that transform learners’ worldviews so completely that they often cannot move forward in a given discipline until they grasp them. Threshold concepts serve as the key organizing principle for the chapters in *Writing about Writing.* Each chapter contains readings and activities intended to get students grappling with specific writing-related threshold concepts. In Chapter 1, the editors outline these five concepts about writing and why they matter. They then move on to explain how students might begin applying some of these concepts to make the most out of the reading and writing they’ll be doing, particularly in the sections that provide overviews of genre and rhetorical reading. Reflective questions and activities present an opportunity for students to begin evaluating their prior experiences and articulating the concepts they will be grappling with over the course of the semester.

As noted in the introduction to this Instructor’s Manual, the sheer breadth of content and the extensiveness of the readings make it unlikely that you will be able to adequately cover all of the material in this textbook in a single term; instead, you should target the student learning outcomes and topics that are most important to you and your program. You will notice, however, that Chapter 1 does not actually contain a list of learning outcomes. That’s because the material in this chapter is foundational to helping students get the most out of *Writing about Writing,* regardless of which specific outcomes you emphasize in your course. Chapter 1 as a whole is noticeably shorter than the others in the textbook, and from start to finish it has been written with a student audience in mind, making it the most immediately accessible of all the

### Key Vocabulary for Chapter 1

- CARS model
- Construct
- Genre
- Joining the conversation
- Rhetorical
- Threshold concepts
chapters. When that’s combined with the fact that many of the ideas introduced here (CARS, genre, rhetorical reading, argument as conversation) will help students to unpack and consider the more difficult readings that appear later in the book, Chapter 1 serves as a useful place for you and your students to begin the course.

Chapter 1 also differs from the others in this book in structure. The other chapters are organized around reading selections: Wardle and Downs introduce the chapter, frame the readings, and offer questions and activities for students to get the most out of the readings. In Chapter 1, however, all of the material outside of two selections comes directly from Wardle and Downs. Instead of assigning a single reading for homework, consider asking students to read two or even three of the major sections at a time. They’re shorter than the others in the book and are relatively straightforward reads; reading them first will prepare students to engage with the selections that come in later chapters. The activities and features explained below are built into Chapter 1 and ask students to begin thinking about threshold concepts of writing from the beginning of the course.

Chapter Activities

Activities are embedded throughout Chapter 1 as a way of introducing and engaging students with threshold concepts. “Write Reflectively” activities appear as soon as a threshold concept is introduced, and students are prompted to relate their own experiences as writers and readers. “Try Thinking Differently” activities follow the explanation of each threshold concept and ask students to reconsider their reflection in the first activity, establishing immediately that understanding threshold concepts about writing is an ongoing interplay between past and new knowledge. The activities also broaden students’ thinking beyond Chapter 1 and Writing about Writing, prompting students to think about these concepts as they approach any writing task in your course or in another space.

Reading Assist Tags

The final section of this chapter introduces a guide to the Reading Assist Tags that appear with select readings in this book. There are two types of tags: genre cues and reading cues, which show students how to apply the genre and rhetorical reading concepts that appear earlier in the chapter to a particular reading as they read. If you plan to take advantage of this feature, be sure to spend some time discussing what these tags mean and why the editors chose to focus on these particular moves, and have students mark these pages for reference.

Reflecting on the Ideas of Chapter 1

The chapter ends with a series of Questions for Discussion and Journaling followed by Applying and Exploring Ideas activities. These sections establish the structure that is used throughout Writing about Writing since each reading
selection in Chapters 2–5 is followed by these prompts; explaining their function and purpose at the beginning of the term will help familiarize your students with the book’s structure. Here in Chapter 1, these sections ask students to respond to the chapter as a whole, offering them an opportunity to begin reflecting on writing as the subject of their course and to start challenging their previously held conceptions of writing.

**Summaries and Take-Home Points**

**Introduction to the Conversation**

**Summary**

In this brief first section of Chapter 1, Wardle and Downs lay out the basic philosophy that undergirds *Writing about Writing*. After positioning this textbook and the work it asks students to do within the scholarly discipline of writing studies, they argue that considering research about writing can help students to learn about something they do every day. The goal here is not to tell students how to write, but rather to invite them to become informed investigators of their own experiences in order to become writers who can continue to learn about and adapt to the writing situations that matter to them, even after the course ends.

This section is divided into three subsections. The first, “Why Study Writing,” includes several arguments for why it’s both relevant and productive for students to learn about writing. This makes it a useful piece to bring up on the first day of class, when students will rightly be wondering why their composition class is asking them to read and write about writing itself. The second subsection, “Two Stories about Writing,” is one that we have found students immediately relate to. Here, Wardle and Downs present two distinct ways of thinking about how writing works and is valued. The first story is likely the “traditional” one students and the general public are familiar with: The key to good writing is good grammar and following the rules, and writers who learn to write correctly are successful. The second story presents a view of writing as focused on communication and all of the contingent complexities and murkiness that arise therein. These two stories together illustrate how powerful conceptions can be in shaping how an activity like writing is perceived and done, which is the focus of the final subsection, “Conceptions: With Our Thoughts We Make the World.” Here, Wardle and Downs explain how many of the views we hold about writing are, in fact, constructed rather than inevitable or universal. This discussion serves as an important foundation to understanding the notion of threshold concepts, which is used to organize the book as a whole and is introduced in the next section.

Some of the ideas touched on in this section are discussed in more depth elsewhere in the book, so you might be inclined to skip over it. Resist this temptation. This section helps students to consider how they might benefit from this different way of thinking about writing. Spending time with this section early in the semester can help head off the “Why are we doing this?” questions that can arise when the work becomes difficult later on.
Take-Home Points

1. Writing is researchable, and learning about that research can benefit students.
2. Conceptions about writing are socially constructed, rather than universal or inevitable.

Threshold Concepts of Writing

Summary

In this section, Wardle and Downs introduce the idea of threshold concepts. Developed by education researchers Jan Meyer and Ray Land, threshold concept theory attempts to explain how individuals acquire and begin to act on disciplinary knowledge. Unlike ordinary concepts that may represent a form of specialized knowledge, threshold concepts are “so central to understanding a particular subject that a learner can’t move forward in that area without grasping them” (p. 6). These threshold concepts are often “troublesome” — difficult to understand or even hard to believe, in some cases — initially, and learners might stay in a “liminal” space for some time as they grapple with these concepts and their implications. Once they come to internalize a threshold concept, however, learners will find their worldviews and ways of thinking transformed.

After an overview of threshold concepts, the remainder of this section is composed of subsections that explicate the five threshold concepts that provide the basis for each of the chapters in Writing about Writing:

- Writing is not just something people do, but something people study.
- Writing is impacted by prior experiences.
- Writing helps people make meaning and get things done, but there are always constraints.
- “Good” writing is dependent on writers, readers, situation, technology, and use.
- Writing is a process, all writers have more to learn, and writing is not perfectible.

Each subsection includes some discussion of what the particular threshold concept means, the implications of thinking about writing this way, and plenty of examples to illustrate the concept in action. Wardle and Downs argue that engaging with these threshold concepts enables students to interrogate and, perhaps, begin to revise their own conceptions of how writing works.

While the notion of threshold concepts and some of the concepts themselves will be new for students, this section, like the rest of Chapter 1, is written with students in mind. Remember, too, that the discussion here represents a first pass at these threshold concepts, and students will have more chances to read, think, and write about them as they continue working with Writing about Writing. The key at this stage is getting students to connect the particular threshold concepts and the ideas surrounding them to their own lives. In our experience, many of these concepts sound like common sense — obvious, even — to students when they first encounter them, and they are more than willing to repeat them back and say, “Well, of course that’s true.” But one of the qualities
that distinguishes them as threshold concepts is that they really are troublesome. Even when the language sounds logical enough, these ideas run against popular conceptions about writing that are typically reinforced through schooling. And the goal for the sort of composition class Writing about Writing imagines isn’t simply for students to learn about these concepts and stop there, but instead to honestly reflect on them, assess them, and develop their own ideas of writing in response.

This is why the activities embedded in this section (and the following) are so important. Amid the elaboration on threshold concepts and related examples, you will find two types of activities: “Write Reflectively” and “Try Thinking Differently.” For every threshold concept after the first one, a “Write Reflectively” activity near the beginning asks students to deliberately reflect on their own views of and experiences with writing. Then, at the end of the discussion of a particular threshold concept, a “Try Thinking Differently” activity encourages students to apply what they’ve just read by reevaluating what they wrote earlier or by imagining a different way of thinking about writing based on the discussion. Assigning these activities (perhaps as low-stakes homework or as in-class discussions or writing) should help students to begin the work of engaging with these concepts that is then taken further in the remaining chapters of Writing about Writing.

Take-Home Points

1. Threshold concepts are ideas about particular subjects that are so critical to understanding those subjects that learners cannot proceed until they grasp them.
2. Threshold concepts are often troublesome when first encountered, but transformative once learners internalize them.
3. Engaging with threshold concepts about writing invites students to interrogate and revise their own conceptions about writing.

Threshold Concepts That Assist Academic Reading and Writing

Summary

This section continues the focus on threshold concepts, and follows the structure of the previous one by presenting a new concept, moving to a “Write Reflectively” activity, elaborating on the concept and providing examples, and concluding with a “Try Thinking Differently” activity. Here, Wardle and Downs turn toward helping students to apply these threshold concepts, connecting useful, research-based ways of thinking about how writing works with what to do with those understandings. In particular, the editors begin to explain two of the concepts that in our experience most seem to stymie students: “genre” and “rhetorical reading” (rhetoric is covered in more depth in Chapter 4). This discussion should help students better understand the readings, research, and writing they’ll be doing throughout the course: Each subsection ends with a paragraph labeled “Look Forward to the Rest of This Book” that asks students to link the ideas they’re learning about to features in the textbook.
In "Genres: Writing Responds to Repeating Situations through Recognizable Forms," the editors introduce and explore the threshold concept “Writers over time create ‘typical’ or expected responses to situations that come up again and again.” Genre is the specific writing studies term used to describe this concept here, and this chapter is a useful place to introduce it. The term appears throughout the readings in Writing about Writing (particularly in Chapter 3), but the authors seldom take the time to explain exactly what they mean by genre and how they’re using it differently than it’s used in common parlance (i.e., to describe broad categories of literature, music, or film). Wardle and Downs developed this substantial reading on genre in Chapter 1 by writing directly to students, making this section the place for students to encounter an introduction to genre theory. Make sure your students read this section if you want them to obtain a coherent understanding of genres.

Understanding genre as a concept is useful in reading many of the selections in the textbook, making this a crucial section for students to read early in the semester. The editors define genres as recurring types of text that arise to meet the needs of repeating rhetorical situations. They are careful to link their discussions about genres doing work in particular situations and adapting over time to many specific examples (e.g., resumes, syllabi, maps) that students should be familiar with. These examples help to clarify how genre is being used and why students should care about it. In explaining why students should care about genres and how they work, Wardle and Downs write, “The point in asking you to think about genres as maps is that genres, just like maps, are extremely helpful if you know how to read them and remember that they change across time and for different purposes” (p. 20). The section ends with some questions from Sonja Foss to ask about genres in order to understand them (e.g., “What conditions [situations] call for the genre?” and “What makes this genre what it is? What are the common denominators of the genre?”). These questions will be helpful when students encounter new genres or consider them further as part of research in your course. Understanding genres and how they work helps students to move past their frustration at what seem like never-ending changes in expectations for what counts as success in writing and provides them with a tool for adapting to new writing situations when they encounter them.

The related subsection, “Genre Features of Scholarly Articles: John Swales’s ‘Create a Research Space’ (CARS) Model of Research Introductions,” expands on the concept of genre, this time applying it directly to the sorts of scholarly articles students will be reading in Writing about Writing. This material is adapted from linguist John Swales’s extensive research into the introductions of academic articles from across disciplines. In short, Swales identified three moves authors typically make in such introductions:

1. Establishing a territory
2. Establishing a niche
3. Occupying a niche

The editors discuss each of these moves as well as the steps Swales highlights in explaining how authors make them. These moves should look familiar to those accustomed to reading or writing scholarly articles, but for
students they can seem quite foreign at first. The introductions and reviews of literature in scholarly readings often trip students up; they’re used to reading linearly, and so get bogged down in references to prior research with which they are not familiar. Swales’s CARS model explains why these introductions look the way they do, allowing students to make better sense of academic readings (note, too, that the Assist Tags on select readings in Writing about Writing indicate where authors make these CARS moves; see the “Using This Book” section in this chapter for further details). Students might also find it useful to perform these moves themselves in their own research-based writing.

The next subsection, “Rhetorical Reading: Texts Are People Talking,” introduces the threshold concept “When we read texts, we are interacting with other people.” The discussion here begins with Wardle and Downs explaining why the CARS moves are so prevalent in academic writing: Each article is a turn in an ongoing conversation (an idea picked up later in this chapter by Stuart Greene in “Argument as Conversation: The Role of Inquiry in Writing a Researched Argument”). This leads to the idea that each text represents a conversation rather than a simple container of information, something the editors argue is easy to take for granted: “When we’re in a face-to-face conversation, human instinct is to know or find out who we’re talking to, and why they want to talk. But as readers we’ve been taught to think differently about some written texts — not to pay attention to who’s talking, or why” (p. 25). This discussion, in turn, leads to several important implications about how reading and writing work that Wardle and Downs walk us through:

- People have motives.
- Texts are called into being by a need shared between writers and readers.
- Readers have needs, values, and expectations of texts.
- Context shapes the construction of a text’s meaning.

Considering these implications should help students remember to look for why writers have elected to write the texts they read, an understanding that can help students become more capable readers.

**Take-Home Points**

1. Genres give writers and readers alike a sense of the expectations of a text.
2. Genres change over time to fit the needs of the situations in which they’re used.
3. Academic articles act as turns in an ongoing conversation, with the introductions typically serving to position the author’s ideas and research in the context of this conversation.
4. Texts represent people speaking to each other, and reading with that in mind can lead to a richer understanding of what a given text is trying to do.

The final subsection, “A Different Kind of Research, Argument, and Reading,” establishes the idea of rhetorical reading and writing as scholarly inquiry, in which nothing is ever fact, only argument. Instead, reading represents the
opportunity to engage the author in conversation. One of the readings that fol-
lows, by Stuart Greene, explains the nature of the scholarly inquiry Wardle and
Downs discuss, and the other, by Richard Straub, suggests a more meaningful
approach to peer review. Together, both offer an introduction to the type of read-
ings and work students will be doing as they work through *Writing about Writing*.

Stuart Greene

*Argument as Conversation: The Role of Inquiry in Writing a
Researched Argument*

*Summary*

Greene’s discussion of research and argument continues the emphasis on ques-
tioning assumptions about writing established in the earlier sections of this
chapter. Here, Greene tackles two conceptions that many students hold to be self-evident: Research is the tedious process of looking up facts to support your
view, and a researched argument is simply the persuasive arrangement of those
facts. Greene argues that researched arguments never happen in a vacuum, but
instead are social processes that function like conversations (he includes
Kenneth Burke’s famous parlor metaphor to explain his point here), reinforcing
the ideas introduced along with Swales’s CARS model in the preceding section.
The first half of Greene’s piece is very much focused on preparing students to
conduct their own meaningful inquiry-as-conversation. He provides three steps
for “entering the conversation”: identify an issue, identify the situation, and
frame a good question.

The second half of Greene’s article centers on what he calls “framing,” a
method of naming key concepts in order to help readers recall and think further
about the principles that organize an author’s arguments (the example Greene
uses is E. D. Hirsch’s term “cultural literacy”). Greene argues that framing is
useful for readers and researchers since it can help them to consider the ideas
of the authors they read in different contexts, including in light of their own
experiences. He also describes how framing can help writers to better articulate
and specify their arguments. The two annotated examples Greene pro-
vides—one from author Richard Rodriguez and another from a student-
authored text—demonstrate framing in action.

Like the other readings in this chapter, this piece was written with a student
audience in mind, making it more immediately accessible than some of the texts
that appear in later chapters. Greene’s article is one worth returning to multiple
times, first as students learn to make sense of the scholarly articles that form the
bulk of the reading in *Writing about Writing*, and then again as students work to
compose their own researched arguments.

*Take-Home Points*

1. Research and argument are social processes in which writers join ongoing
conversations.
2. Inquiry can and should be generative, leading to discovery and meaningful applications of new information.
3. Framing allows authors to name their ideas and readers to consider those ideas in light of their own experiences and interests.

Richard Straub

Responding — Really Responding — to Other Students’ Writing

Summary

Students entering your composition class likely bring with them some experiences with and thoughts about peer review, not all of them positive. Many students see peer review simply as an exercise in editing and correcting grammar, and others question what a reader other than the instructor can offer in terms of feedback. Straub addresses these concerns with a piece that reads like a list of peer review’s frequently asked questions. He covers the gamut of peer review–related topics here, raising questions such as, “How should you look at yourself as a responder?”; “How do you get started?”; and “How much criticism? How much praise?” His advice is distinctly relatable and direct (a typical example: “[F]riends don’t let friends think their writing is the best thing since The Great Gatsby and they don’t lead them to think that all is fine and well when it’s not”; p. 45) in a manner that students tend to appreciate. At the end of his article, Straub includes a sample peer-reviewed essay and his commentary on what the student reviewer is doing effectively. While his argument for students to peer-review and comment first and foremost as readers might seem commonsensical enough (“You’re there to play back to the writer how you read the paper,” he writes), Straub’s specific advice and plentiful examples make this a useful article for students to read in advance of your class’s first peer-review session.

Take-Home Points
1. Students should approach each other’s in-progress drafts as informed and interested readers, not as editors or teachers.
2. Peer-review comments should inspire the writers to look back at their writing through readers’ eyes in order to reflect on choices made and possibilities for revision.
3. Peer review can serve as a productive form of collaboration around writing.

Using This Book

Summary

The final section of this chapter is a good one for both you and your students to mark and revisit. In addition to helpful advice on getting the most out of the readings, this section also includes a breakdown of the Assist Tags that
accompany one of the readings in each of the following chapters (Brandt in Chapter 2, Gee in Chapter 3, Grant-Davie in Chapter 4, and Perl in Chapter 5). These tags appear in the margins of these four selections, highlighting key genre features and offering useful reading advice about how to proceed through the selection. While the Assist Tags are set up so that you and students can ignore them if you so choose, you’d be wise to encourage your classes to take advantage of them. The tags are divided into two categories: genre cues and reading cues. The genre cues build directly on ideas presented in the “Threshold Concepts That Assist Academic Reading and Writing” section of this chapter, particularly Swales’s CARS model. These tags will help acquaint students with some of the conventions of scholarly articles. The reading cues provide specific coaching in how to read the article, including tips like “Look Ahead,” “Reread,” and “Speed Up.” While the AssistTags are pretty self-explanatory, this brief guide should come in handy the first time a student works through one of the tagged readings. Moreover, the nature of the tags and the advice they offer make for a useful topic of discussion as students prepare to read scholarly articles — tagged or not — as they invite conversations about the nature of academic writing and research as well as effective reading strategies.

**Take-Home Points**

1. Reading scholarly articles takes time, and understanding both the context of the article as well as how you can link it to your own experiences help in making sense of them.
2. The AssistTags offer helpful support for beginning to engage with difficult readings.

**Supplemental Activities for Chapter 1**

1. Prior to reading this chapter, ask students to write a short essay (3–4 paragraphs) about their own conceptions of writing. What do they believe to be 100 percent true about writing, and why? Students might initially struggle to articulate these conceptions, so it might be helpful to begin this work together in class. Ask them to bring these essays into class and share them. Then, as they read through Chapter 1, ask them to annotate their essays, marking places where their ideas do or do not seem to align with Wardle and Downs’s. Use these annotations as a starting point in discussing this material. If time allows, return to these essays at the end of the semester and ask students to revise them based on where their thinking is now.

2. After reading “Threshold Concepts,” divide the class into five groups and assign each group one of the threshold concepts Wardle and Downs introduce in this section. Give each group ten to fifteen minutes to make a list of reasons why that particular concept is “troublesome.” Then, ask each group to report back, explaining first what Wardle and Downs have to say about the concept and then their list of reasons as to why it’s
troublesome. Encourage other students to add their own responses to each concept.

3. Use a discussion of Richard Straub’s “Responding — Really Responding — to Other Students’ Writing” as an occasion to reflect on experiences with peer review and to set goals and expectations for the peer reviews in your class. At the start of this discussion, ask students to write for a couple of minutes about the qualities they appreciate in feedback they’ve gotten from peer reviews in the past. If they have not had experience with peer review or struggle to think of ideas, you might open this up to the qualities they appreciate about feedback in writing more generally. Then, spend time listing these qualities on the board. Work with students and Straub’s article to identify specific, actionable strategies that you all can implement to make sure they get the most out of peer review.

4. After students have read “Threshold Concepts That Assist Academic Reading and Writing” and “Using This Book,” give them a chance to identify the CARS moves and some of the features of scholarly reading together in class. Use the Reading Assist Tags (see p. 58) to structure this work. Have the class open to one of the tagged readings (Brandt in Chapter 2, Gee in Chapter 3, Grant-Davie in Chapter 4, and Perl in Chapter 5). Start with the genre cues. Have students locate the tags for the CARS moves, and then consider how the way those moves look in action does or does not meet their expectations. Next, consider the reading cues. Get students to articulate why each tag appears where it does. Why, for instance, are the editors suggesting they “Speed Up” in a particular section? Use this activity to lead into a discussion of what students are noticing about scholarly articles and how to effectively read them. If time allows, have students work in pairs to add their own tags to one of the non-tagged readings and then share their tags with the rest of the class.
Chapter Overview

This chapter asks your students to reflect on something about which they have probably taken little or no notice of up until now: the development of their literacies. The threshold concept here is straightforward: Writing and literacy practices are informed by prior experiences. We begin focusing on how an individual’s “literacy” is the product of many forces. Most students do not have the theoretical lenses to recognize how they were shaped by the discourse communities and social contexts in which they were raised and in which they currently participate. Like all of us, they tend to see their own experiences as natural or universal, without recognizing how very situated they are, so the importance of the specific details of their literacy development is often difficult to imagine. Some of their own literacies evolved when they were busy being children, and some were orchestrated by grown-ups who probably sounded to them like ones on the televised Peanuts specials: “Wah, wah, wah.” Many students probably took little notice of explicit, school-based literacy instruction: kindergarten and first grade were just “going to school.” Relevant but less obvious forces in their lives — the presence or absence of reading material, parents who worked two jobs, access to particular technologies, a summer job in high school — might not have registered as literacy-related. And, of course, your students are continuing to develop as literate people even now, which they may not always recognize.

The readings in this chapter help students begin to understand what literacies are, what literacies they have, and how social contexts impact literacy development. The articles include case studies and histories of people whose literacy experiences may or may not match students’ own. These selections provide students with a foundation and vocabulary for considering, analyzing, and writing about their own literate lives as well as those of others.

The articles in this chapter use terms like sponsor, activity, and event literally, which are familiar terms to most students, but not necessarily in the

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Key Vocabulary for Chapter 2

- Case studies
- Code switching/meshing
- Literacy/literacies
- Literacy practices
- Literacy sponsor
- Misappropriation
- Multiliteracies
- Transfer
context of “literacy.” For this reason, you might want to work out definitions of these terms with your students, based not only on the readings but also on examples from their own experience.

**Key Student Outcomes for Chapter 2**

1. **Understand the concepts of literacy and multiple literacies**
   
   Literacy, in its narrowest sense, is the ability to read and write. This chapter expands and deepens that definition to include the forces that privilege or prevent our acquisition of literacy tools and skills; literacy describes all those processes too. Also to be considered are nonprint literacies, technological literacies, the specific literacy practices of different discourse communities, and the literacy demands of navigating new environments or mastering context-specific lexes like the mysterious sequence of symbols on the four-inch screens of our smartphones. Negotiating with the twenty-first century requires competence in all of these literacies.

2. **Come to greater awareness of the forces that have shaped you as a writer and reader**
   
   G.I. Joe was right: Knowing is half the battle. It’s important for students to know what they do when they read and write, and why they do it the way they do. It’s also important to have a vocabulary for “talking about yourself as a writer and reader.” Analyzing the literacy narratives of others can help students more fully understand their own literacies. Questions such as those provided in the introduction to this chapter (p. 66) can also help students bring into focus exactly how the diverse “forces” for (and against) literacy shaped them. Finally, writing a literacy narrative gives students the opportunity to reflect on and come to terms with what happened, and what continues to happen, below the surface and behind the scenes of their lives.

3. **Consider how you use your literacy practices across different settings, what that means for you, and what it reveals about our culture at large**
   
   Students might initially be surprised by the breadth of how authors like Deborah Brandt and others in this chapter define literacy, but if you work with them to develop their own stories and examples (the student narrative by Lucas Pasqualin is helpful here) and then consider what they gain when they draw on the full wealth of their experiences, they’ll start to see the usefulness of this concept. Students enter college with years of experience as writers and readers, even if they don’t immediately consider some of that experience — for instance, texting or posting on message boards — as relevant. By reflecting on these experiences in light of ideas about misappropriation and transfer, students can begin to consciously consider the impact these experiences have had on their literate development, and the impact they might have going forward. Helping students achieve this outcome empowers them to see the value of their experiences as they face new writing situations in the future.
The articles by Young and Mellix also raise further questions about how specific literate practices get valued (or not) across different settings. An overarching theme of this chapter is that literacy has real consequences beyond just writing or reading in a classroom. These readings should help students think about what that means for them.

4. Understand ways of conducting contributive research and writing about literacy that can be shared with an audience

Three of the readings in this chapter (those by Brandt, Tejada Jr. et al., and Robertson et al.) use case studies or ethnography—methods students can use to conduct their own research to discover and make claims about their own literacies.

Students enjoy the predictable, narrative format: The characters’ lives are engaging and easy to remember and discuss. Students used to reading for plot or content, though, sometimes forget that the point of “research” is to explore a research question. Because their understanding of “evidence” is often limited to the empirically driven, quantifiable kind, some students even assume that the case studies are a kind of fiction, anecdotes created to engage the reader.

A couple of strategies may help combat this tendency: Have a short discussion about how and why qualitative research is used in education and social science research. Why doesn’t it begin with a hypothesis or research question? What kinds of “data” do case studies generate? And finally, help students discover strengths and weaknesses in this kind of data.

Readings That Teach to Key Student Outcomes for Chapter 2

Outcome #1:
Understand the Concepts of Literacy and Multiple Literacies

- Deborah Brandt *Sponsors of Literacy*
- Sandra Cisneros *Only Daughter*
- Malcolm X *Learning to Read*
- Victor Villanueva Excerpt from *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*
- Vershawk Ashanti Young “Nah, We Straight”: *An Argument Against Code Switching*

Outcome #2:
Come to Greater Awareness of the Forces That Have Shaped You as a Writer and Reader

- Deborah Brandt *Sponsors of Literacy*
- Victor Villanueva Excerpt from *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*
- Malcolm X *Learning to Read*
- Arturo E. Tejada, Jr., Esther Gutierrez, Brisa Galindo, DeShonna Wallace, and Sonia Castaneda *Changing Our Labels: Rejecting the Language of Remediation*
Outcomes:

Outcome #3:
Consider How You Use Your Literacy Practices across Different Settings, What That Means for You, and What It Reveals about Our Culture at Large

- Deborah Brandt Sponsors of Literacy
- Vershawn Ashanti Young “Nah, We Straight”: An Argument Against Code Switching
- Barbara Mellix From Outside, In
- Liane Robertson, Kara Taczak, and Kathleen Blake Yancey Notes toward a Theory of Prior Knowledge
- Donald M. Murray All Writing Is Autobiography
- Jeff Grabill, William Hart-Davidson, Stacey Pigg, et al. Revisualizing Composition: Mapping the Writing Lives of First-Year College Students

Outcome #4:
Understand Ways of Conducting Contributive Research and Writing about Literacy That Can Be Shared with an Audience

- Deborah Brandt Sponsors of Literacy
- Arturo E. Tejada, Jr., Esther Gutierrez, Brisa Galindo, DeShonna Wallace, and Sonia Castaneda Changing Our Labels: Rejecting the Language of Remediation
- Liane Robertson, Kara Taczak, and Kathleen Blake Yancey Notes toward a Theory of Prior Knowledge

Summaries and Take-Home Points

Deborah Brandt

Sponsors of Literacy

Summary

Brandt broke new ground with her idea of literacy sponsorship. The first part of her essay discusses how previous research focused on the development of literacies in individuals, ignoring the outside agents (which include institutions and individuals, as well as more abstract entities such as cultural practices and ideologies) that she concluded were fundamentally important in fostering, regulating, inhibiting, or otherwise shaping literacies. Key to Brandt’s concept of such sponsorship is that the sponsor benefits in some way from the
“economies of literacy” and, more specifically, from their relationship to the
sponsored. Brandt’s article contains three principal claims: (1) Access to literacy
sponsors is determined in part by such socioeconomic factors as race and class;
(2) sponsors define literacy standards, and competition among sponsors deter-
mained the rapid post–World War II rise in literacy standards that has left many
ordinary individuals unable to compete economically; and (3) sponsored
individuals can potentially “misappropriate” or “divert” literacy sponsors’
resources toward their own ends.

To support her first claim, Brandt uses the examples of Raymond Branch
(white, privileged, male) and Dora Lopez (Hispanic, the child of immigrants,
female), contemporaries raised in the same Midwestern town, who had mark-
edly different access to literacy sponsors and thus entirely different literacy
experiences. She uses an extended example to support her second claim,
chronicling the career of Dwayne Lowery, a staff representative for a labor
union, who, despite his long experience on the job, finally cannot compete with
the academic degrees of those with whom he must negotiate. In support of her
third claim, she discusses two female white-collar workers who redirect literacy
practices learned from their supervisors to help them achieve personal (religi-
ous and economic) goals.

Brandt concludes by suggesting that her readers help their students under-
stand that these “economies of literacy” are fast-moving, complex transactions,
and that they are bound to context and privilege (or lack of it).

Note that Brandt’s article is the first tagged reading in Writing about Writing.
For more information on the new Reading Assist Tags, see page 2 in Chapter 1
and pages xii-xiii in the introduction to this Instructor’s Manual.

Take-Home Points

1. Literacy sponsors are any agents that foster, regulate, inhibit, or other-
   wise shape literacies in individuals.
2. Race and class affect access to literacy sponsors.
3. Competition among sponsors shapes standards for literacy, which can
   have far-reaching impacts on ordinary individuals.
4. Sponsored individuals can “misappropriate” sponsors’ resources for
   their own ends.

Sandra Cisneros

Only Daughter

Summary

This brief narrative illustrates Cisneros’s struggle to be accepted as a writer in
the eyes of her working-class, Mexican American father. The piece moves back
and forth between Cisneros’s memories of her childhood and reflections on her
family’s perceptions of her career plans. Much of this discussion develops
Cisneros’s sense of how her gender simultaneously constrained the options
available to her as a young woman while also making it acceptable for her to take on a career—writing—that was hardly practical. The last several paragraphs focus on a more recent experience: After a decade of writing, Cisneros is able to share one of her stories with her father, perhaps, she notes, because the piece had been “translated into Spanish, or because it was published in Mexico, or perhaps because the story dealt with Tepeyac, the colonia [her] father was raised in” (p. 104). Even after a year when she received a number of awards and publications, Cisneros found her father’s enjoyment of her story the most satisfying reward of all, as it represented his acceptance (finally) of her chosen career.

Students reading this piece might find connections to their own lives in Cisneros’ discussion of how writing was valued in their families growing up, whom they shared their writing with, and what their families see as the goals for education and college. Students who have read Deborah Brandt’s “Sponsors of Literacy” might also consider how Cisneros’s narrative demonstrates some of the qualities of literacy acquisition Brandt describes. As Brandt argues, literacy acquisition is always an exchange, with values and ideals being passed along with the abilities. Cisneros’s narrative also provides plenty of examples of literacy sponsors, from Cisneros’s own (her father, college programs, the NEA, UC Berkeley) to those of her father (sports magazines, tabloids, and fotonovelas).

**Take-Home Points**

1. Gender expectations affect both access to literacies and what others expect an individual to do with those abilities.
2. Parents figure prominently in an individual’s literacy development and their perceptions of success.
3. Language and culture act as powerful forces that shape literate development.

**Malcolm X**

**Learning to Read**

**Summary**

Malcolm X told Alex Haley, “I am a part of all I have met.” This excerpt from Haley’s *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* offers a snapshot of the many literacy sponsors Malcolm X met in prison. Because he envied convicts who could “take charge of any conversation,” he began his self-education with a dictionary, tablet, and pencil. His remarkable journey from “learning to read” to “reading to learn” makes a personal case for the transformative power of reading and writing. He is an excellent example of Haas and Flower’s assertion that readers “construct” meaning (see Chapter 4). As a disciple of Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X read to understand “the truth about the black man’s role” that
resonated with his own experience. Malcolm X also supports Brandt’s assertion that literacy sponsors can be negative or constrain our literacy.

A brief (three-minute) interview of Alex Haley discussing how Malcolm X became “a part of all I have met” is available at http://pbs.org/wgbh/amex/malcolmx/sfeature/sf_video.html.

**Take-Home Points**

1. Race, class, gender, and socioeconomic status can impact literacy access.
2. Literacy acquisition is a subjective process.
3. Motivation plays an important role in literacy acquisition.

**Victor Villanueva**

**Excerpt from *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color***

**Summary**

This excerpt from Villanueva’s literacy narrative chronicles his journey as a Puerto Rican Vietnam War vet with a GED, determined to improve his education. Moving back and forth between a third-person point of view, observing his academic journey, and a first-person viewpoint, reflecting on that journey, his narrative describes his place as an outsider in the classroom and in the college essays that he writes. Villanueva briefly establishes the personal context for this story — a series of working-class jobs, a failed marriage, a child — in order to plumb his stubborn and painful commitment to “[get] the degree.” He discusses studying not just literature but also what it meant to be white and middle class. He uses examples from the classroom, in conferences with professors, of friendships he made, and with women he dated.

As a literacy sponsor, Villanueva’s minority status is a double-edged sword, working for and against him time and again. He’s not proud of the role it played in his admission to grad school, but as a minority member he’s too proud (and insecure) to seek academic help from his professors. That insecurity resonates throughout his narrative in the comments professors have made about his writing: “Nonsense,” “Logic?” and “What’s the point?” But when he “stumbles into his first rhetoric course” (mistaking “invention” in the course title for “inventor”), he learns about the relationship between discourse patterns and language acquisition. The last part of his text briefly digresses on the foundations of rhetorical criticism from Aristotle and Cicero to Bruffee and Burke — in order to apply those rhetorical traditions to his own story as reader and writer. Villanueva recognizes that “here was all that language had been to me” (p. 127). He learned that his academic “failures” could be explained by the cultural contexts in which he first learned to speak. Until then he had not seen how his language, more than his color, had informed his academic journey. Finally, his formal education spoke to and about his otherness.
Take-Home Points

1. Academic success in college is measured by the language conventions and practices of that community.
2. Our cultural identity can inhibit our ability to feel accepted by other discourse communities.
3. The language we acquire first and the discourse patterns that the language uses to construct the world will inform how we think and write.

Arturo E. Tejada, Jr., Esther Gutierrez, Brisa Galindo, DeShonna Wallace, and Sonia Castaneda

Changing Our Labels: Rejecting the Language of Remediation

Summary

This article presents commentary on the label “remedial,” remedial writing classes, and standardized writing tests from the perspective of the five student authors, all of whom found themselves placed in remedial first-year writing courses when they started at California State University, San Bernardino. After some initial framing discussion, the article moves through three sections that allow each of the authors to speak to their own experiences, research, and reflections. The first, “Why Did We Feel Remedial When We Were Not in a Remedial Course?” concerns the authors’ initial reactions to discovering they were being labeled as remedial, despite working hard in high school and being accepted to a four-year university. The authors describe hiding the label from their parents and peers, worrying they wouldn’t be able to make it at CSUSB, and generally feeling embarrassed and separated from the rest of the university community. In the second section, “And Then We Showed Up for Our First ‘Not-Remedial Remedial’ English Class,” the authors explain how their experiences in their English course began to shift their self-perceptions. By grappling with difficult scholarly material (including two articles from this textbook: Deborah Brandt's “Sponsors of Literacy” in this chapter and James Paul Gee's “Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction” in Chapter 3), the authors began to see themselves as full participants in the university, despite being fully aware of the “remedial” label imposed on them by administration. The third section, “We Did Research on Labels and Remediation and Became Even More Confused,” presents some of the research the authors did on the power of the remedial label during the second part of their English course. Between conducting interviews with students, faculty, and administration as well as reviewing research from education and writing scholars, the authors discover the confused and inherently unfair systems of schooling and testing that privilege particular socioeconomic classes and certain kinds of abilities (e.g., critical thinking and writing skills that are often underdeveloped in working-class schools). In the final section of the article, titled “Our Rebellion,” the authors draw from their
experiences sharing their research with others to argue for the value of students speaking out about how labeling affects them.

Like the three narratives that precede it, the experiences the authors describe in this article provide further examples of the connections Deborah Brandt draws between literacies, literacy acquisition, and socioeconomic factors. Students who have read James Paul Gee’s “Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction” in Chapter 3 should be able to make further linkages. Ultimately, this article prompts students to compare those experiences with those of the authors, considering the times they have been labeled and the impacts of those labels on their self-perceptions as well as their own expectations for college writing courses.

Moreover, the issues and desire that led to the creation of this article are important: The student authors identified something that troubled them, asked questions about it, conducted relevant research to learn more, and then were driven to share what they’d learned to help others and affect change. This is an example of writing that is actually attempting to do something. It’s also an example of how students can apply the concepts they are reading about in Writing about Writing in meaningful ways.

**Take-Home Points**

1. Labels and associated expectations can be powerful forces that shape individuals’ trajectories toward literacy acquisition, even though they might not tell the whole story.
2. Different schools (and tests) can value writing and associated abilities differently.
3. Some of the “ideological freight” that comes with literacy sponsorship is how a sponsor views the individual being sponsored.
4. Students can surpass the expectations set for them (by society, tests, administration, etc.) if they are sufficiently challenged, engaged, and supported.

**Vershawn Ashanti Young**

**“Nah, We Straight”: An Argument Against Code Switching**

**Summary**

Young’s article picks up on some similar themes as earlier selections in this chapter, chiefly that institutions play powerful roles in shaping individuals’ literacy learning and that different language and literacy practices are granted varying degrees of value. At issue is the pedagogy surrounding code switching, the notion that speakers and writers must shift languages between “home” and more public, accepted variants when transitioning between informal/private and formal/public situations (e.g., using African American English at home or
on the street while using Standard English at work). While at first glance this sort of code switching might sound like a form of the rhetorical dexterity that we want to encourage in our students, Young argues that the discussion and teaching around code switching have reinforced distinctions between languages that might not, in practice, exist. Moreover, he also makes the case that understandings of language and literacy learning that ask students to divide “home” and “school” languages bring wrongheaded notions of “separate but equal” into the writing classroom.

The article is divided into two main parts. In the first, “The Problem of Linguistic Double Consciousness,” Young examines the practice of teaching students (especially African American students) to code-switch within the historical context of institutionalized racism in the United States. Here, he draws on scholarship to counter the argument that code switching is antiracist, linking beliefs about black students’ “two-ness” (meaning their need to communicate both at home and in public/at school or work) to the double consciousness that W. E. B. Du Bois highlighted more than a century ago and to the practices of racial segregation. Young observes that proponents of teaching students to code-switch reinforce the perceived inferiority of black English, and he argues that even if code switching proponents are well-intentioned, such misguided instruction asks students to undergo language “conversion” and accept the notion that standard English is superior (and that, in turn, the people associated with that language — middle- and upper-class whites — are superior, too). He attributes this sort of thinking to “exaggerated perceptions of racial difference” when “in reality the languages aren’t so disparate after all” (p. 157).

In the second part of the article, “Code Meshing, Not Code Switching,” Young draws on a number of examples (from research as well as current events) to demonstrate what code meshing looks like in practice. He argues here that “American dialects of English are already building blocks of standard English,” drawing parallels to how accents inflect speech (p. 159). Young then highlights examples from the 2008 U.S. presidential race to demonstrate some of the complexities of language use and variety. Further, he points out that even the people we expect to use standard English (the white middle and upper classes) often do not, which means all of the conversations around and purported need for code switching are further exaggerating racial disparity. Ultimately, he argues that the solution is to shift ideologies and beliefs around language in the country, and that educators have an important role to play in changing conversations about race and language.

Students will likely be surprised by Young’s points, so you might find they meet this reading with skepticism. His many examples of code meshing (both that he cites and includes in his own writing) as well as the sorts of experiences he describes with language learning in school, however, create opportunities for conversations about how language gets valued in different contexts by different people. Like many of the authors in this book, Young is calling attention to the fact that the way writing is perceived is a construct, one in this case that is deeply rooted in politics and culture.
Take-Home Points

1. Language and literacy practices — and how they are or aren’t valued — inform identity, in addition to having real consequences (in school, work, and public life).
2. There is no such thing as a single, unified standard English.
3. Conceptions of proper language use are tied to the situation in which the language is being used and the reader’s assumptions about the individual using it.
4. Code meshing allows individuals to become more effective communicators by incorporating their varied dialects and language patterns rather than discarding them.

Barbara Mellix

From Outside, In

Summary

Mellix’s essay serves as a useful complement to Vershawn Ashanti Young’s article. Both raise questions about code switching and the relationship between language and identity, and both acknowledge the unsettling nature of having to move between black English at home and standard English (which Mellix describes as belonging to “others”) in public. However, Mellix’s use of personal experiences and examples might make her piece more immediately relatable and understandable, in addition to providing examples of the very issues Young discusses in detail. Mellix’s descriptions of adjusting to college writing also resonate with the excerpt from Victor Villanueva’s Bootstraps that appears earlier in this chapter.

The essay starts with a recent anecdote in which Mellix used black English to reprimand her daughter (“[W]hen I get angry at home,” she writes, “I speak some of my finest, most cherished black English. Had I been speaking to my daughter in this manner in certain other environments, she would have been shocked and probably worried that I had taken leave of my sense of propriety”; p. 173) before moving through her memories of code switching as a child, in school, and as a student in college writing classes. She explains the distance she felt from standard English as a child: “The language was not ours. It was something from outside us, something we used for special occasions” (p. 176). Eventually, however, she became comfortable enough in this language to take on a job writing business letters as an adult. When she later enrolled in college classes to work toward becoming a teacher, she encountered a new challenge: writing about herself and her life. In trying to do so, Mellix realized that the “appropriate” language of the college classroom still felt separate from her — as though it couldn’t quite capture her own lived experiences — even though she was mechanically proficient. The last few pages of the essay detail her experiences in two college writing classes and how she gradually found ways to take on this style of writing as her own. She eventually concludes that “to seek
knowledge, freedom, and autonomy means always to be in the concentrated process of becoming — always to be venturing into new territory, feeling one’s way at first, then getting one’s balance, negotiating, accommodating, discovering one’s self in ways that previously defined ‘others’” (p. 181). Writing, for Mellix, is a way of taking on new identities and responsibilities that previously did not seem possible to her.

**Take-Home Points**

1. Prior experiences with family, school, and local communities affect how an individual inhabits a particular language.
2. Language shapes how individuals think about and perceive their own experiences.
3. Adjusting to writing in new situations (e.g., college classrooms) happens intermittently and over time.

Liane Robertson, Kara Taczak, and Kathleen Blake Yancey

**Notes toward a Theory of Prior Knowledge**

**Summary**

Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey report results from their research into transfer, or how students adapt and build on their prior writing-related knowledge when completing new writing tasks in college courses. As a result, the beginning of the article is much more dense and theoretical than other selections in this chapter. Rather than focusing on literacy as broadly informed by cultural, geographic, and socioeconomic factors — as several of the other selections do — the authors focus on particular writing abilities and conceptions and how students deploy them in college. Students will likely be able to see something of themselves in the three case studies that make up the majority of the reading.

The authors start by reviewing several models of how students transfer knowledge to and from writing classes and situations. Here, Reiff and Bawarshi’s distinction between boundary guarders (learners who “work to maintain the boundary marking their prior knowledge, and at the most add only strategies to the schema they seek to preserve”) and boundary crossers (learners who “[accept] noviceship, often as a consequence of struggling to meet the demands of a new writing task”) introduces some new terminology students can use to think about how they use their prior writing knowledge (p. 189).

The next several sections elaborate on particular experiences the authors learned about through their research; they are therefore more immediately accessible. The first, “Where Many Students Begin: Absent Prior Knowledge,” discusses the differences between high school English classes and college writing classes — in particular, high school curricula typically devote little time to
explicit writing instruction and focus more on reading imaginative, literary texts rather than the nonfiction texts students are usually expected to write about in college. Three case studies follow. Eugene, in “A Typology of Prior Knowledge, Type One: Assemblage,” represents a boundary guarder who tried to add on (without blending) some of the new concepts and writing theories he learned in his college writing class to his existing understanding of writing. In “Type Two: Remix,” Alice is able to combine ideas from her previous experiences and her college writing classes into a new, composite theory of writing. Finally, in “Critical Incidents: Motivating New Conceptions and Practices of Composing,” Rick experiences two “critical incidents” (“a situation where efforts either do not succeed at all or succeed only minimally”; p. 201). These two incidents—one in a composition class and another in chemistry—demonstrate Rick’s (eventual) willingness to revise his theories and practices in light of teacher feedback. As the authors note, “the critical incident prompts Rick to develop a more capacious understanding of writing, one in which genre is flexible and the making of knowledge includes application” (p. 205).

In the penultimate paragraph of the article, Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey suggest some possible ways teachers might use the results of their research in the composition classroom, and these are worth noting as you think about how to incorporate this reading into your class discussions. Ideas include inviting students to identify absences in prior knowledge (and then collaborating to fill them), presenting remix “as a way of integrating old and new, personal and academic knowledge and experience into a revised conception and practice of composing for college” (p. 206), and helping students to reflect on critical incidents in their own experiences.

**Take-Home Points**

1. Transfer of writing-related knowledge from one situation to another does not happen neatly or easily.
2. High school and other prior experiences do not provide students with all of the knowledge they need to meet the demands of college writing.
3. Writers should find ways to build on, recombine, and revise their earlier theories of how writing works in order to adapt to new situations.
4. Critical incidents (i.e., moments of struggle and failure) provide important opportunities to reflect on and revisit theories about how writing works.

**Nancy Sommers**

**I Stand Here Writing**

**Summary**

Nancy Sommers begins this article with a charming anecdote recounting a time she stood in her kitchen cooking chicken, attempting to recall a phrase she had recently read. While trying to remember how that particular sentence began, it
occurs to her that “writing is a radical loss of certainty,” because to recall the rest of the sentence, she acknowledges that “voices start showing up.” This causes Sommers to claim that “writing emerges from writing” (p. 213). Sommers distinguishes among the kinds of writing we do: personal, academic, and autobiographical, for the purpose of readers understanding that there is a connection between sources, texts, and real-life experiences. Academic writing, she claims, “does not mean being remote, distant, imponderable,” like so many students view it (p. 218). Academic writing is a search to find connections between authorities and published sources. Sommers’s first-person narrative, where she shares her past relationship with the library, will give students an alternative impression of what it means to conduct research. Sommers admits that if she could teach her students “one lesson about writing it would be to see themselves as sources, as places from which ideas originate” (p. 218). Sommers encourages writers to bring their personal “judgments and interpretations to bear on what they read and write, learning that they never leave themselves behind even when they write academic essays” (p. 218). She uses the word inventors throughout the article and inspires student writers to see themselves as originators of ideas, where they act as a “source from which other readers can draw sustenance” (p. 221). Like many of the readings in this chapter, Sommers connects both what and how we write to prior experiences. Because of her conversational tone and her personal accounts of being a student who also was required to conduct research, students will find her article immensely approachable.

**Take-Home Points**

1. The prior knowledge that writers bring to their research can help them understand the constructed nature of the “truth.”
2. Writers need to consider the connections they observe among sources, texts, and real-life experiences.
3. Academic research should be personal, with writers making judgments about interpreting a text.

**Donald M. Murray**

**All Writing Is Autobiography**

**Summary**

Murray claims that all writing is “autobiography” or always personal. We cannot write outside of who we are. He claims his “thinking style and voice” infuse even his nonfiction pieces. Ever the romantic, Murray uses examples from his own poetry and personal essays to point out what is from his life and what is because of his life. And he admits that for him, writing has been therapy: a way to understand the life he now looks back on. He discusses how autobiography informs academic writing and, paraphrasing Don DeLillo, adds, “We become what we write” (p. 230). He recommends his process of
“layering” — revising on top of what we’ve already written — to find and reveal the truth of a text.

Murray does not encourage narcissism as much as he suggests that writers write from the inside out, looking inward as well as outward. He implicitly gives writers permission to be themselves when they write. Students can find in this essay a place from which to enter a conversation about how writers construct texts. It also reinforces the notion that not only are their previous experiences valuable to draw on when writing and researching (a point made by Sommers in the preceding article), but drawing on them is, in fact, inevitable.

**Take-Home Points**

1. Writers’ worldviews inform all the texts they write.
2. Writing can be a way to discover who we are and the meaning of events in our lives.
3. What we write says as much about us as the subject we are writing about.

Lucas Pasqualin

**“Don’t Panic: A Hitchhiker’s Guide to My Literacy”**

**Summary**

Pasqualin’s narrative puts a student face on many of the concepts discussed in this chapter. He directly cites two readings from this chapter (Brandt and Malcolm X) and another from the next chapter (Mirabelli). Moreover, connections can be drawn to several other selections (Villanueva in his discussion of the power of rhetoric in the world, Tejada Jr. et al. on labeling and expectations, Cisneros on how family members serve as literacy sponsors). These connections make this a useful piece for students to consider as they reflect on their own literacies and prior experiences with reading and writing.

After a brief scene that demonstrates the importance books have played in his life, Pasqualin describes five impactful literacy encounters. These start conventionally enough, as Pasqualin explains how important both *Harry Potter* and *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* have been in his development as a reader. The next three examples — bussing tables, working in retail at PetSmart, competing on his high school debate team — might surprise students and encourage them to think broadly about the sorts of experiences they have as communicators, not just with writing in a classroom. Pasqualin articulates the different kinds of literate abilities he acquired through these experiences, ranging from spelling to an appreciation for literature to reading people through body language to crafting arguments. Pasqualin ultimately concludes that “when life throws me in a new direction, I try to embrace that. Life and literacy have taught me that when your walls are painted blank, you should let them
represent a new page in your life” (p. 242). His narrative presents a picture of a writer and reader who has taken advantage of the opportunities around him to develop into a well-rounded, literate individual.

Take-Home Points

1. Literacy acquisition is a lifelong undertaking.
2. Individuals combine literacies acquired through all of their experiences — not just what happens in a classroom — in order to adapt to new situations.
3. Communication happens through more than just reading and writing; it includes speech, body language, and other nonverbal cues.

Jeff Grabill, William Hart-Davidson, Stacey Pigg, et al.

Revisualizing Composition: Mapping the Writing Lives of First-Year College Students

Summary

The findings in this report are based on a survey given to 1,366 first-year writing students at seven institutions. According to the report, “Participants were first asked to identify types of writing that they do based on a list of 30 writing types. Then participants were asked to rank order the five types of writing that they do most often. Next they were asked to rank order the types of writing that they value the most” (p. 248). The findings suggested that the three most frequently written genres were short message service text messages, e-mails, and lecture notes. Interestingly, the survey determined that students use cell phones for various types of “self-sponsored writing.” This included e-mails, instant messaging, creating lists, taking lecture notes, or even creating outlines for academic papers. When students were asked to value the writing they do, participants listed texting and academic writing. School-sponsored genres were highly valued by participants, and some genres, like resume and letter writing, were valued but not performed frequently. The findings suggest that students write for personal fulfillment nearly as often as for school assignments. When participants were asked to identify the types of technologies they use when they compose, 90 percent claimed to use a word processor. However, most often, “blogs, Twitter, and Wikis are not used by many participants.” Finally, the report suggests that students value writing alone versus collaboratively. This report helps us to understand the writing practices and values of college students. Furthermore, the report speaks to “the pervasiveness of writing in the lives of our participants and the importance of hand-held devices like mobile phones as a writing platform” (p. 247). This research helps students to broaden their understanding of what writing is and to acknowledge that writing occurs in multiple ways and places outside of the writing performed in school. The
report offers interesting data that will help students identify their own writing processes and practices in order to reflect on what they value.

**Take-Home Points**

1. When students identify the types of writing they do outside of the classroom, their definition of writing expands.
2. Students value texting and academic writing more than other types of writing.
3. Students write for personal fulfillment almost as much as they do for school.

**Supplemental Activities for Chapter 2**

**Outcome #1:**

*Understand the Concepts of Literacy and Multiple Literacies*

1. Ask small groups, based on examples of types of literacies (academic, civic, religious, etc.) given in response to question 1 of Applying and Exploring Ideas following Brandt’s article (p. 100), to establish a criteria or a matching definition for *literacy*. How is this definition similar to or different from what they would’ve said prior to reading Brandt? What’s the value of defining literacy the way Brandt does? Once students have read Pasqualin’s narrative or some of the readings in Chapter 3 (Gee, Mirabelli), consider asking students to revise their definitions of *literacy* and compare how they have changed.

2. Ask small groups, based on examples of types of literacies (academic, civic, religious, etc.) given in response to question 1 of Applying and Exploring Ideas following Brandt’s article (p. 100), to choose a particular type of literacy and develop a glossary of ten to twelve terms for that literacy. For example, an “academic” literacy glossary might include terms such as *override*, *credit hours*, or *academic minor*. Also, ask them to consider what reading and writing look like in relation to these literacies.

3. Ask students to create a list of situations or events that represent different types of literacies. For example, what would they need to understand in order to fill out a tax return, read a medical insurance form, create a blog, or read a stop sign? How many types of literacy do they feel are necessary to be successful as a student? What kinds of reading and writing do they anticipate needing to do at a university?

4. Do all literacies require reading and writing alphabetic texts? What other fields or careers function without much reading and writing of alphabetic texts? (For example, coaches use playbooks.) Ask students to speak directly from their experience with athletics, performing or visual arts, or work.
**Outcome #2:**
**Come to Greater Awareness of the Forces That Have Shaped You as a Writer and Reader**

1. Have students identify a specific elementary school experience that exemplifies why they love or hate to read. Then have students describe this experience in writing, or in some other form (a drawing, comic, audio or video, and so on).

2. Working from small groups to report-outs that are written on the board, ask students to identify *all* the different positive and negative literacy sponsors in their lives. Working from the list on the board, ask groups to identify patterns in the data that reflect American assumptions or cultural values about literacy.

3. Working from small groups to do quick presentations that are written on the board, ask students to identify *all* the important books in their lives, whether that importance was negative or positive. Each group should develop criteria for what is “important.” Remind them to include non-school-based texts, including those used for religious education, instruction manuals, diaries, and scrapbooks as well as books read with someone or that students read by themselves.

4. In class, ask students to draw webs that show all of the literacy sponsors — both institutions and individuals — they can think of that played some role in leading them to your writing class. This might include scholarships, a high school teacher, the college itself, the state, and so on. Next, ask them to elaborate on their webs by jotting down some of the values and “ideological freight” that get transmitted with each sponsorship. Finally, ask students to compare their webs with one another. What do they notice across all of their webs? Are there any sponsors who appear again and again? To help students generate ideas, consider creating your own web on the board as they draw theirs, listing the sponsors that played some role in you being able to teach your writing class.

**Outcome #3:**
**Consider How You Use Your Literacy Practices across Different Settings, What That Means for You, and What It Reveals about Our Culture at Large**

1. After reading Grabill et al. (p. 245), have students respond to question 3 of Discussion and Journaling (“Make your own top ten list [of most frequently written genres] based on your own experience”). Ask students to work in a small group, comparing their lists to note the various literate abilities they need to write and use each kind of text and to think about any connections between how they write these texts. Does the way they write text messages, for instance, impact the way they write their to-do lists? Does the way they take lecture notes inform how they create outlines for research papers? After several minutes, ask each group to share their findings with the class.
2. For homework, ask students to write a one- to two-page narrative about a time they “misappropriated” something they learned from one literacy sponsor to use in a new situation (it will be helpful to spend some time in class first brainstorming examples of what this can look like). Ask them to share their narratives with a partner, then switch up the groups so students can exchange ideas with several others. Afterward, lead the class in a discussion about misappropriation generally: What leads to misappropriation? Do the values of the original sponsor still get carried along with the particular skill or ability? If students have read Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey (p. 184), how does this notion of misappropriation relate to ideas about transfer?

3. Ask students to write two or three short synthesis paragraphs in which they draw on some combination of ideas from Brandt, Young, Mellix, Robertson et al., Sommers, Murray, and/or Pasqualin to review what writers and researchers have to say about how individuals learn to read and write across different contexts. What are the challenges? What promotes this sort of transfer across settings? Where do the authors seem to agree and disagree?

**Outcome #4:**

**Understand Ways of Conducting Contributive Research and Writing about Literacy That Can Be Shared with an Audience**

1. For homework, ask students to locate two sets of literacy “statistics” that they find interesting using two different search strategies (only one of which can be Google or a similar search engine). Have them include in their research how the data were gathered. As a class, in small groups, evaluate the merits of the data. How were the data gathered, by whom, and for whom? How were the statistics “shared with an audience”?

2. For homework, ask students to investigate “high-stakes” literacy testing that takes place in their state in order to determine how the tests were developed and how they are “graded.” Ask students to share their findings with the class and consider the usefulness of those tests, given the definitions of literacy they have been developing throughout this chapter. If your class has read “Challenging Our Labels: Rejecting the Language of Remediation” by Tejada Jr. et al. (p. 130), you might ask them to compare what they’ve found with the experiences of the authors of that piece.

3. Using Brandt’s “Sponsors of Literacy” (p. 68), Tejada Jr. et al.’s “Challenging Our Labels: Rejecting the Language of Remediation” (p. 130), and/or Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey’s “Notes toward a Theory of Prior Knowledge” (p. 184), ask students to identify the specific research methods used to gather the data presented. For example, how many subjects did the researchers talk to? Were they videotaped or audiotaped? What questions were they asked to respond to? How did the researchers go about analyzing this data? What do the data collection methods suggest about the validity of the data?
Chapter Overview

In this chapter students move outward, from exploring their own literacies to examining how groups use literacy tools—reading, writing, and texts—to perform activities that enable the work of those groups to get done. The threshold concept in this chapter is that people use texts and discourse in order to make meaning and mediate meaningful activity. In other words, writing gets things done and makes things happen. The chapter offers three different theoretical lenses scholars use to consider how groups of people who share goals, purposes, and languages shape individuals’ language use, writing, and values: discourses, discourse communities, and activity theory. While you may choose to focus on only on one or two of these theories in your classes, the varying lenses complement one another and provide slightly different ways of thinking about the same underlying concept—each emphasizes a different aspect of how groups shape texts and literacies. You should find students are able to move between these ideas relatively easily if you can avoid getting too hung up on the particular terminology.

One concept that you should emphasize is genre. In the introduction to this chapter, Wardle and Downs provide a helpful discussion that defines and explains genre as it’s used by writing studies scholars, picking up on the extended discussion in Chapter 1 (pp. 17–21), which we recommend you assign to your students. The authors of the selections in this chapter tend to use “genre” without much in the way of explanation, so it is easy for students to be confused and mistake it for either a broad category of texts or interests. And in our experience, it is this writing studies notion of genre that helps tie the ideas

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<th>Key Vocabulary for Chapter 3</th>
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presented in this chapter to the study of writing. Without this grounding in genre and careful thinking about how texts and language work, student discussions about their discourse communities can often lead to research and reflections about group norms and activities that would likely be more appropriate in an anthropology course rather than a writing class.

Several readings (Mirabelli, Johns, McCarthy, Branick, and Marro) focus on discourse communities and activity systems in landscapes familiar to college students. Students’ inquiries into these discourses quickly become a means of personal study and reflection. One clear suggestion made by the readings in the chapter is that how individuals construct texts and how those texts *mediate* the activities of a group contribute to the group’s success. The readings also ask students to reflect on times they might have been resistant to a new discourse and suggest ways for adjusting their approaches in the future, underlining again why studying how and what we write, read, and say helps us do these things better.

With three different theoretical lenses and quite a bit of new or specialized terminology, students and teachers alike may get lost in the abstract concepts that underpin much of the discussion in this chapter. But by encouraging students to look closely at how writing conventions and values are socially constructed, the readings in this chapter ultimately invite students to question — and perhaps even critique — the communities they write for and the genres they use. These authors remind us that what can sometimes seem inevitably “correct” is usually grounded in social practices and the needs and values of particular groups of people.

**Key Student Outcomes for Chapter 3**

1. **Understand how language and texts (genres) mediate group activities**
   In this chapter our literacy learning moves to discussing how groups of people share goals, purposes, and language. Because everyone belongs to several discourses at any given time, this chapter emphasizes how we need to adjust our language and interpretation of texts in order to successfully operate within groups that use and require different ways of thinking and communicating. Students may have wondered before why they didn’t fit in with a particular group or why they had difficulty finding an identity in their workplace or school. This chapter explains how adapting (or not) to the appropriate language and behaviors determines how people may be viewed by existing members of a group and how students can improve their communication skills. Students learn how using the “right” language in the “right” genres with the “right” people will win them success in the real world. And, more than that, students even begin to see how what gets valued in writing (including ways of researching, thinking, and seeing the world in addition to conventions and common moves) is socially constructed rather than inevitable.

2. **Gain tools for examining the discourse and texts used by various communities**
   Chapter 3 is a rewarding chapter to teach and study because students get involved in collecting their own data. After selecting a discourse community or activity system to observe, students act like detectives by taking notes at meetings and by collecting e-mails, instant messages, text
messages, memos, and agendas. It doesn’t take long for them to observe that discourses can generate quite a bit of communication. Students also learn how to interview both experts and novices of a discourse. These interviews provide literacy histories and insights into how group members communicate, as well as how certain behaviors can cause conflict or advance goals within the community. The investigative process is one that students enjoy. By comparing their findings with those of the authors they read in this chapter, students learn how to identify interesting aspects of the writing they’re investigating. This process invites them to act as careful interpreters of language and writing practices, as well as to ask questions about why a particular group writes the way it does. This makes for a skill set that should serve them well as they work to adapt to new classes, careers, and other groups in the future.

3. **Gain tools for conducting primary research**

All of the suggested assignments for this chapter require that students first gather data and later analyze and interpret that data using the theoretical lenses they have been reading about. Because we can provide students with specific criteria to collect and analyze as they observe the group they are researching, their goals in conducting this research are fairly straightforward. They don’t know what results the research will produce, of course, but they do initially know what questions to ask and why they are observing and interviewing group members. They know they are looking for concrete evidence to understand the goals and missions of a discourse. Be sure to emphasize that this research requires more than a report on their findings.

### Readings That Teach to Key Student Outcomes for Chapter 3

**Outcome #1:**

**Understand How Language and Texts (Genres) Mediate Group Activities**

- **James Paul Gee** *Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction*
- **Tony Mirabelli** *Learning to Serve: The Language and Literacy of Food Service Workers*
- **Ann M. Johns** *Discourse Communities and Communities of Practice: Membership, Conflict, and Diversity*
- **Donna Kain** and **Elizabeth Wardle** *Activity Theory: An Introduction for the Writing Classroom*
- **Elizabeth Wardle** *Identity, Authority, and Learning to Write in New Workplaces*

**Outcome #2:**

**Gain Tools for Examining the Discourse and Texts Used by Various Communities**

- **Tony Mirabelli** *Learning to Serve: The Language and Literacy of Food Service Workers*
- **Perri Klass** *Learning the Language*
• Lucille P. McCarthy *A Stranger in Strange Lands: A College Student Writing across the Curriculum*

• Sean Branick *Coaches Can Read, Too: An Ethnographic Study of a Football Coaching Discourse Community*

• Elizabeth Wardle *Identity, Authority, and Learning to Write in New Workplaces*

• Victoria Marro *The Genres of Chi Omega: An Activity Analysis*

**Outcome #3:**

**Gain Tools for Conducting Primary Research**

• Ann M. Johns *Discourse Communities and Communities of Practice: Membership, Conflict, and Diversity*

• Sean Branick *Coaches Can Read, Too: An Ethnographic Study of a Football Coaching Discourse Community*

• Donna Kain and Elizabeth Wardle *Activity Theory: An Introduction for the Writing Classroom*

• Victoria Marro *The Genres of Chi Omega: An Activity Analysis*

**Summaries and Take-Home Points**

James Paul Gee

**Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction**

**Summary**

In this article Gee proposes “a way of talking about literacy and linguistics,” suggesting that “what is important is not language, and surely not grammar, but *saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations*” (p. 274). Gee calls these combinations “‘Discourses,’ with a capital *D*,” in order to distinguish the concept from the narrower (lower case) *discourse*, meaning language or communication. Gee believes that “any socially useful definition of ‘literacy’ must be couched in terms of the notion of Discourse” (p. 281) and that how we understand literacy is directly linked to the Discourses we come from and belong to.

Gee gives multiple examples of Discourses, and emphasizes that everyone belongs to many Discourses. Gee claims that all of us have a primary Discourse, which constitutes “our original and home-based sense of identity” (p. 279), and that we strive to become “literate” by acquiring fluency in secondary Discourses, like the Discourse of mainstream academic endeavor. Gee further distinguishes between dominant Discourses (those that carry with them social prestige and power) and nondominant Discourses (those that do not). Students who have read Deborah Brandt’s “Sponsors of Literacy” and other selections from Chapter 2 should see connections between Gee’s explanation of how particular Discourses get valued and those authors’ ideas about how exposure to different literacies shapes individuals’ trajectories in schools and careers.

Gee challenges his readers to consider *how* and *whether* individuals can gain “true acquisition” into multiple secondary Discourses, given the
constraints of social structures. Gee claims, in fact, that “true acquisition” of a secondary Discourse is possible only through active social practice (apprenticeship and ongoing, scaffolded instruction), and that such acquisition often involves conflict with one’s primary Discourse; for these reasons, he contends that true acquisition is exceedingly rare.

What hope is there, then, for those who desire entry later in life into a dominant secondary Discourse — as, for example, in the case of nontraditional students who want to acculturate late in life to mainstream academic practices? Gee suggests that, in the best of circumstances, Discourse hopefuls can engage in a compromise called “mushfake,” which is the ability to integrate into a group by observing enough of the participants’ behaviors and language to “make do.” He adopts an openly political attitude toward such adaptation, suggesting that this variety of Discourse acquisition will be necessary if “outsiders” wish the advantages that come with acquisition of a dominant Discourse. He suggests that such acquisition might in fact be more productive for participants (and, ultimately, society), in that they will remain aware of the elements of the Discourse, and can thus resist and criticize in a way that primary participants cannot.

Because the article is difficult, it requires a careful and close reading. However, most students find that Gee’s argument causes them to reflect meaningfully on how their home, community, and school interact and influence their words and actions. Gee also admits that his ideas are complex and difficult, and suggests in more than one place that he does not himself know all the answers. Making students aware of his openness on these matters can foster productive class discussion.

**Take-Home Points**

1. When studying language practices, we also need to consider the “social practices” of groups of people.
2. Discourses are “ways of being in the world.” Discourses give us directions for how to act, speak, and write in any social gathering.
3. If we want to gain even partial acquisition of a secondary Discourse, we have to develop a “metaknowledge” of what the social group expects, which can allow us to practice a “mushfake Discourse.”

**Tony Mirabelli**

**Learning to Serve: The Language and Literacy of Food Service Workers**

**Summary**

In this article, Mirabelli studies how workers in a diner use language and texts to interact with each other and with customers. His article introduces “the concept of multiliteracies to argue that these workers do not just read texts: They also read people and situations” (p. 298). It will immediately appeal to the experience and knowledge of the many college students who have worked in a restaurant or other food-service setting.
Mirabelli provides a strong argument for the need to reevaluate how we understand literacy in the workplace. Mirabelli is compelling in suggesting that the “menu is a genre unto itself” (p. 304). Perhaps the most fascinating part of his study is the interaction between Mirabelli, the server, and Al, a regular customer at Lou’s restaurant. Mirabelli transcribes the exact dialogue between the customer and the server and suggests that communication is affected both by “reading the menu” and by “reading the customers” (p. 314). Factors such as Mirabelli’s knowledge of food preparation, his knowledge of the menu, and his ability to read a customer’s taste and preferences play a vital role in the interactions between customers and servers. Mirabelli concludes that this research has shown that “language use was far more complex than one might assume in situations and events that involve taking a customer’s food order” (p. 314).

Students usually appreciate both Mirabelli’s accessible approach to presenting his research and his many examples. Mirabelli’s integration of transcripts and close analysis of the menu as a genre serve as useful models for students’ own investigations. Help students work through Mirabelli’s literature review, which quickly references a lot of information with which students are probably not familiar (though if they’ve read Gee in Chapter 3 or Lucas Pasqualin in Chapter 2, they should see some connections to those readings). He’s drawing on this research to argue that contemporary understandings of literacy should include more than just reading and writing but also “the various modes of communication and situations of any socially meaningful group or network where language is used in multiple ways” (p. 302). Students sometimes want to take this expansive definition to include any skill (which makes the term so broad as to be useless), so be sure to have a discussion about what some of these different uses of language might be.

**Take-Home Points**

1. Understanding multiliteracies in a particular event or situation broadens our ability to interact and effectively communicate.
2. Multiliteracies require individuals to “read people” as well as “read texts.”
3. Complex literacy practices, verbal and nonverbal, exist in the events and situations of our everyday world.

Ann M. Johns

**Discourse Communities and Communities of Practice: Membership, Conflict, and Diversity**

**Summary**

Johns’s article introduces the second of three lenses this chapter provides for looking at writing as socially situated: discourse communities. In her
introduction, Johns cites an article from fellow linguist John Swales to present six defining characteristics of such communities: common public goals, mechanisms of intercommunication, one or more unique genres, feedback, specialized language (lexis), and a “threshold level” of experience members (p. 321). Students sometimes appreciate the relative concreteness of the discourse community concept; while Gee’s notion of Discourses gets at a similar idea, discourse communities are usually specific groups that students can point to. Johns spends much of the first half of her article presenting examples of discourse communities, dividing her discussion between social, political, and recreational communities; professional communities; and academic communities.

Johns acknowledges and agrees with the study of language practices within discourses, but she believes that it’s also necessary to study the behaviors of the group or what she refers to as “the forces that make communities complex and varied” (p. 322). Her text examines the conventions members follow as well as the “rebellion” that sometimes erupts in discourse communities, and discussion of these different complications makes up most of the second half of her article. This is an important aspect of the discourse community concept for students to consider. At first, the notion of a “community” sounds perhaps more homogenous and harmonious than these communities actually are. In discussing this article with your students, you’ll want to be sure to help them think about the ways these conflicts manifest in writing and communication (and Johns provides plenty of examples, particularly in her analysis of academic communication). Otherwise, students can come to see the concept as more useful for an anthropologist studying cultures in general rather than a researcher investigating writing in particular. Pairing this text with James E. Porter’s “Intertextuality and the Discourse Community” (p. 352) can help students interested in how Johns’s ideas play out in writing. Johns also spends some time discussing authority — how it is viewed and how it is acquired — within the university setting, enabling many students to understand for the first time why being a student is so challenging. Johns admits that “we cannot tell students ‘truths’ about texts or community practices” (p. 336); however, she does believe that “we can heighten student awareness of generic conventions” (p. 336). Making students aware that conventions, as well as conflict, exist is another step toward enabling them to successfully navigate among and between discourses.

Take-Home Points

1. Discourse communities exhibit particular language, social, and cultural practices and conventions that unite members.
2. Discourse communities also exhibit conflict, mainly centered around issues of authority and identity (both within the community and at its borders), when outside individuals seek membership.
3. Academic discourse communities are complex and varied. Students who are aware of the conventions and influences of their particular discipline will be better prepared to meet the challenges of academic life.
Perri Klass

Learning the Language

Summary

Klass’s essay serves as a useful follow-up to the articles by James Paul Gee and Ann M. Johns that appear earlier in this chapter. Her experiences as a med student exemplify the social nature of communication and language that both authors explain in their discussions of Discourses and communities of practice, respectively. Klass presents two very different ways language constructs the social realities at a hospital. First, in describing how a shared language builds camaraderie among staff, she notes, “This special language contributes to a sense of closeness and professional spirit among people who are under a great deal of stress. As a medical student, I found it exciting to discover that I’d finally cracked the code, that I could understand what doctors said and wrote, and could use the same formulations myself” (p. 345). Later, she observes how language also builds distance between patients and the doctors treating them: “By reformulating a patient’s pain and problems into a language that the patient doesn’t even speak, I suppose we are in some sense taking those pains and problems under our jurisdiction and also reducing their emotional impact” (p. 346). Klass’s essay demonstrates not only examples of specialized language use but also how and why that language is developed. She ends her essay by describing the sense of loss and change she has experienced in acquiring this language, writing, “At first you may notice the new and alien assumptions every time you put together a sentence, but with time and increased fluency you stop being aware of them at all. And as you lose that awareness, for better or for worse, you move closer and closer to being a doctor instead of just talking like one” (p. 346).

Students will likely first notice the specialized language and acronyms that Klass sprinkles throughout her essay. They should also note the attitudes and beliefs — what Gee might call “ways of being” — that this language represents.

Take-Home Points

1. Particular communities (e.g., doctors working in a hospital) develop specialized language in order to get things done.
2. Specialized language constructs identities of the people who use it and relationships with the people who hear it.
3. Moving from outsider to insider status in a particular community means losing (or at least shifting) identities.
Lucille P. McCarthy

A Stranger in Strange Lands: A College Student Writing across the Curriculum

Summary

One student’s journey writing across the disciplines is the focus of McCarthy’s research. Using a variety of qualitative research methods — including attending his classes, interviewing him, and analyzing his writing — McCarthy studies first-year student Dave as he writes his way through Freshman Composition, Introduction to Poetry, and Cell Biology. Like most ethnographers, she has no hypothesis to test, but she does have a question she’d like answered: How and why do students succeed or fail at writing tasks in different classes?

She learns several important things about Dave’s practices:

• Dave sees each assignment as a different beast, which eliminates his ability to transfer literacy practices from one situation to another.
• He is more likely to succeed when he perceives the assignments to have a positive value for him beyond the course grade.
• He is positively influenced by camaraderie with the teacher, the students, and the texts they produce.
• He uses limited strategies to determine what kind of text he should produce.

Dave’s story is a useful one for first-year writing students to discuss. Students tend to identify with him, and for good reason: Like Dave, they face writing situations over which they have no control and about which they have little knowledge. Discussing Dave and speculating on how things might have gone differently for him gives them an opportunity to prepare for the strange lands of their academic futures. Also, though McCarthy explicitly refers to “discourse community” less often than Johns, she is drawing on much of the same research and similar ways of thinking about how writing works. Each classroom, in effect, is a different discourse community Dave needs to join, and his difficulties adapting to these new communities echo some of the complications that Johns outlines in her article (as well as some of the difficulties Alan faces in enculturating to a new community through his writing in Elizabeth Wardle’s “Identity, Authority, and Learning to Write in New Workplaces,” which appears later in this chapter). If your students read Liane Robertson, Kara Taczak, and Kathleen Blake Yancey’s article on transfer in Chapter 2, invite them to consider what these researchers might have to say about Dave’s experiences.

Take-Home Points

1. Academic writing situations can vary so much that each appears “foreign” to first-year students.
2. Many first-year students lack skills for assessing college writing contexts.
3. Student writers develop as they encounter new writing situations, but they need help learning to transfer writing strategies from one academic discipline to another.

Sean Branick

**Coaches Can Read, Too: An Ethnographic Study of a Football Coaching Discourse Community**

**Summary**

Branick, now a high school history teacher, was a student at the University of Dayton when he wrote this essay for Elizabeth Wardle’s first-year writing class. He uses ethnographic research methods to research his claim that college football coaches form a discourse community whose ability to “read” their players and the game constitute “literacy.” His introduction follows John Swales’s CARS model of research — establishing the territory; then his niche, “coaching as a complex literacy practice”; and then explaining how his ethnography occupies that niche. He uses secondary research to support his assertions that coaches do an important job and that effective coaches display similar characteristics. To collect data, he recorded the coaches’ pregame speeches and conducted interviews, in person and via e-mail, with coaches from the University of Dayton and the University of Cincinnati. To help interpret his data, Branick applies the “six characteristics of a discourse community” that Johns cites from John Swales in her article. Throughout his discussion of these characteristics, he integrates quotes from his interviews. His essay neatly connects the “textual, situational, and interpersonal literacies” of his claim in a single, constructed example — a single play to achieve the coach’s primary goal, scoring a touchdown. His conclusion brings the significance of his topic back to the reader, perhaps a fan, who no longer wonders, according to Branick, “What was that coach thinking?!”

Students will enjoy watching Branick's dance moves in the Ohio State University locker room, where he was an OSU defensive line coach, as originally filmed by ESPN. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=cv3fjwuQPcg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cv3fjwuQPcg).

**Take-Home Points**

1. Literacy can mean “reading” other things besides alphabetic texts.
2. Literacy can be “situated” in a discourse community’s pursuit of shared goals.
3. Understanding how a discourse community uses situated literacies can help us evaluate the effectiveness of that community.
Donna Kain and Elizabeth Wardle

Activity Theory: An Introduction for the Writing Classroom

Summary
Kain and Wardle wrote this article for their undergraduate students, and so it provides an accessible introduction to this chapter’s third lens through which to consider the socially situated nature of writing: activity theory. This selection defines activity theory, describes its constituent parts, and explains how it functions. Students might make use of this theory to analyze a group with shared goals and tools (called an activity system) in order to examine how the group meets its “social needs.” Broadly, activity theory is a lens through which we can better see how the work of an activity system gets done. Similar to using Johns’s ideas about discourse communities to understand communities we might aspire to, activity theory can help us see not only what the parts of the community are, but also the relationships between the parts and how those relationships influence and sometimes stress the parts. Kain and Wardle parse David Russell’s definition of an activity system and find six foundational elements:

1. It is ongoing over time.
2. It is object directed toward a goal.
3. It is historically conditioned to act the way it does because of how it responded to events over time.
4. It is dialectically structured—when one part changes, other parts must accommodate those changes.
5. It is tool mediated in that it uses both objects and systems (language, for example) to do its work.
6. It is centered on human interaction, the working together of members to accomplish its goals.

Kain and Wardle include a diagram of the activity theory model and a brief explanation of each of the parts: motives, subject, tools, rules, community, and division of labor. They follow with a second diagram, this one labeled to reflect a university class as an activity system. Recognizing these systems are marked by change, they also claim that one system can influence or be embedded inside another system. Activity systems are therefore dynamic and complex. Kain and Wardle explain why researchers use this lens and why understanding an activity system can be useful. When we understand the activities the system is engaged in, we can better “anticipate . . . needs,” and solve the problems of the system. Finally, the authors include a series of questions and research methods students might use to conduct their own analysis (a triangle diagram is included for student use). They predict students who engage in this analysis can become more knowledgeable members of the activity systems they belong to. As Wardle and Downs point out in the Framing the Reading section before this selection, activity theory also provides a framework for thinking about the
histories of groups, tools, and contexts, and so dovetails nicely with some of the reflective work your students may have already begun in considering their individual literacy histories.

Students tend to appreciate the visual, “at a glance” nature of activity triangles and the amount of information they can represent. Be careful, though: These diagrams can also serve to flatten an activity since, even though these triangles include lines linking the various pieces, students sometime still read them as lists of individual components rather than richly complex context. It’s important here to help students to consider not only the components of an activity system but also the implications of noticing these types of connections. In other words, what do these triangles allow them to see and think about that they might otherwise not notice? In their section, “What Purposes Does Activity Theory Serve?,” Kain and Wardle provide some initial answers to this question, and the readings that follow by Wardle and Marro do similar work.

**Take-Home Points**

1. Activity systems are groups of people with shared goals who work together to “meet social needs.”
2. Activity theory is a lens for seeing the contexts, relationships, exigencies, and histories of a particular activity system.
3. Students who effectively apply this lens to activity systems can better understand how and why an activity system works the way it does, which in turn provides a useful means of thinking about the social context in which writing is operating.

Elizabeth Wardle

Identity, Authority, and Learning to Write in New Workplaces

**Summary**

Elizabeth Wardle candidly admits that she experienced conflicts in graduate school, and that these conflicts led her to conduct a study of a recent college graduate attempting to communicate in his new workplace. Wardle applies the framework of activity theory to look closely at this particular workplace — a university humanities department — and the interactions occurring there. She also considers sociologist Etienne Wenger’s ideas about modes of belonging, which describe three ways people attempt to belong to a group: engagement, imagination, and alignment. From there, she discusses how individuals gain authority and how this authority must be negotiated within particular communities.

Wardle’s study focuses on Alan, a computer specialist who alternately ignored or refused to participate in the writing conventions that others in his workplace deemed appropriate and necessary. Wardle’s study examines the complexities surrounding Alan’s employment and investigates how Alan’s
refusal to adopt the established discourse conventions resulted in his seeking another job elsewhere. The study also describes how Alan presented himself as a de facto authority in the workplace without proving to others that he was competent or that he had expert knowledge in his field. This experience demonstrates that having a degree or being considered an expert by others will not automatically gain an individual acceptance in a discourse community. Besides Alan’s attitude about his authority, Wardle investigates how Alan’s written communication demonstrated his resistance to discourse conventions. He lacked sensitivity to the discourse expectations of the audience he regularly corresponded with, sending e-mails that lacked the grammatical conventions of the community. This deficiency presented a problem for the members of the humanities department, who valued and used those conventions and saw them as “marks of insider status.”

Wardle’s article provides a useful and readable application of activity theory that helps students to see how these theoretical ideas can be used to consider how and why writing works the way it does in particular situations. Students enjoy following along with Alan’s story, and his experiences invite them to think about how they develop and maintain their own authority in writing (and if they’ve already read Johns, there are a number of useful connections to be made between that article and this one).

Take-Home Points

1. Issues of identity and authority play central roles in individuals’ abilities to join a new workplace.
2. New members of a community must be willing to learn the appropriate ways to write in and for the community they’re hoping to join.
3. In order for new members to be successful, they must be willing to negotiate communication strategies.

Victoria Marro

The Genres of Chi Omega: An Activity Analysis

Summary

Composition student Victoria Marro modeled the form of an academic journal article to present her analysis of how genres “further the goals” of her sorority, Chi Omega. Using the work of established composition researchers for support, she introduces her sorority as a discourse community and then an activity system, defines what a genre is and how it works, and connects her particular kind of analysis to similar research in the field. She creates her own research space by distinguishing it from other research on sororities. The methods section of her article explains whom she interviewed and how she collected twenty different genres, as well as what activity systems are and how they work. The figures in her article illustrate generally and then specifically the
use of genres by Chi Omega — both nationally and in her chapter. Each genre is named and its function explained. Different genres can “mediate the same goal for different chapters.” She identifies multiple smaller activity systems working inside larger ones, carefully documenting each one’s function and purpose, as well as how they exist to support the activity of the larger system. Her Results and Discussion section reveals that although different chapters do not use the same genres, because all chapters “share the same goals” — as set out in the sorority’s Mission Statement (a genre itself) — the organization’s 173 chapters are able to remain connected, which sustains and supports its members. Marro notes that this connection does not happen without maintenance, that maintenance must be learned, and that learning is a result of careful observation by the members as they are “becoming enculturated into [the] community.”

**Take-Home Points**

1. Genres function as tools within an activity system and can be used to further its goals.
2. Genres typically do not work in isolation but as part of larger genre systems.
3. Learning how the constituents of activity systems are connected can help novice members enculturate into the community.

**Supplemental Activities for Chapter 3**

**Outcome #1:**

**Understand How Language and Texts (Genres) Mediate Group Activities**

1. Ask students to bring in syllabi from other classes. Divide the class into small groups. Redistribute the syllabi so each group is working with two unfamiliar syllabi. Analyze the two syllabi for expectations and norms of the genre. How do we know these are syllabi? What do syllabi do? Write a brief analysis speculating on what their analysis reveals about the genre of syllabi.

2. Ask students to bring in syllabi from other classes. In small groups analyze how each syllabus mediates the class’s activities: How do you use this syllabus as a tool to participate and succeed in this activity system that is this class? (Do you need a laptop? Where will you sit? Do you need to enter due dates in your planner? Are you going to stay home Thursday night? Do you need to drop another class to succeed in this one?)

3. Ask students to list five genres they use most frequently. Then have students share their list with a partner and together pick at least four genres their lists have in common. For two genres, write a brief analysis of how they “get work done.” For two other genres, explain how they can obstruct or impede work when they are used unsuccessfully. Encourage
Supplemental Activities for Chapter 3

students to use examples from their experience to support their explanations.

4. Ask students to identify all the texts that “mediate” getting a driver’s license. Because the DMV only creates some of those texts (DMV handbook, the driver’s test, and your driver’s license), they must recognize some texts created by other institutions as having sufficient authority (Social Security cards, birth certificates, etc.). Why do they accept those texts? Who created those texts? How do these different texts legitimate the activity that is “getting a driver’s license”?

**Outcome #2:**

_Gain Tools for Examining the Discourse and Texts Used by Various Communities_

1. As a class, and using the activity triangle worksheet provided in the Kain and Wardle reading, analyze the writing class as an activity system. Work together to fill in each node of the triangle on the board (it might be helpful to have students brainstorm ideas individually). Then, break the class into six groups, one for each node (tools, motive, division of labor, community, rules, and subject). Ask each group to develop three to five questions for further discussion and investigation that arise when they consider their node in relation to any of the others (e.g., “How does this tool help the group achieve its short-term and long-term goals?” or “How does this rule maintain the division of labor?”). Finally, come back as a class to share these questions and brainstorm ideas for looking into them further.

2. Ask students to bring in three examples of genres used by a discourse community or activity system with which they’re familiar (any organization with a mission statement or a shared goal: e.g., religious, athletic, or workplace). In small groups, analyze how those genres advance the mission of the group. Consider, too, how the ways the genre gets used reflect distinction between insiders and outsiders of the community as well as between those with more or less experience.

3. Choose a discourse community your students are a member of, and ask them to write a short analysis of it based on Swales’s six characteristics (outlined in both Johns’s and Branick’s articles). Does their composition classroom meet Swales’s criteria for a discourse community? Why or why not?

4. Ask students to identify a time when they or someone they knew ignored the lexis or the texts in a particular situation and suffered the consequences — for example, not reading the Department of Motor Vehicles manual and failing the driving test. Write about the issues of identity or authority those in similar activity systems could be more aware of in the future.

5. After students read Johns’s “Discourse Communities and Communities of Practice: Membership, Conflict, and Diversity,” spend a class session testing some of her ideas about the conventions of academic writing (see pp. 320–339). Ask students to bring in an article written by a
professor who teaches in their major, or a major they’re considering if they’re still undeclared. (Be sure to spend some time before this session walking students through how to find such publications.) During class, have students work with a partner to consider how each of their texts does or does not follow Johns’s ten common practices of academic writing (depending on time, you might ask groups to focus on just three or four practices). Encourage students to compare their articles not only to what Johns has to say but also to each other’s articles. How does each article reflect the values and goals of the discourse community/activity system/discourse? Spend some time at the end of the meeting debriefing on what they found. Use this as an opportunity to discuss not only the practices, but Johns’s comments on each as well. If students have read the Villanueva piece from Chapter 2, this is a good opportunity to remind them of the value of what he calls “professorial discourse analysis” (p. 121).

**Outcome #3:**

**Gain Tools for Conducting Primary Research**

1. Ask students to identify a discourse community or activity system they are considering researching. Ask them to explore why the group interests them. What basic assumptions do they have about the group? How will they access the group in order to learn more about it? What do they hope to learn or gain from selecting this particular community/system? Do they have any particular research questions to ask of it?

2. Ask students to brainstorm television shows or movies that might reflect an activity system (shows like *Modern Family*, reality TV, or superhero movies can be good choices). Ask students to group around a TV show or movie with which they’re familiar. How exactly would they go about collecting the data to fill out the activity triangle worksheet included with the Kain and Wardle reading?

3. In class, develop interview questions a student might ask someone to learn more about a discourse community or activity system the interviewee is a part of. (If left to develop questions on their own, students often do not get the material they need to analyze their research.) Have students practice using these questions in small groups. In a large group, discuss how these questions will help them gain insight into the languages, practices, or attitudes of the group members. Brainstorm additional useful research methods, like collecting specific genres or observing the group at work.

4. Ask students to interview someone in their lives (a family member, friend, or relative will work fine) about the different discourse communities/activity systems/Discourses they participate in or interact with on a regular basis (or have in the past). Prior to these interviews, work together in class to develop ways to explain these concepts to someone not in the class and possible interview questions. After students have conducted these interviews, have them bring in their notes/recordings
and talk through what they found with a few classmates. What trends do they notice in their interviews? What’s most surprising or interesting? At the end of class, have students begin to write up some of their findings in a short narrative (as in Klass) that they can share with their peers, either online or during the following class.
Chapter Overview

Up to this point, Wardle and Downs have looked at how writing is not just something people do, but something people study; how writing and literacy practices are informed by prior experiences; and how people use texts and discourse in order to make meaning and mediate activity. The threshold concepts of Chapter 4 are writing helps people make meaning and get things done; “good” writing is dependent on writers, readers, situation, technology, and use; and, therefore, there are always constraints on writing. This chapter introduces rhetorical theory as a means to understand writing. Initially, the word rhetoric may cause students to pause, as most are unfamiliar with it (or, at least, they think they are). For many students, this will be the first time they consider the interaction that occurs between writers and readers, and the first time they purposefully select language for an intended audience. We are asking students to consider more than the inscriptions on a page. According to Wardle and Downs, we are teaching them that rhetoric is about understanding how texts come to actually do things in the world.

“Rhetoric” can mean a lot of things. The chapter introduction begins to develop readers’ understanding of what rhetoric is (and consequently what it means to consider rhetoric as a writer) by outlining seven fundamental rhetorical principles that run through the readings:

1. **Meaning depends on context.** This principle directs students to consider the context and situation for their writing. Students learn that good writing is not formulaic, but rather depends on reviewing the specific situation and the given context for their writing.

2. **Meaning is purposeful and motivated.** This principle asks students to think about what motivates a writer to respond to some situation or event through discourse.

3. **Readers and writers interact to make meaning.** According to Wardle and Downs, “Human interaction and communication don’t simply pass

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**Key Vocabulary for Chapter 4**

- Argument
- Constraints
- Contingent
- Ecology
- Epistemic
- Exigence
- Intertextuality
- Plagiarism
- Rhetor
- Rhetoric
- Rhetorical situation
- Rhetorical velocity
existing knowledge from place to place” (p. 452); instead, readers and writers and texts have particular interactions that create meaning.

4. **Readers and writers make new knowledge.** Students need to understand that as writers they will never be just “transmitting information,” because as they write, they are, in fact, making new knowledge.

5. **Rhetorical interaction is embodied and material.** This principle reminds students that rhetoric is the study of how meaning is made between real human beings, and that how those individuals create meaning is influenced by their situations in time and space. (This idea might seem a little murky at first, but in this chapter Downs, Corder, and Jones and Wheeler all provide useful discussion of rhetoric as embodied and its impact on the construction of meaning.)

6. **Rhetoric is shaped by technology.** Communication is shaped by the tools (including writing itself) used to accomplish it, so any meaningful consideration of rhetorical meaning must take into account “the technologies with which we compose, inscribe, and share it” (p. 454).

7. **“Good” writing and communication are contingent on situation, not universal.** This is an idea that students see again and again throughout *Writing about Writing*. There is no one “right” way to communicate for every situation. By encouraging students to think rhetorically, however, this chapter helps them to consider how they might better understand what affects the understanding of “good” in a particular situation.

These are big ideas, and Wardle and Downs note that this chapter (and, indeed, likely your entire class) represents only the beginning of students’ understanding of these principles. Students sometimes struggle with rhetoric because it resists easy definitions or simple frameworks applicable to every situation. Identifying artistic proofs (ethos, logos, and pathos) in an argument might help students to understand how communicators take advantage of the available means of persuasion. Looking at a rhetorical triangle linking writer, audience, and context might help students to remember that communication is always transactional. But the truth is that communication and the making of meaning (so, *rhetoric*) are messy. Rather than presenting your students with a pat way of identifying the parts of a rhetorical situation, this chapter starts a conversation about a wide variety of ways that meaning is made. It might initially seem somewhat more theoretical than other chapters in *Writing about Writing*, but if you can help your students to see how the concepts introduced in the different readings build off of each other, they’ll begin to understand some of the messiness — and opportunity — of communication for themselves.

When students understand how and why these principles work, they begin to create essays that have the ability to persuade and influence others. They understand as writers that they have choices, and these choices can successfully contribute to a difference in the world. The concepts in this chapter are ones that you will incorporate over and over as you teach this book. For this reason, consider assigning some of Chapter 4’s readings in conjunction with those in other chapters. The syllabi at the beginning of the Instructor’s Manual suggest how to incorporate some of the readings in this chapter as you teach...
other threshold concepts in the text. However, if you decide to teach Chapter 4 in its entirety, the framework follows here.

**Key Student Outcomes for Chapter 4**

1. **Understand the concept of rhetorical situation (and ecology) and be able to apply it to reading and writing situations**
   Most first-year students (in our experience) have not thought about how a given situation influences the words they decide to use in a text. They have yet to consider that writing is situated in time and space and that the situation will influence the language they use. Because many students have written prior assignments for a teacher, the idea that language used to persuade one type of reader may not have the same effect on another is a new concept for them to grasp. Our goal is to help students understand that “good writing and communication are contingent.” When this happens, students see how writing can be a powerful means of communication that they can adapt to their needs and goals. Understanding how the different components of a rhetorical ecology come together to shape how writing can and does make knowledge should help students to make better-informed decisions as writers.

2. **Understand how writers construct texts persuasively (or not)**
   As well as understanding that writing is situated, students need to consider that writing is purposeful and motivated. When students realize that human interaction is “always motivated by particular purposes, needs, and values,” they discover that there is no such thing as a truly objective text (p. 451). Our goal is to help students see that writers choose to respond to situations through communication (and writing, in particular) because of deliberate motivations, and understanding those motivations can help us understand why a text looks and reads the way it does.

3. **Understand how readers construct meaning from texts**
   Many times when students are asked to read a text, they look only for the writer’s literal intentions. Yet the act of reading as described by Christina Hass and Linda Flower suggests that the varying experiences of readers result in the different meanings they construct from a text. Students need to recognize that as readers, they help create meaning in a given text and, at the same time, that their interpretation of a text is not the only possibility. Readers interpret texts differently because of their different experiences and cognitive frameworks. Our goal is to help students recognize that interpreting a text involves more than just divining the writer’s intended meaning, and it involves more than one reader’s interpretation.

4. **Understand what it means to say that knowledge is constructed**
   According to Wardle and Downs, writers and readers of texts interact “to construct meaning and knowledge from them” (p. 452). Students often assume that the text itself “pass[es] existing knowledge from place to place” (p. 452). Yet, as students interact and respond to a text, new knowledge is being constructed because of specific rhetorical activities,
and rhetoric itself is the study of how humans create meaning in these situations. Our goal is to challenge the assumptions students have about how new knowledge is built.

Readings That Teach to Key Student Outcomes for Chapter 4

Outcome #1: Understand the Concept of Rhetorical Situation (and Ecology) and Be Able to Apply It to Reading and Writing Situations

- Doug Downs *Rhetoric: Making Sense of Human Interaction and Meaning-Making*
- Keith Grant-Davie *Rhetorical Situations and Their Constituents*
- Christina Haas and Linda Flower *Rhetorical Reading Strategies and the Construction of Meaning*

Outcome #2: Understand How Writers Construct Texts Persuasively (or Not)

- Doug Downs *Rhetoric: Making Sense of Human Interaction and Meaning-Making*
- Keith Grant-Davie *Rhetorical Situations and Their Constituents*
- James E. Porter *Intertextuality and the Discourse Community*
- Christina Haas and Linda Flower *Rhetorical Reading Strategies and the Construction of Meaning*
- Margaret Kantz *Helping Students Use Textual Sources Persuasively*
- Jim Ridolfo and Dânielle Nicole DeVoss *Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery*

Outcome #3: Understand How Readers Construct Meaning from Texts

- Doug Downs *Rhetoric: Making Sense of Human Interaction and Meaning-Making*
- James E. Porter *Intertextuality and the Discourse Community*
- Christina Haas and Linda Flower *Rhetorical Reading Strategies and the Construction of Meaning*
- Margaret Kantz *Helping Students Use Textual Sources Persuasively*
- Natasha N. Jones and Stephanie K. Wheeler *Document Design and Social Justice: A Universal Design for Documents*
- Komysha Hassan *Digital Literacy and the Making of Meaning: How Format Affects Interpretation in the University of Central Florida Libraries Search Interface*

Outcome #4: Understand What it Means to Say That Knowledge Is Constructed

- Doug Downs *Rhetoric: Making Sense of Human Interaction and Meaning-Making*
- James E. Porter *Intertextuality and the Discourse Community*
**Chapter 4 • Rhetoric**

- **Christina Haas** and **Linda Flower** *Rhetorical Reading Strategies and the Construction of Meaning*
- **Margaret Kantz** *Helping Students Use Textual Sources Persuasively*
- **Jim W. Corder** *Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love*
- **Dennis Baron** *From Pencils to Pixels: The Stages of Literacy Technologies*

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### Summaries and Take-Home Points

**Doug Downs**

**Rhetoric: Making Sense of Human Interaction and Meaning-Making**

**Summary**

Written by one of *Writing about Writing*’s editors, this primer on rhetoric quickly distills a lot of information — new terms and definitions, tools for analyses, and possible applications. It is, however, written with a student audience in mind, making it a valuable place to begin an exploration of rhetoric in your class and an article that students should find themselves referring to again and again as they continue reading other selections in this chapter. Downs’s discussion early on works to situate rhetoric as “an operating system for human meaning-making and interaction” (p. 460), meaning the interpretation of signals (and the study of that interpretation). This broad understanding allows Downs to both argue for the value of attending to rhetoric as a means of understanding problems and questions one might encounter in writing (picking up some of the ideas from this chapter’s introduction) and to contextualize some of the particular frameworks for thinking about rhetoric with which students might be familiar — the Aristotelian appeals, rhetorical situation — within the larger theory.

The section “A Rhetorical Guide to Human Interaction” comprises much of this article. Here, Downs illustrates what he refers to as some key rhetorical principles — motivation, ecology, knowledge making, identification, and the five canons — through an extended example involving a team of grant writers. This section is loaded with what will be for students new terminology (as well as familiar terminology being used in new ways), but Downs is careful to define his terms and then follow through with a clear connection to the example. In explaining a rhetorical ecology, for instance, Downs first defines the term (“a place defined by a network of myriad interconnecting and almost inseparable elements that all shape the rhetorical interaction and meaning that emerges from them”) and then introduces several typical elements of a rhetorical ecology: rhetors acting in different capacities, different kinds of readers, machines and tools, environmental conditions, exigence, and *kairos* (p. 467). This discussion of each element is accompanied by a paragraph in which Downs identifies specific instances of each in the grant writing example.

Students might at first be put off by the amount of new terminology and concepts they encounter in this selection. If they keep reading, however, they’ll
find that Downs has introduced a way of thinking about rhetoric that is both practical — thinking carefully about these issues enables writers to find the best course of action in varying situations — and expandable: later readings in this chapter, such as those by Grant-Davie and Porter, can be layered atop the foundational understanding Downs sketches out here. In our experience, students too often see the elements of rhetorical situations as discrete and disconnected, and too seldom see the value of thinking about rhetoric beyond writing a rhetorical analysis. Downs's piece should challenge them to consider how rhetoric surrounds them and how thinking about rhetoric can help them become more successful communicators and writers.

**Take-Home Points**

1. Rhetoric refers both to the principles by which individuals interact and make meaning as well as the use of those principles.
2. A rhetorical ecology is a framework for thinking about how particular rhetorical interactions are motivated and situated within a network of interconnected elements that shape the interaction and how meaning arises from it.
3. To say that something is rhetorical means that it is situated, motivated, contingent, interactional, epistemic, and embodied.

**Keith Grant-Davie**

**Rhetorical Situations and Their Constituents**

**Summary**

This reading explains how examining a text’s rhetorical situation benefits our reading and writing. It contains extended discussion of the concepts of exigence, rhetor, audience, and constraints, including how each of these elements can and are often plural in any given situation.

Students initially complain that this reading is difficult to understand; however, this article is certainly one that students can understand, in our experience, and often refer to over and over again as the semester progresses. Its discussion of rhetorical analysis as a tool for writing and reading has been empowering for many of our students. Once they understand rhetorical analysis as a means for making writing choices, students’ attitudes toward their writing assignments often shift. Suddenly, students are active participants in choosing the structure and direction of their own work; they claim authority for their work. As students begin to own their rhetorical choices, their writing improves and the likelihood that they will leave your class with specific, transferable tools increases.

As an added help, this is one of the tagged readings, which offers extra reading support and guidance on reading the academic genre to understand the argument and rhetorical moves Grant-Davie makes.
Take-Home Points

1. A rhetorical situation exists every time language is used to communicate a message.
2. Readers who understand a text’s rhetorical situation will likely get more out of what they read.
3. Understanding rhetorical situations helps writers make informed decisions about constructing texts in light of their contexts.

Jim Ridolfo and Dânielle Nicole DeVoss

Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery

Summary

This piece (originally published online in the journal Kairos) is written as a series of press releases. Students might initially be taken aback by this unconventional form, but given Ridolfo and DeVoss’s focus on the circulation and recirculation of text, it makes sense. The key concept here is what the authors call “rhetorical velocity,” which they define as “a conscious rhetorical concern for distance, travel, speed, and time, pertaining specifically to theorizing instances of strategic appropriation by a third party” (p. 515). In other words, they’re considering how texts — especially in the digital age — get taken up, manipulated, and repurposed by rhetors other than the original author, as well as how rhetors might design with that sort of reappropriation in mind. And, like Porter later in this chapter, these authors are questioning the notion of “authorship” as it’s traditionally conceived, taking issue with the romantic image of the lone writer waiting to be inspired.

Several sections following the introduction look at and develop the notion of rhetorical velocity through contemporary discussions of remix in digital spaces, the history of rhetoric (specifically, delivery), recent rhetoric and composition research, and current events. Students might struggle with some of the references to the literature and history of rhetoric, but this material does help to situate rhetorical velocity within broader rhetorical theory. Teachers and students alike might hone in on the last two sections. The first outlines the concept of rhetorical velocity, provides a specific example, and suggests questions rhetors might pose when designing a text with its velocity in mind. The next argues why teachers should care about velocity and presents ideas for getting students to engage with this concept.

Like most of the readings in this chapter, this article invites discussion of the rhetorical concepts being presented as well as application of these ideas. Combined with other tools for thinking about and analyzing rhetoric (Downs’s discussion of rhetorical ecology, Grant-Davie’s rhetorical situation, or Porter’s take on intertext), rhetorical velocity provides a powerful, unexpected way to help students consider how texts move and prompt action. The focus on texts
that get recomposed/remixed pushes against popular conceptions of plagiarism and authorship that students bring into the classroom. Moreover, Ridolfo and DeVoss’s examples encourage the consideration of texts that might otherwise get overlooked, yet still do important work in the world.

**Take-Home Points**

1. Texts are not only composed by individual authors for one particular audience, but they can also be shared, recomposed, remixed, and otherwise manipulated by additional rhetors for new audiences and purposes.
2. Rhetorical velocity is a set of principles for composing for rhetorical delivery that emphasizes both the ways a text might get appropriated and how to accommodate successful appropriation.
3. The digital age has prompted revisions to how we might conceive “delivery.”

**Christina Haas and Linda Flower**

**Rhetorical Reading Strategies and the Construction of Meaning**

**Summary**

Haas and Flower’s research was conducted in order to extend and refine the “constructive, rhetorical view of reading . . . by raising two questions. The first is, how does this constructive process play itself out in the actual, thinking process of reading? And the second is, are all readers really aware of or in control of the discourse act which current theories describe?” (p. 561). In their article, the authors identify rhetorical reading strategies that clearly show the difference between superficial reading and critical reading. In fact, Haas and Flower designate an entire section to answering, “What is ‘Good Reading’?” — and they provide explicit strategies for the construction of meaning.

Many students do not know what is expected when they are asked to “read critically” for class, and that is where the unexpected bonus of this article surfaces. Discussing those strategies in class gives students the vocabulary to explore their reading processes. The investigation the authors call the “think-aloud” protocol is an exercise you can do with your students to help them assess their own reading abilities. There’s a small epiphany for all of your students when they literally “hear what they think.” Students learn that readers do not universally pay attention to the same things when they attempt to interpret a text.

**Take-Home Points**

1. What a text “means” varies with the reader and their reading strategies and experiences.
2. Reading rhetorically means identifying a text’s rhetorical situation and considering how it has impacted the text’s construction.

3. Expert readers don’t only read for what a text says; they also read for how a text fits into what they already know.

Margaret Kantz

Helping Students Use Textual Sources Persuasively

Summary

Margaret Kantz’s article discusses how we write a new text from existing texts and what it means to synthesize sources and create an original argument. For her article, Kantz studied how college writers understand and use the texts they integrate into their writing. Her main example is Shirley, a composite student derived from Kantz’s research and teaching, who has difficulty knowing what to do with the sources she has collected that must be used in a history paper.

The problems Shirley encounters are the same ones your students may have experienced when asked to write a researched essay, including being dismayed at how much time it takes to create an original argument. Kantz suggests that teaching students like Shirley to read rhetorically in order to look for “rhetorical gaps” between reader, writer, and subject will give them something original to write about.

If your students have had difficulties gathering and interpreting sources, Kantz’s case study of Shirley will reassure them that new strategies and solutions are available. They may find the account of Shirley’s college writing experience disconcerting, especially if their high school writing experiences earned them high grades — or if they assume their academic major will require no shift in their current practice. Allowing them to share their experience writing with sources will help you impart the necessity of analysis and synthesis as part of a skilled writer’s repertoire.

Take-Home Points

1. Reading (merely) for information and then writing to report it is not writing persuasively.

2. Reading rhetorically in order to reveal the “gaps” between reader, writer, and subject can provide a path to making original claims.

3. Writing about new things (source information) in new ways (rhetorically) requires multiple drafts.
James E. Porter

Intertextuality and the Discourse Community

Summary

Porter argues that all texts are connected to other texts. His classically academic essay is fully aware of its audience: writing teachers. It begins with a metaphorical analysis of Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* to frame his definition of a text as something that comes from the “sources and social contexts from which the writer’s discourse arises” (p. 544). He contends that all “new” texts that writers create are drawn from, shaped by, and constrained by those sources and contexts.

Porter uses critical theorists like Barthes, Derrida, Bloom, Foucault, and Bartholomae, among others, to situate his claim. But his support for that claim ranges from familiar narrative openings like “Once upon a time,” to a Pepsi commercial infused with images from a Spielberg film, and finally to the Declaration of Independence. Porter refers to Thomas Jefferson as a “community writer,” so influenced and aided was he by previous documents like the Magna Carta, the social contexts of the Enlightenment, and his unparalleled discourse community.

We are, Porter says, “locked into a cultural matrix,” and a writer merely moves the parts or “fragments” around to “redefine the matrix” (p. 550). He decries “writing as individual, as isolated, as heroic” (p. 553) and claims that “our immediate goal” is to produce “‘socialized writers,’ ” who learn to appropriate the conventions and discourse of the community (p. 552). He sees a problem with current composition pedagogy because it “romanticize[s]” the individuality of the writer — as evidenced by composition readers filled with essays by Didion, Trillin, and Russell Baker — rather than recognizing the role of writer as a member of a discourse community. We should, Porter suggests, “immerse” students in the conventions of those communities (p. 553). To that end, he briefly discusses how this immersion process, which must necessarily recognize the value of imitation, may complicate our current definition of plagiarism.

This reading can be applied to either how writers construct a text or how readers construct texts. It makes an excellent bridge between the two concepts.

Take-Home Points

1. All texts emerge from the forms, ideas, and contexts of earlier texts.
2. Texts are not original and autonomous, but always constrained and informed by the traditions, forms, and content of discourse communities and their texts.
3. Student writers, like all writers, learn the conventions of various discourse communities by imitating their traditions and forms.
Jim W. Corder

Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love

Summary

This article picks up some of the discussions around and reinterpretations of argument begun in Chapter 1. Corder explores how we might conceive of argument if we choose not to see it as either antagonistic (i.e., focused on “winning”) or as a reasonable debate between rational individuals willing to calmly hear each other out. Instead, Corder considers the sorts of arguments that get heated and emotional, in which an individual’s very sense of being is at stake. He gets here by first acknowledging that “we make the fictions that are our lives” (p. 602): in other words, each individual is their own narrative, and every argument is a clash of contending narratives (this discussion expands on Downs’s discussion of narratives earlier in the chapter). This leads Corder to state, “Evidence and reason are evidence and reason only if one lives in the narrative that creates and regards them” (p. 608). After spending much of the article trying to examine and describe arguments, the final few pages present Corder’s ideas for how this understanding of argument might lead toward new paths of resolving disputes. “If there is to be hope,” he writes, “we have to see each other, to know each other, to be present to each other, to embrace each other” (p. 608). In recognizing arguments and individuals as narratives, Corder hopes we can come to see the value in taking the time to “emerge” toward each other when facing a dispute.

Students should find Corder’s approach in this article appealing. Like Murray in “All Writing Is Autobiography” in Chapter 2, Corder weaves personal anecdotes and reflections throughout his discussion, and the subject matter is relatable—after all, who hasn’t been in an argument at some point? Unlike some of the other selections in this chapter, Corder’s article does not present a particular framework for further analysis that students can immediately put to use. Instead, we think this essay is valuable for how it pushes against mainstream conceptions of argument and academic discourse and invites students to consider another application of rhetoric; that is, taking the time to understand another’s position and how they’re making meaning can lead to opportunities for further learning and, maybe, a more peaceful, successful resolution to arguments.

Take-Home Points

1. Individuals create the narratives of their own lives and experiences.
2. Arguments arise when contending narratives meet.
3. Arguments are opportunities to be open to other narratives and learn, but it takes time and the ability to listen.
Impression Management on Facebook and Twitter: Where Are People More Likely to Share Positivity and Negativity with Their Audiences?

*Summary*

This student-authored article presents research into how individuals shape their social media posting habits to match their expectations of the given platform. Combining survey and interview data, Sigona finds that her participants (fellow first-year college students) were more likely to post about negative events on Twitter and positive ones on Facebook. She concludes, then, that users of these sites are indeed keenly aware of their audiences and accordingly manage the impression they create through posting. Students should find this subject relatable and Sigona’s research both interesting and readable. Her research provides an example through which students might consider some of the concepts introduced in this chapter. How are Facebook and Twitter different rhetorical ecologies, and how might that lead to Sigona’s findings? How are these platforms intertextual? How does rhetorical velocity come into play? Sigona’s discussion of social media and audience prompts discussions like these, providing a useful opportunity to test the rhetorical theories students are encountering in their work in this chapter.

*Take-Home Points*

1. Different social media platforms structure different relationships between users and their audiences.
2. Users adapt their postings in order to shape the impression they make, with different audiences in mind.

Dennis Baron

From Pencils to Pixels: The Stages of Literacy Technologies

*Summary*

Baron—a professor, writer, and author of the blog *The Web of Language*—considers the history of writing as a series of “technologies” in order to make sense of how computer technology will affect literacy practices. Baron discusses writing itself as a technology, “a way of engineering materials in order to accomplish an end” (p. 634). All technologies, according to him, move through the same “stages” of development. From restricted use by a “priestly class,” the technology gains popular acceptance when it becomes associated with performing familiar tasks, and (as its cost drops) it becomes accessible to the masses—eventually finding a home in their lives and becoming “natural rather
than technological” (p. 651). To illustrate this, Baron uses the extended example of the history of the writing pencil. Despite the fact that he clearly delineates these “stages” of development, Baron believes that we can never predict the full effects of a new writing technology, such as our current writing technology — computers and the “pixels” of the essay’s title.

Baron offers a couple of fascinating asides: for example, in discussing writing’s ability in “bridging time and space” (p. 639), he notes that our original resistance to written documents centered on our inability to authenticate the written “word” of someone when they were not present to attest to the document’s legitimacy. The transitory nature of credibility and authenticity, from oral affirmation to written signatures, makes for an interesting class discussion. Two of the rhetorical principles at the center of this chapter are that rhetorical interaction is embodied and material, and that rhetoric is shaped by technology. Both of these points are vividly illustrated by Baron’s discussion.

**Take-Home Points**

1. Writing is a technology, an “engineering” means to an end.
2. The development of writing technologies follows predictable stages: limited functionality and restricted access by an elite class; adaptation to more mainstream functions and lower costs that make it available to the masses; and reshaping of the original technology by the masses to create “new forms” that often affect “earlier technologies” as well (p. 644).
3. New writing technologies can change our assumptions about literacy practices, our definitions of what it means to be literate, and the available means of making and interpreting meaning.

Natasha N. Jones and Stephanie K. Wheeler

**Document Design and Social Justice: A Universal Design for Documents**

**Summary**

Jones and Wheeler extend one of the recurring themes of *Writing about Writing* — writing is more than alphabetic inscription — by describing text creators as “writer-designers” rather than simply writers. This shift highlights the need for composers to consider design choices in addition to content ones. Their ideas also apply some of the ideas about audience and rhetorical ecologies introduced earlier in the chapter, demonstrating another way that thinking rhetorically give individuals a means of considering how texts act and are used.

The first half of the article reviews ideas about designing documents in light of both usability and accessibility. Jones and Wheeler contend, however, that these frameworks, while useful, are incomplete and imperfect. Design for usability, they argue, tends to focus writer-designers’ attention on serving an imagined “normate” (the composite of cultural assumptions about “normal”
Design for accessibility, on the other hand, leads writer-designers to filter their understanding of readers’ experiences (including disabled readers) through their own and often only “retrofit” a text to accommodate readers after the design is initially set. They also note that both frameworks place “an enormous amount of pressure on the author to make a document accessible and usable by accounting for every experience he or she can think of” (p. 662). Their solution is what they call Universal Design for Documents (UDD), a series of principles and questions arising from those principles that writer-designers can ask while beginning to create a document. These principles build out of Universal Design (UD), which is a framework for thinking about architectural design in light of accessibility for all users. Suggestions that come from UDD include “remove elements that are purely decorative” and “ensure that [a] document can be accessed using different types of assistive technologies,” both of which respond to the principle, “The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user’s sensory abilities” (p. 664; Table 1 is a particularly useful resource that outlines UDD principles and practices at a glance). The example Jones and Wheeler use as a model for applying UDD—a booklet about eviction laws created by the Public Justice Center—demonstrates what it might look like to analyze a document in light of these principles and practices.

Ultimately, Jones and Wheeler position UDD not as a checklist of practices, but rather a process of continuous, collaborative critique and responsive design that constitutes a form of activism. No set of generic design principles can accommodate every audience or every document, so this conception of UDD instead helps to encourage meaningful dialogue between writer-designers and their audiences early in the creation process.

**Take-Home Points**

1. Writers are also designers.
2. Usability and accessibility approaches to document design offer useful practices, but no set of guidelines can ensure every document meets the needs of every audience.
3. Working with Universal Design for Documents in mind means valuing inclusivity, diversity, and equality through continually critiquing documents and collaborating with audiences to ensure documents work well for as many readers as possible.
Komysha Hassan

Digital Literacy and the Making of Meaning: How Format Affects Interpretation in the University of Central Florida Libraries Search Interface

Summary

Like the preceding articles by Sigona, Baron, and Jones and Wheeler, Hassan’s research into how library search interfaces shape meaning provides students with another example of an application of the rhetorical principles outlined earlier in this chapter. She draws specifically on Grant-Davie’s articulation of the rhetorical situation concept, arguing that “understanding the rhetorical situation is critical in understanding how an interface functions to influence its user” (p. 681). Rather than simply highlight the constituents in this rhetorical situation, however, Hassan uses this framework to develop questions about how and why the interface works the way it does, and how that, in turn, affects users. Through a careful rhetorical analysis of the main UCF Libraries search page, Hassan finds that the interface draws users toward the keyword search rather than database searches, despite the databases typically yielding more accurate and focused results. In addition to serving as a model for how to put rhetorical theories into practice, Hassan’s article invites conversations about web design as well as effective research methods in students’ own libraries.

Take-Home Points

1. Search interfaces (in addition to web design more broadly) are rhetorical, drawing users to particular tools and features in lieu of others.
2. The way users interact with research tools shapes the knowledge they find and ultimately create with those tools.

Supplemental Activities for Chapter 4

Outcome #1: Understand the Concept of Rhetorical Situation (and Ecology) and Be Able to Apply It to Reading and Writing Situations

1. When the class discusses Grant-Davie’s essay, have students look at the rhetorical strategies of a presidential speech to determine its exigencies and identifiable constraints. Then have students identify the historical events or situations that might have influenced how the general public reacted to this speech.
2. Grant-Davie discusses rhetors, exigence, audience, and constraints. Ask students to think back to their last Thanksgiving holiday and identify the rhetorical components of that occasion. Who are the rhetors? Who is the audience? What constraints can students identify (both positive and negative)? What is the exigence?
3. Have students identify four different rhetorical situations or ecologies in their everyday life—for example, the express line at the grocery. After students have identified these everyday rhetorical situations, have them explore how they responded to each of these situations.

4. After reading one of the more theory-heavy selections in this chapter (Downs, Grant-Davie, or Porter would be good choices), ask students to pick a key term that interested them and define it in light of an example of their choosing. Then, have students share their definitions and examples in small groups. Have them compare the examples they chose with one another and those of the authors. Use this to initiate a discussion about what it means for rhetoric to be embodied and material.

**Outcome #2:**

**Understand How Writers Construct Texts Persuasively (or Not)**

1. Have students first write a letter to their parents giving reasons why they want and need to change their major. Then have students write a letter to the advisor in the department of their new major, requesting admission into the program. Have students share their letters with a partner and discuss which letter they believe is the most persuasive and why.

2. Ask students to bring to class two syllabi from other courses. Have them share their syllabi with one other classmate and determine each rhetor’s purpose. Ask students to consider whether the rhetoric shows a rhetorical awareness of the audience. How is each syllabus persuasive or not?

3. Have students examine a political cartoon or a past Super Bowl advertisement found on YouTube. In class, have students write a one-minute response identifying its rhetorical situation.

4. After reading Ridolfo and DeVoss, ask students to get into groups and locate a text online that incorporates a bit of repurposed text. Remember that “text” is defined broadly here to include not only alphabetic text, but also pictures, video, multimedia, and so on. Examples of texts that include repurposed text would be news articles built off of press releases, syllabi including boilerplate language, videos that remix parts of others, and so on. Then, ask students to see if they can find (a) the original text being repurposed into this new one, and/or (b) another text that repurposes the same material. What do they notice about how the repurposed text has been changed and adapted? Do the different rhetors’ purposes align, or not?

**Outcome #3:**

**Understand How Readers Construct Meaning from Texts**

1. Have students use the same political cartoon or advertisement they used in Outcome 2 (question 3), and ask them to write down their interpretation. Have them share their interpretations with one other person. How did their interpretations differ? Then discuss as a class. List all suggested interpretations on the board.

2. Have students list ten things that they value or believe in. For example, “I believe that the secondary education in our country needs improvement.” Ask students to create a list they don’t mind sharing with the class. After students have identified ten values or beliefs, ask them to
define how this list influences the way they read. In small groups, have students try and identify what they, as readers, bring to a text.

3. First, have students write about how they learned how to read. Then have students identify how this early life experience influences how they read and interpret their text Writing about Writing.

4. Have students apply Porter’s heuristic for conducting a forum analysis (see his Appendix on p. 555) to two websites: one they read often, and one they do not. Ask them to consider how their understanding of the texts on each site changes after investigating it further. Then, tell them to share a text from each site with a partner, first without discussing the forum analysis and then after. How do their perceptions of the texts change?

**Outcome #4:**

**Understand What It Means to Say That Knowledge Is Constructed**

1. Ask students why Porter’s ideas about the “intertextuality” of texts might be considered subversive or threatening. Discuss how Porter challenges our understanding of authorship and originality. Then have students write a definition of authorship now that they have gained new knowledge.

2. Show in class actor Joseph Gordon Levitt’s website hitrecord.org. Then ask students to write a definition of plagiarism based on the last time they encountered it (in any circumstance). Discuss the differences among the various definitions students come up with, and then ask students to revise their definition, based on the new knowledge that occurred during class discussions and their understanding of the work done on the Hit Record website.

3. Have students find and bring to class two articles from CNN, NPR, your local newspaper, or a similar news site that discuss the same current issue. Ask students to write about the similarities and differences the two writers exhibit about the same issue. Discuss how the different writing approaches and examples used in each article contribute to different meaning. Then have students briefly write or identify what “new” knowledge they would write about if they had to write on the subject.

4. After reading Baron, ask students to create two short narratives about a recent, interesting day in their lives. The first should be made in a medium with which they are comfortable — pen and paper, word processor on a computer, illustration, and so on. The second should be made in a medium with which they have little or no experience, the more creative the better: writing on clay, calligraphy pens, chalk, Etch a Sketch, for example. Spend some time in class brainstorming possibilities. After building their narratives, have students share them with the class. How did the medium of the narrative shape what they said, and how they said it? What does this tell them about the relationship between rhetoric and technology?
Chapter Overview

Now that the book has discussed why people study writing and what can be gained from that study, how individual literate histories shape writing practices, how texts are created and influenced by other people, and how texts construct meaning, the focus in this final chapter shifts to how people create texts. **The threshold concept of this chapter concentrates on the idea that writing is a process, all writers have more to learn, and writing is not perfectible.** In the introduction to Chapter 5, Wardle and Downs ask several good questions for students to consider as they think about their writing processes: “How well do you really understand how you get things written? How would you describe your writing process if asked to do so right now? Is what you think you do actually what you do?” (p. 706). Consider using these prompts in class as a way to get students to start thinking about their individual writing processes and how those processes vary as the contexts change.

Students have many misconceptions about what it means to be a writer. Many of them would argue that writers possess a natural-born talent, an ability to create words on a blank page with little to no effort. This chapter replaces those myths with useful, concrete ideas about how writers invent, plan, draft, revise, research, and collaborate. By studying what other writers actually do when they write, students can compare their strategies to those successful writers and modify their approaches as needed.

This chapter also helps students understand the cognitive, affective, and environmental aspects of writing. Some of the readings ask students to explore how they process ideas and then determine how they construct texts. Students will consider their writing environments and contemplate how lighting, music, or writing in a pressured situation (like a classroom or office environment) affects their ideas and ability to draft and compose. We find students are intrigued and engaged with studying writing as a process and are encouraged to learn they can develop skills to become stronger, more proficient writers.

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<th>Key Vocabulary for Chapter 5</th>
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<td>● Algorithm</td>
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<td>● Composition</td>
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Key Student Outcomes for Chapter 5

1. Actively consider your own writing processes and practices and shift them if you wish

Many students come into our classes claiming that they simply don’t have the talent to be “good” writers. They view their approaches to composing as fixed and irreversible. As students become aware that writing includes multiple steps, they more easily let go of their earlier assumptions that writing is either right or wrong. When students read about the explorations of writing researchers and published writers, they tend to be more willing to question their own habits and behaviors and get a better sense of how writing really works. This outcome asks students to deliberate about how, when, and where they write. Our goal is for students to see that if they are self-aware about the processes and practices of their own writing, they can become more skilled writers by making different choices when they compose.

2. Understand writing and research as processes requiring planning, incubation, revision, and collaboration

Academic writing is most often text based, and quite often research based. Much academic writing, then, is a process that entails both researching what others have said and collecting data to test one’s own hypotheses. This chapter encourages students to gather and analyze data to test their assumptions about writing. When students conduct procedures like the think-aloud protocol, they better understand the cognitive process that occurs in a writer’s head. Stacey Pigg studied Dave to investigate how communicating on and through social media helps create professional writing identities. Sondra Perl studied Tony in an attempt to identify and code specific behaviors unskilled writers perform when writing. Berkenkotter and Murray were part of an experiment that researched a writer’s environment when composing to determine how that environment affected the multiple processes writers go through when they write. Understanding what goes on in a writer’s head is problematic. No researcher will know exactly what’s going on in another writer’s mind. However, our goal is for students to become self-aware and mindful of the processes they engage in when they write.

Readings That Teach to Key Student Outcomes for Chapter 5

Outcome #1: Actively Consider Your Own Writing Processes and Practices and Shift Them If You Wish

- Stacey Pigg  Coordinating Constant Invention: Social Media’s Role in Distributed Work
- Anne Lamott  Shitty First Drafts
Summaries and Take-Home Points

Stacey Pigg

Coordinating Constant Invention: Social Media’s Role in Distributed Work

Summary

Pigg’s research vividly demonstrates two ideas central to Writing about Writing and this chapter, in particular: writing is intertextual, and writing processes are often more complex than they might initially seem. Connections can be drawn between this article and a few from Chapter 4 (Downs on rhetorical ecologies, Ridolfo and DeVoss on rhetorical velocity, Porter on intertextuality) as well as the others later in this chapter, making this a useful place to begin.

After reviewing research on distributed work and coordination as it pertains to writing, Pigg presents her investigation of the composing and inventing processes of Dave, a freelance writer working on a fatherhood blog. This research can broadly be divided into two strands. The first details Dave’s process over the course of an hour spent writing a particular blog post. Here, Pigg highlights how frequently Dave shifts between social media platforms (Twitter, e-mail, other blogs) and his own writing. The second strand puts some of the specific
practices noted in Dave’s process into context by considering the highly intertextual nature of his writing, considering how he has not only drafted this post, but also built a readership and professional trajectory for himself over time. Pigg concludes by noting the central role of social media in Dave’s writing, arguing, “Social media facilitate activities that are deeply important to invention: accessing or creating networks of relationships, building and maintaining a presence that can interact with them, and then leveraging them toward future action” (p. 728).

Students should appreciate Pigg’s valuing of social media both as part of the writing process and as a means for distributing, inspiring, and shaping one’s own work. Her description of her findings and account of Dave’s process, too, can serve as a potentially useful model for students’ own analyses of writing processes.

**Take-Home Points**

1. Writing involves not only composing but also coordinating resources (e.g., other texts, tools, and research) in order to invent texts and build/maintain audiences.
2. Successful writing on social media is not mindless, but rather requires authors to build, maintain, access, and understand relationships with various audiences.
3. Recording individuals in the act of writing (as opposed to only what they are writing) and their interactions with different tools and technologies can lead to insights about both cognitive and cultural influences on writing processes.

**Sondra Perl**

**The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers**

**Summary**

This article presents the results of a study Perl conducted to analyze what writers do while they compose, and it describes in detail a coding system she devised for doing so. Probably the most interesting aspect of this article is Perl’s decision to study “unskilled writers” to better understand how they write. One of the main subjects of her study is Tony, a twenty-year-old ex-Marine born and raised in the Bronx. Tony was able to speak Spanish but considered English to be his native language. Students tend to identify with Tony’s struggles with writing, often noting that they have some of the same problems he does (e.g., writing one thing and reading another). In part through studying Tony’s composing processes, Perl draws a now widely accepted conclusion: “composing does not occur in a straightforward, linear fashion” (p. 762).

Once students read Perl, they may begin to see that their writing process may also have been embedded and tangled, and they may begin to understand some reasons why their drafting and revising, up to this point, have not been as
successful as they might want. This article gives students specific problem areas to pay attention to when they do sit down to write.

Perl's research has at least three important implications for teaching and research. First, teachers' practice of labeling unskilled writers as deficient gives these students a defeatist attitude toward writing assignments (a claim that readers of Tejada Jr. et al. in Chapter 2 should find familiar). Second, the composing process can be codified and represented in a graphic mode. Third, there is a "preponderance of recursive behaviors in the composing processes" (p. 768).

**Take-Home Points**

1. The composing process consists of multiple activities that can be objectively identified and analyzed.
2. Evaluating composing processes helps students determine how they are spending their time and decide whether their "old" processes work for them.
3. Unskilled writers like Tony are not "stupid" or "lazy," but they have processes that they don't know how to untangle.

**Alcir Santos Neto**

**Tug of War: The Writing Process of a Bilingual Writer and His Struggles**

**Summary**

Neto's article brings together a number of concepts—as well as research methods—from both this chapter and Chapter 1 (readers who've read the selections by Cisneros or Tejada Jr. et al. might look to make further connections around how being multilingual shapes individuals' writing views and practices). Like Perl, Neto is interested in the processes writers use when composing text. As a bilingual writer, however, he is especially interested in how translating between Portuguese and English impacted his own processes. Neto's methods are careful, and he explains in detail how he employed the think-aloud method and coded his data. Ultimately, Neto concludes that he can reduce the impact of distractions on his writing, but he is surprised to discover what he calls the "tug of war" problem: those moments in his process where he is stymied by "untranslatable concepts," which are those phrases and ideas that contain nuance he cannot easily translate into English. While he does not identify a solution to this problem, he argues that the reflection prompted by his research does at least help him to understand his process and his writing that much more.

Neto's methods are largely based on those of Perl, so his research might inspire students to begin considering how they can build on the think-aloud protocol to investigate their own writing processes. Moreover, his work also demonstrates the extent of what can be discovered by closely attending to writing processes.
Take-Home Points

1. Thinking in multiple languages impacts writers’ processes.
2. Think-aloud protocols can be revised and adapted to help researchers investigate particular aspects of writing processes.
3. By understanding their writing processes, writers can begin to thoughtfully revise and adapt those processes to make them more effective.

Mike Rose

Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and the Stifling of Language: A Cognitivist Analysis of Writer’s Block

Summary

Previous readings in Chapter 2 focus on how writers compose; in this article, Rose concentrates instead on what blocks writers from composing. He claims that many writing problems arise from the rules imposed on student writing and suggests that these well-intentioned rules often serve as “blockers” that can prevent students from being able to solve their writing problems. He concludes by offering a discussion of how to recognize when a rule is ineffective and how to act on that knowledge.

This article provides another opportunity to discuss rules students have been forced to follow in the past without much understanding of how or why the rules will improve their texts. Rose incorporates case studies that illustrate many of the “rules” students have heard in the past, such as “always grab your audience.” Most students enjoy Rose’s article and feel empowered when they discuss how previous experiences could explain how or why they freeze when assigned a writing task. Like others in this chapter, this reading can be used to reinforce the notion that writers have choices, a recognition that should gradually change how students perceive and respond to writing for class.

Take-Home Points

1. Exploring the origins of particular rules and how those rules impact writing empowers students to abandon what does not make sense or what prevents them from writing well.
2. Defining what a good writer does (rather than what bad writers fail to do, or what they do badly) can help student writers become more proficient.
3. As writers compose, they need to navigate audiences, situations, and grammar conventions.
Joseph M. Williams

The Phenomenology of Error

Summary

Williams ponders the value his fellow teachers place on errors of grammar, usage, and mechanics, and in doing so illustrates one of the key threshold concepts of this chapter: Writing is not perfectible. He argues that the focus on error in writing is misplaced for two main reasons: (1) Unlike violations of “social behavior,” a grammatical error never leaves a physical mark on the reader, and yet we make the error a personal failing of the writer; and (2) our judgments about error are inconsistent and contradictory. For this second point he offers many examples: his own work as a consultant, as well as the writings of E. B. White, George Orwell, Jacques Barzun, and Henry Fowler, who all prescribe rules in one sentence and violate them in the next. Errors are what grammarians and teachers and handbooks say they are, but they often disagree. Williams makes the case that grammatical errors are a perfect example of a social construct. Williams claims that “if we read any text the way we read freshman essays” (p. 812), we will find grammar, usage, and mechanics errors mostly because we are looking for them. Still, we cannot agree about what we are looking for.

The middle of Williams’s essay discusses the four categorical positions readers take when they read, only one of which — reading for error — guarantees we will find said errors. He clarifies his position as a defender of substantive rules, but acknowledges that “grammatical correctness” may be more of a moving target than a standard for moral judgment. He further suggests we test the rules, not just meekly obey them. We could, Williams remarks, consider changing the way we grade, remembering that just because an error is named in a handbook doesn’t mean we have to mark it. To cement his claim, at the end of the essay he reveals his conceit — his essay is filled with “about 100 errors” (p. 819). He invites readers to identify how many of these they noticed “the first time through.”

Take-Home Points

1. Writing “errors” are socially constructed: We don’t all acknowledge or even respond to the same ones.
2. Our response to a writing error has a lot to do with what we were taught and why we are reading a text.
3. Recognizing the range and variety of acceptable and unacceptable usage and syntax will help students understand how all writing is rhetorically situated and that all readers read from their own worldview.
Michael Rodgers

Expanding Constraints

Summary

Rodgers uses this narrative to provide a reflective account of his writing processes and how he’s seen those processes develop over time. While the lack of specific data might at first make his article seem rather different than many of the others in this chapter, his insights are no less significant. Drawing on the notion of constraints introduced by Grant-Davie in Chapter 4, Rodgers tracks how critically thinking about his audience and his goals for writing have impacted what he’s written in different situations as well as how he felt about that writing. Students will likely relate to his discussion of feeling stuck in a forced, five-paragraph structure throughout most of his time in school. Later, after writing scholarship essays and beginning his first college writing class, Rodgers discovers that there could, in fact, be a place for his voice and creativity in his writing. He notes, “Writing not only answered certain questions, but also asked new ones. Writing didn’t have to be this set in stone, grocery list of a medium. I could talk” (p. 826). Rodgers’s experiences should prompt students to reflect on how the situations in which they have written have shaped their approach to the process of writing itself.

Take-Home Points

1. Writing rules can act as constraints that hinder both a writer’s process and content.
2. Writers’ processes are shaped by an understanding of the context in which readers will encounter the text.

Carol Berkenkotter

Decisions and Revisions: The Planning Strategies of a Publishing Writer

Donald M. Murray

Response of a Laboratory Rat — or, Being Protocoled

Summary

While these are separate articles, Murray’s piece responds to Berkenkotter’s, so it’s best to assign them together.
Berkenkotter’s research was designed to test the idea that researchers can study writing in a “laboratory” environment (as Perl did, and as Berkenkotter herself did in earlier research). She studies Murray, a “publishing” writer, in both a lab and a natural setting, and makes startling discoveries about his differing abilities in each—which in turn allows her to make important claims about how different environments can affect a writer’s processes.

Unlike Perl, who focuses on the unskilled writer Tony, Berkenkotter conducts research on the professional writer Donald Murray. She writes that she “wanted to learn more about the planning and revising strategies of a highly skilled and verbal writer, to discover how these strategies could be most usefully analyzed, and to determine how an understanding of this writer’s processes would contribute to what we have already discovered about how skilled writers plan and revise” (p. 834). Like Perl, Berkenkotter devised a code that examined Murray’s planning, evaluating, revising, and editing strategies. In analyzing her data, Berkenkotter, like Perl, concludes that the writing process is recursive. She also discovers that the setting and task can seriously impact the writer’s performance. For example, Murray was unable to write in a short time on an assigned topic—something that most students are required to do on a regular basis.

In his “Response,” Murray acknowledges that at first the “one-hour protocol was far worse than I had expected”—he felt “trapped” and “inadequate,” and hampered by a strong “need to perform” and a “desperate desire to please” (p. 846). Nevertheless, he claims that being asked to talk aloud for the researcher and reflect on his writing process was not awkward, since it was like “turning up the volume knob on the muttering I do under my breath as I write” (p. 847). In reflecting on the research process, Murray expresses surprise at the percentage of time he spent planning, which was more than he expected: He decides that what he had called revision in the past was essentially a special type of planning that Berkenkotter refers to as reconceiving. He further concludes with Berkenkotter that the writer’s surrounding conditions and environment do play a role in whether the writing task is achieved effectively.

The finding that seems to intrigue students most is how much time Murray spent planning and evaluating, rather than revising and editing. This awareness helps them understand that composing is more than the physical act of writing.

**Take-Home Points**

1. Many students confuse editing and revision. Reading Berkenkotter and Murray can help clarify the differences between these activities—and help students understand why those differences are important.
2. A writer’s environment and task significantly impact writing processes and the effectiveness of the final text.
3. Identifying problems that writers experience in the composing process can help them change their processes and learn to compose more effective texts.
Anne Lamott

**Shitty First Drafts**

*Summary*

Almost every student likes this article the minute they read the title, “Shitty First Drafts.” Lamott endears student writers by giving an honest account of her writing process, and this piece exemplifies and reinforces Chapter 5’s threshold concept that writing is an ongoing, recursive process that can change. She dispels the myth many students embrace and believe, which is that published writers possess a natural, gifted talent presented to them at birth. She claims holding on to this imagined vision, one in which a writer rolls up her sleeves and types out eloquent, well-formed passages at lightning speed is “just the fantasy of the uninitiated” (p. 853). She maintains that the “right words and sentences just do not come pouring out like ticker tape most of the time.” Lamott encourages writers to produce a first draft that should be thought of as a “child’s draft.” This draft is where a writer should let it all come out on the page. As an example, Lamott says, “If one of the characters wants to say, ‘Well, so what, Mr. Poopy Pants?’ you let her” (p. 854). Students relate to Lamott when she describes her experience in writing food reviews for *California* magazine (which she admits is now defunct). She explains the processes she engaged in to complete a published review, and nowhere did she report zipping out a polished draft at the first sitting. The real purpose for a first draft, Lamott claims, is an opportunity to “quiet the voices” that many writers experience in their head as they compose. She insists that the first draft is just a starting point, a place where the writer gets the ideas down on paper. It is not until the second or perhaps third draft, that many writers discover what they have to say. Lamott’s voice in this article is conversational and humorous, which appeals to students. She gives students a starting place for their writing processes and reassures them that the first draft is not, nor should it be, the polished, final draft. After reading Lamott, students begin to understand that writing is recursive, even for published and accomplished writers.

**Take-Home Points**

1. The right words rarely flow out and onto the paper, even for published, successful writers.
2. The first draft is a “child’s draft,” which is a starting point and gives the writer permission to get his or her ideas on paper.
3. It is fine and preferable to write a “shitty” first draft in order to create a space where the voices in a writer’s head are quieted and where invention can flourish.
Nancy Sommers

Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers

Summary

In this article, Nancy Sommers, who teaches and researches at Harvard, considers how students go about revising their work. Sommers’s basic research question is whether there are differences in how student writers talk about and implement revision as compared to how professional writers go about the process. This article is a response to, and ultimately a refutation of, the earlier linear models of writing and the earlier belief that writing is just like speech. Sommers claims that “this movement fails to take into account . . . is the recursive shaping of thought by language; what it fails to take into account is revision” (p. 860).

Unlike speech, Sommers claims, writing allows for the possibility of revision. Sommers conducted case studies on twenty freshmen at Boston University and the University of Oklahoma, as well as studied twenty experienced writers, journalists, editors, and academics from the same area. She interviewed each individual three times and identified four operations pertaining to revision: deletion, substitution, addition, and reordering. She also identified four levels of change: word, phrase, sentence, and theme. She found that student writers decidedly think “lexical changes are the major revision activities of the students because economy is their goal” (p. 863). Yet experienced writers engaging in revision “discovered meaning” in their text. Sommers confirms that student writers fail to see writing as a repeated process, a process where meaning is discovered at every stage.

Keep in mind as you read and discuss this article that the study was done over thirty-five years ago, and as Wardle and Downs point out in Framing the Reading, the composing Sommers observed did not happen on a word processor. There are contextual differences between how we write today and how we wrote then. Yet the article is still applicable because it suggests that revision is a recursive process, which we, as writers, should be aware of throughout the writing process.

Take-Home Points

1. Revision should be thought of as a recursive and ongoing process in which the writer makes changes to the text throughout the writing process.
2. Student writers are more concerned with lexical changes when they revise, because they just want to get the job done.
3. Experienced writers “discover meaning” as they revise.
Supplemental Activities for Chapter 5

Outcome #1: 
**Actively Consider Your Own Writing Processes and Practices and Shift Them If You Wish**

1. Have students list all the steps they perform when they write a paper for an academic class. Then have students write about which processes they consider the most difficult and why. Ask students to share their responses.

2. Have students re-create a hypothetical “log” of a high-stakes writing assignment from high school. (It could be a parody or a tragic commentary.) Once they learn the “vocabulary” of the writing process, ask them to rank order each process from most to least favorite. Share lists in small groups; discuss with the whole class why their lists are the way they are.

3. In small groups, have students discuss the process of revision and editing. How are they frequently seen as one process? Why should they consider viewing them as processes that meet separate goals for the writer? Have the small groups share their findings with the group at large.

4. Ask students to draw a picture of their favorite writing environment on one side of a piece of paper, followed by a brief reflection on the drawing, so others can understand why it’s their favorite. What about it is so good? How does it improve their writing process? Have students trade drawings with at least two other students, each one writing on the back a comment that responds to the drawing.

5. In class, have students spend time collaborating in groups to devise means of revising the think-aloud method used by Perl, Berkenkotter, and Neto in order to meaningfully investigate their own processes. Start by leading the class through a discussion of the problems Perl wanted to respond to that led her to devise this method, and then how and why both Berkenkotter and Neto revised those methods to suit their own needs. Then, help students work backward from the questions about their own writing processes that they are interested in to develop some possible methods for researching those questions. Alternatively, you might ask students to revise these methods in light of another reading from this chapter (e.g., how they can use a form of think-aloud to extend Pigg’s research into how writers coordinate tools and resources throughout the writing process) or another in *Writing about Writing* (e.g., how their writing processes change depending on the rhetorical ecology they’re writing in).

Outcome #2: 
**Understand Writing and Research as Processes Requiring Planning, Incubation, Revision, and Collaboration**

1. Have students try the “talk-aloud” protocol for a short writing assignment, recording their process using either video or audio and then transcribing it. Ask students to bring their transcriptions to class and discuss
what they have observed and what they might want to change about their writing.

2. Have students imagine a conversation between Perl and Berkenkotter on their research. What would these two researchers discuss about the problems that exist in their methods? What contributions might each feel she is making about planning and revision?

3. Have students describe a typical writing process in a prior class. Then have them write about what changes they made in writing an essay for this class or what changes they will make in future writing endeavors because of the readings in this chapter.

4. After they read Pigg’s article, send your students out to collect some research of their own by going to a public place where people are writing (a coffee shop, the library, a campus hangout) and recording what they see for thirty minutes. What kinds of technologies are people using to write? How often are they switching between tools? Are there signs of active collaboration? What sorts of activity do they think a researcher like Pigg would be interested in noting, and what questions might be worth investigating further?
Writing Assignments in *Writing about Writing*

Take advantage of the Major Writing Assignment options at the end of every chapter. Each assignment builds on one or more of the readings from the chapter and is designed to help students achieve the goals outlined in the chapter introduction.

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