

# Processes

## *Writing Across Academic Careers*

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# Introduction

## CHRISTOPHER IVERSON

There is no such thing as writing in general. Do you doubt this claim? Test it out. Go to your desk right now and attempt to write something in general. Do not write for any specific audience, purpose, or context. Do not use any conventions that you've learned for school, work, creative writing, and so on. Just write in general.

You can't do it, because it can't be done. There is no such thing as writing in general. Writing is always in particular.

– Elizabeth Wardle, *Bad Ideas About Writing*

## Welcome to *Processes*

This introduction serves as a greeting space, where I define terms and provide background into the educational movements Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID) and the history of those movements at Farmingdale State College. We do not pretend to offer a definitive history of WAC/WID or determine how it should run on any campus other than ours. We *do* hope to inspire others to not only nurture a strong WAC/WID presence on their campus, but also to share that experience with others so that we can all contribute to an ever-larger community of academic writers. We designed this book to communicate how writing sticks with us throughout our careers and lifetimes.

Some readers may not be familiar with WAC/WID and the terminology that goes along with it. The trouble is, WAC/WID efforts resist definition because they form locally in response to the needs of the campuses they support. On top of that, WAC differs from WID in subtle but key ways, which further complicates quick and easy definitions. In fact, when I think of WAC/WID, I think more about what they do as opposed to what they are.

And this thinking is not without reason. A website run by Colorado State University called the WAC Clearinghouse defines WAC this way:

In its simplest form, Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) *recognizes and supports*<sup>1</sup> the

1. My italics

use of writing in any and every way and in every and any course offered at a learning institution. A WAC Program in its simplest term is any organized, recognized, and sustained effort—no matter how modest in people, resources, and funding—to help faculty in any and every course use writing more deliberately and more often. (“What Is a WAC Program?”)

Note my italics draw attention to verbs rather than to nouns. WAC Clearinghouse presents this definition directly beneath the title of the web page: “What Is a WAC Program?” The writers *do* move on to provide a noun-based definition, but not without first discussing the work of WAC, which, given the diversity of ways WAC/WID can form in response to the needs of a campus, makes a lot of sense.

The WAC Clearinghouse also provides some detail on WID programs, couching WID within WAC as a more field or genre-focused version of Writing Across the Curriculum:

Writing in the Disciplines (WiD) focuses WAC on the design and teaching of writing assignments that ask students to write in the specific genres of a discipline. These often call for projects that ask students to communicate professionally with audiences appropriate to the assignment: members of a discipline who read journals in the field, corporate clients who may require a white paper, city planners who might require a flood mitigation proposal, to name just three examples. WiD assignments are usually ones where in final drafts students will often need to meet the conventions and standards of a discipline and/or the genre. (“What Is A WAC Program?”)

It proves difficult to nail down a definition of WAC/WID because even the form of a WAC/WID effort depends on the institution. I’ve worked in WAC offices led by directors, and I currently serve on a WID Committee, led by a chair. So rather than attempt the impossible—or at the very least reductive—task of defining WAC/WID in some overarching way, I will provide a short history of WAC/WID in the U.S. followed by a history of both WAC and WID at Farmingdale State College to show that although these efforts have historically focused on writing, they also provide exciting opportunities to bring students and scholars together around the common but not uniform concern of writing. WAC/WID can help us build communities on campuses.

## History of and Community in WAC/WID

WAC/WID do not have concrete beginnings because they represent a gradual shift in attitudes toward writing from “writing is a discreet skill/memory tool” to “writing is a process dependent



on context and subject.” Therefore, it proves difficult to pin down one origin. David Russell, professor emeritus at Iowa State University, who has published widely on WAC/WID, claims WAC/WID ideology began in the 1870s, when American academic discourse shifted from a largely oral mode to a written one (*Writing in the Academic Disciplines* 3). According to Russell, before the 1870s, writing was ancillary to speaking in the professions which college graduates prepared for—like law, politics, or the clergy—and writing represented a simple tool to aid memory (4). But this is a conception of writing that I find difficult to adopt. I challenge anyone to compare a speech read from the page and one recalled—however imperfectly—from memory and then expound on writing’s value as a memory aid for public speaking.

Further complicating the origin of WAC/WID is the fact that, today, instructors do not deal with the thing they called “writing” in the 1870s. Bazerman, Little, Bethel, Chavkin, Fouquette, and Garfus complicate any simple conceptions of the origins of WAC/WID by noting this shift and connecting it to writing study. They acknowledge the changes in writing pedagogy that happened in the 1870s and add that the number of students enrolled in American universities nearly doubled when education expanded from training for law or the clergy to training for employment (17). In the late 1800s, writing proved visible and permanent “evidence” of how the colleges were doing.

In fact, the aspect of writing instruction that has changed most dramatically since the 1870s is likely the demographic makeup of the student body. This shift continued in the 1960s and ’70s in the United States, when more working-class students, women, and people of color were permitted to pursue education (21), and the older ways of writing to and for well-off white Christian men no longer served students, many of whom were not well-off, white, Christian men.

By the 1930s, writing instructors knew they needed to think explicitly about their work because the findings from a study that examined student writing at the beginning and end of their writing courses were disappointing. For example, at the 1931 National Council of Teachers of English conference, Alvin C. Eurich, a professor of English at the University of Minnesota, shared findings from a study he conducted on his campus, which showed that first-year writing courses had little positive impact on students’ writing after one semester. Eurich argued for scrutiny into the teaching of writing, which could represent the origins of WAC/WID (Bazerman et al. 18).

Eurich’s study and the critical examination into student writing that followed mark one of many such studies, published and unpublished. Assessment of writing on a large scale happens regularly in writing programs. For instance, FSC’s English and Humanities Department conducts assessments of student writing regularly, as do many first-year writing programs. As a result of this continued scrutiny, many writing scholars today know they must approach writing *as it operates* rather than prescribing uses for it. We now accept that writing operates as the mode of communication rather than a supplement to oral speech. Some writers never intend for their work

to be read aloud, and many students even resist the advice to read their work aloud in revision, likely because for these projects, writing *is the mode* of communication, and the writers plan on communicating in that mode, which influences rhetorical choices along the way.

As noted above, WAC/WID are movements in academia rather than organizations with centralized authorities and prescriptive lists of practices and strategies. Traditionally, Writing Across the Curriculum is associated with a “writing to learn” mentality, while Writing in the Disciplines espouses a “learning to write” mentality. “Learning to write” means learning not only the mechanics of writing in elementary school—such as grammar, sentence structure, and spelling—but also the refinement of that knowledge to create defined products to meet specific needs (Knipper and Duggan 462). This extends in college to learning about how to write in certain disciplines. In short, “learning to write” is the lifelong process of learning *about* writing, which can look different at different times in a writer’s career. Alternatively, “writing to learn” espouses approaching one’s subject *without* considering the product of writing (Knipper and Duggan 462). Writers need not consider revision, and students need not consider assessment or grades in this writing, because this writing represents a student’s reflection on their topic. The product can take the form of low-stakes writing, such as a journal entry, and the writing takes a back seat to content knowledge. It’s worth noting that instructors need not choose between WAC or WID approaches to an assignment or class. An instructor can scaffold an assignment so that early writing associated with it omits concerns for form, while later ones shift their focus to the particulars of writing in a specific discipline when crafting a drafted and revised product.

But today, writing scholars often reject what we call the “product model,” which prizes finished products as the sole focus of writing instruction, an approach more closely aligned with WID. The product, especially when professors plan first-year writing classes, pales in importance to teaching that writing can be process-based because when students enter the academy, their relationship with academic writing has in large part been a relationship with reading finished texts, and the processes that went into constructing them remain unseen.

But that does not debar value from “learning to write.” Farmingdale State College’s WID Committee concerns itself with technical matters by necessity, as we oversee writing instruction on a campus offering widely varying majors with equally varying writing needs. A classic example of this is when faculty from a discipline that uses APA citation finds that their students only know MLA and mention this issue at a WID committee meeting, prompting first-year writing faculty to look into ways of teaching multiple citation styles.

Often, WAC/WID meetings at FSC serve to address misunderstandings, such as when faculty expect writing moves specific to their disciplines, and students do not deliver. McLeod and Maimon respond to many of the misunderstandings that have plagued WAC/WID discourse, such as the idea that WAC/WID only support the teaching of writing mechanics and that “writing to

learn” is intrinsically superior to “learning to write” (574). They note: “WAC programs are site-specific by nature (a program structure at a small liberal arts college, where colleagues know one another and much can be done informally, will not work at a larger institution)” (581). As a result, they conclude that WAC/WID on college campuses respond to specific needs and are therefore an expression of campus community.

Furthermore, WAC/WID must rely on the campus community to continue in their missions. Since the WAC/WID movement concerns itself with writing from different angles—writing as a tool for learning, writing as an expression of learning—faculty must rely on each other to ensure these angles are covered. WAC/WID committees and programs gather feedback from faculty to address writing concerns and develop approaches to those concerns that serve students and that instructors can reasonably employ. WAC/WID informs curriculum and content when applicable, and so the relationship between instructors and the smaller subset of instructors involved in WAC/WID proves reciprocal in the design and teaching of courses.

Another reciprocal writing relationship on campuses is the one between WAC/WID and other academic offices, such as Writing Centers. Writing Centers support students in their writing by creating open dialogue between students and either peers or professional writing tutors. The important part here is that Writing Centers do not assess writing so much as support it. Similarly, writing tutors have insight into how students respond to instructors’ comments on their writing, which is valuable information for instructors who otherwise might not know the effects of their comments.

This interaction creates community, as instructors and administrators must rely on each other to make writing instruction work. Furthermore, communities must define themselves, rather than being defined from without. In *Democracy and Education*, for example, Dewey, using the terms “community” and “society” as near synonyms, notes the dangerously normalizing nature of naming groups as communities from without:

The terms *society*, *community*,<sup>2</sup> are thus ambiguous. They have both a eulogistic or normative sense, and a descriptive sense, a meaning *de jure* and a meaning *de facto*. In social philosophy, the former connotation is almost always uppermost. Society is conceived as one by its very nature. The qualities which accompany this unity, praiseworthy community of purpose and welfare, loyalty to public ends, mutuality of sympathy, are emphasized. But when we look at the facts which the term *denotes* instead of confining our attention to its intrinsic *connotation*, we find not unity, but a plurality of societies, good and bad (82).

The misunderstandings McLeod and Maimon respond to, such as WAC/WID focusing on mechanics over anything else, result from the incorrect notion that communities can be defined

2. My italics

and have their needs named and met from without. This misconception represents prescriptive ideas of WAC/WID and writing instruction, but the establishment and maintenance of WAC/WID requires campus communities to define their own needs and support them in ways that work for their own campuses.

WAC/WID also serve to ensure that communities within academia exist and have defining characteristics. Writing does not look the same across disciplines, as Russell notes in *Writing in the Academic Disciplines: A Curricular History*, as he explains what he calls the “myth of transience” (8), by which teachers and students are led to believe one can simply *learn to write*, as opposed to learning to write in specific disciplines and/or contexts. If one could learn to “write in general,” as Wardle puts it (30), then attempts in First-Year Writing to teach writing once and for all would work, but they don’t. The different disciplines have different needs and expectations for writing, and those differences set them apart from one another as distinct disciplines. This lends each an identity, which we can use to form academic communities.

However, students struggle to understand the complex dynamics of an intellectually diverse community defined by disciplinary writing on campuses where many disciplines exist. Thaiss and Zawacki note this struggle and use it to explain how many students approach writing in academia, how they become acculturated to the concepts of writing in a larger rhetorical arena that houses smaller discourse communities. Thaiss and Zawacki note that when students enter the academy, they tend to think in terms of “academic writing,” or they imagine writing to be a discreet skill they can learn and apply to any course or writing scenario (note Russell’s myth of transience). Student become even more confused when they notice that instructors want different things, which many students chalk up to instructors’ personal idiosyncrasies. Finally, as students encounter enough writing across their courses, many realize that writing looks different in different disciplines *and* that instructors’ personal expectations inform their teaching (Thaiss and Zawacki 110).

Depending on whom you ask, college faculty have attempted to facilitate students’ writing enculturation since the 1970s or as far back as the 1870s. Since this is a movement as opposed to an organized effort, these attempts are different at different institutions, depending on the needs of these specific local contexts. We have written *Processes* to share some of that local history at Farmingdale State College in the hopes that what we’ve learned can apply to your teaching or learning, or we can inspire similar reflections on writing at your campus.

# History of WAC/WID at Farmingdale

I had the pleasure of learning about the origins of WAC/WID at Farmingdale State College from the founder of what has evolved into the present-day WID Committee, Dr. Ann Shapiro. The committee's goals have evolved as per the needs of the campus since its beginnings in 1999, but thanks to the foundational work of Dr. Shapiro, WID has thrived and served various purposes specific to Farmingdale State College.

In 1999, Farmingdale State College's provost requested a meeting with the department chairs to discuss a Writing Across the Curriculum initiative on campus. Dr. Shapiro and Dr. Paul Kramer from the Physics Department expressed interest in such an initiative. Dr. Shapiro applied for a New York State Professional Development and Quality of Working Life (PDQWL) grant and was awarded \$1,300. The grant funded a retreat in Tarrytown, NY. Led by Art Young and Toby Fulwiler, two key scholars in the late twentieth-century WAC movement, the retreat was attended by 60 faculty from across campus.

Dr. Shapiro followed up by implementing peer tutoring at FSC, assigning peer tutors recommended by the English department, and using the remainder of the PDQWL grant. Today, Farmingdale boasts an established Writing Center, where professional tutors consult with students on writing at any stage of the writer's process and for any course offered on campus. The Writing Center at FSC has since grown enough to establish itself as independent from the WID Committee, though we maintain a strong relationship and work together to support student/faculty writing.

WAC at Farmingdale operated in this capacity until 2001, when the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) review found that writing among Engineering students did not meet expectations. In response, the Dean of the Engineering School called on WAC and Dr. Shapiro. WAC devised semi-weekly seminars on lab report writing and created a lab report template for use on campus.

This genre-specific support marked the first shifts from WAC (writing to learn) to WID (learning to write in the disciplines). The following year, students' low scores on a series of standardized tests pushed the initiative squarely into WID territory. The College President and Provost called on Dr. Shapiro to assemble a WID Committee, which launched that Fall with a full-day workshop on writing for faculty led by Dr. Sondra Perl, the Coordinator of the City University of New York (CUNY) faculty development writing program. The workshop was well attended, and Dr. Shapiro followed up with bi-weekly faculty workshops (Shapiro *Faculty Handbook on Writing* 3). While the committee continued to serve faculty in their writing instruction, Dr. Shapiro changed the com-

mittee's name to WID to mark a new beginning and signal the shift from supporting writing in the abstract to supporting writing in specific disciplines.

In 2003, the WID Committee instituted Writing Intensive (W) courses: students were mandated to take one W class to graduate. This put the WID Committee in charge of determining the guidelines for what qualifies as a W course as well as reviewing syllabi to make sure they meet those requirements. With approval from the President and Provost, the Committee also required each department to offer at least one writing-intensive course per semester. At first, this went very well, with W courses certified in the fields of Visual Arts, Physical Sciences, Construction, and Management, among others, but the success of the initial push meant that fewer faculty were left to join the initiative later on.

Dr. Shapiro's work has had a lasting impact. Her multi-pronged WID program—including but not limited to workshops, course review, and the creation of a handbook for faculty—has survived in different ways over time and in response to campus need and resources. When Dr. Shapiro retired, Dr. Marcia Littenberg became committee chair, continuing the workshops and support for W courses. When Dr. Littenberg retired, Dr. Laurie Rozakis took over, continuing to support W courses and offering workshops, though funding limited them to twice a year as opposed to every other week, and the lack of a budget for outside speakers meant more in-house speakers.

Dr. Rozakis still leads WID, and the program continues to offer support W courses, workshops for faculty, arrange awards for student writing across disciplines, and as of 2021, publish about our work, with the formation of the WID Publishing Subcommittee, who bring you this book.

## **And Here We Are: *Processes***

As with much writing, this project has been collaborative from the start, when the chair of the English and Humanities Department at Farmingdale State College, Marlene Groner, approached the Writing in the Disciplines Committee with an idea, which we took and made into a project. Dr. Groner sent us Kremer and McNabb's 2007 collection, *Collide: Styles, Structures, and Ideas in Disciplinary Writing*, a collection of texts by faculty across disciplines at Long Island University's C. W. Post campus. Each chapter includes a piece of writing from a faculty member, a reflection on their writing, and questions for readers—including students—to contemplate as they discuss the chapter. As a graduate of LIU's Brooklyn Campus, I was particularly interested in learning about how writing worked at LIU from the perspective of the professors.

*Collide* inspired our efforts, but it is not the only book of its kind. We also found inspiration in Segall and Smart's 2005 text, *Direct from the Disciplines: Writing Across the Curriculum*, a collection

of articles by Quinnipiac University faculty on writing in their disciplines. Their work does not include reflection, as many of the contributions themselves are reflections on writing in various disciplines, explicitly addressing how WAC works on the Quinnipiac campus.

We saw a pattern here. *Direct from the Disciplines* collected faculty writing about their disciplines, exposing similar and differing writing needs intrinsic to their disciplines, and how WAC approaches to writing can help specifically in those fields. *Collide* takes a different approach, including disciplinary texts not necessarily about *writing* in those disciplines, and adding reflective glosses to make the connections between disciplines and their writing. Each text approaches the question of disciplinary writing at a specific institution.

LIU and Quinnipiac are private universities that offer majors in most of the traditional disciplines, such as nursing, English, communication, business, etc., and their work reflects the writing needs on their campuses. Farmingdale State College is a State University of New York (SUNY) public college that primarily offers majors in fields such as nursing, biology, and business. We attract career-driven students from Long Island, NY, as well as New York City, and many come to us with a purpose: to build a career in the sciences or business. That purpose often has little to do with writing, or so it may seem to our students at first. We offer an English minor and courses such as Basic Writing, College Writing, Technical Writing, and Public Speaking, but most of our students view these courses as supplements to their majors at best and obligatory prerequisites at worst. Often, while taking our classes, students discover how central writing will be in their careers, but they seldom begin the semester with that belief.

We saw fit to contribute our own book inspired by *Collide* and *Direct from the Disciplines*, one that reflected how writing works on our campus. As the most recent of these two books, *Collide*, was published in 2007, we saw an opportunity to update the conversation on interdisciplinary writing on college campuses. We also wanted to examine writing on a campus where writing is perceived as secondary to content/field knowledge. We do not attempt to replace or correct previous texts in this conversation, but rather to add to the body of work that examines disciplinary writing.

We felt we had a lot to contribute as scholars who have regular access to our colleagues in other disciplines by virtue of the WID Committee. For instance, many conversations about writing exude frustration. The public says students can't write anymore (a perennial complaint that we reject); students find writing confusing and often anxiety-inducing; and English instructors say that students are ill-prepared for the rigors of college writing.

The public expects what it expects, and that is usually writing that looks like its own. Often this complaint comes from educated people, people who majored in a field in which they go on to work, and they expect college writing to look like writing in their fields. Students find academic writing monolithic and the idea of writing like their professors intimidating. English instructors

often feel a sense of propriety over writing. It is a truth universally acknowledged that many English instructors believe their ways of writing are *the* ways of writing.

The English faculty in the WID committee at FSC feel free to admit this because we are not alone in our discipline-centric approach to writing. Our committee welcomes members from all disciplines at Farmingdale State College, and when we get together, we see first-hand how actual writing and writing expectations differ between our disciplines.

These differing expectations create miscommunication among colleagues in different disciplines and confusion among students who are learning about writing from a fragmented body of academics who know their own fields but not each other's. This book attempts to show those differences and make them the *center* of conversations about writing rather than an unspoken impediment to them.

## Overview of *Processes*

This book is a collection of writers' work from across the Farmingdale Community, including students, faculty, and administration. Inspired by *Collide*, each piece is its own chapter and comes with a reflective gloss in which the writer shares some of the experience, or their own *process* in writing their contribution. This format serves two purposes. First, readers enjoy insights into different writers' processes, since no two writers' processes are the same. Contributors are generous and honest with their reflections, and this presents a rare opportunity to get to know writers in academic spaces, where we often step aside to focus attention on our ideas.

Second, *Processes* shows that, beyond personal relationships to our writing, there are relationships between writing and our disciplines. For example, explaining the reproductive stages of fungi requires a different lexicon, different body of prior knowledge, and different research methods than exploring the theme of loneliness in *The House on Mango Street*. In short, the uses of this book span the micro—personal relationships with writing—and the macro—disciplinary relationships with writing.

This knowledge allows us to draw conclusions about writing in different disciplines to meet specific requirements as well as learn about individuals' comfort with writing, their approach to writing, and their images of themselves as writers. To widen the lens, this book also shows us not only *how* processes differ across individuals and disciplines, but also *that* these differences exist. While the topics covered in this book include botany, health sciences, English, and the reproductive states of fungi (pronounced fun-gee), the overarching topic is writing. Writing is a topic most



closely associated with English, but the fact—and the lesson to be learned here—is that writing needs no disciplinary home.

## Uses of This Book

In his book *On Revision*, William Germano shares an open secret: “it’s OK to be scared by the responsibilities of writing and revising, at least sometimes” (Germano 9–10). This quote struck me as indispensable to our project and central to my own perception of writing. Thaiss and Zawacki’s model of how students learn about academic writing—from considering it monolithic to mistaking field-specific expectations for faculty’s personal expectations to understanding that both personal idiosyncrasies and field-specific expectations exist alongside one another (110)—accounts for some of the anxiety people have about writing. Students seek out patterns and signs that they are doing something right, and they may very well misinterpret those signs as they calibrate their expectations and perfect their knowledge.

But what about those of us who are no longer students? Why doesn’t the anxiety go away when we write, considering our degrees and accomplishments? I again find William Germano’s insights into writing helpful: “At least in part, we are what we write. As you revise your text, you’ll be revising some part of yourself, too” (Germano 11). Unlike most students, some of us define ourselves as writers. I dedicated 15 years of my life to the structured study of writing, picking up several degrees along the way, but still, when I see that blank screen, with the cursor seemingly mocking me as it blinks, I fret. I worry that this project will expose me as a fraud. I worry that somehow, just enough of my professors were feeling tired or generous as they responded to my writing, and I slipped through the system, fumbling for words in full regalia. Writing represents a core part of my identity, and so it is important for me to get it right. Hence, I worry.

Likely, anxiety about writing stems from different things along the lifetime of a writer. Perhaps the level of anxiety depends on the individual, but those anxieties are there for most of us, and they are OK. In other words, are you worried about a piece of writing? Good! Welcome to the fold.

Earlier I mentioned that the WID Committee intends for *Processes* to become one more entry in a larger discussion about writing, one that hope others will expand on, revise, or correct. To that end, we chose a Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial ShareAlike License for this publication. This license allows people to use and alter the text (or portions of it) without securing permissions, but it bars anyone from putting a commercial license on any derivatives they may create (Apfelbaum and Stadler 2). Essentially, the license guarantees that users can access the

text and any future iterations of it for free. We chose this license after careful consideration and consultation with the Farmingdale Library experts in publication formats to ensure that people can make the most out of this book, and that they are animated to do so because of their love of writing, not for profit. Again, we *want* people to join conversations about writing, and if they can do so by expanding on or disagreeing with our work, then we feel that we have been successful.

After all, *Processes* is merely the product, and nothing can alter the experiences we have shared during the process of creating it. This includes the revelations writers had while reflecting on their work, the learning we've done as we assembled the book, and the conversations that have sprung up around it on our campus. Working together on this helped us build some much-needed community after working apart, alone with our anxieties, for two years.

## **WID Conference 2022**

This is not a book entirely about anxiety, and I am truly sorry to disappoint on that front. This is also a book about community. As discussed previously, WAC/WID at Farmingdale State College has operated in varying forms, but central to its mission was always the good of the Farmingdale community. Higher administrators called on faculty to establish college-wide writing support in 1999 and again in 2002, and faculty rose to that challenge. WID proved a resource of knowledge for committee members and a source of support for all, and that tradition continues today.

In the spring of 2022, the second semester of in-person learning after COVID and the first semester of maskless learning at Farmingdale, the WID Committee held a lunch conference to promote *Processes* on campus. This was our first opportunity to hold an in-person event, and it was well attended. Students, faculty, and higher administration sat in the audience and stood at the podium, and we all engaged in a rigorous conversation about writing on campus and in our careers. As a faculty member, I found the Q&A portion of the conference exhilarating. Often, I employ several strategies to promote participation in class and see what works, but when the final speaker of the afternoon finished and I asked the room to share any questions, a spontaneous conversation broke out. Faculty shared stories of being students, and students shared their perspectives on writing, some of which were surprisingly in line with the experiences of faculty. The college President conversed with a student from one of my classes about how the word “writing” means different things to different people. This was community and writing had brought us together.

Returning to the quote from Elizabeth Wardle that opens this book, I want to note what it means to me and to the students with whom I share it every semester. It's from a book called *Bad Ideas*

*About Writing*, a collection of reflections from noted writing studies scholars. The book is set up somewhat like this one, and it is an Open Educational Resource that all of us can use. Each chapter contains a short reflection on one bad idea that permeates conversations about writing. Wardle's chapter is titled "You Can Learn to Write in General," and the whole point is that one *cannot* learn to write in general, a surprisingly disruptive claim.

Too much conversation hinges on the idea that writing is a discrete skill that one can apply anywhere at any time under any context and still succeed without any preparation. This "Writing Myth" assumes that sufficient preparation takes place in a first-year writing course. David Russell uses the analogy of sports, likening learning about writing to learning sports played with a ball. To be faithful to Russell's analogy, one can learn to play ping-pong, and in fact master the game, but then be utterly at a loss playing jacks, a game with a similarly sized ball but with entirely different aims and ways of using the ball ("Activity Theory" 57, 58). I like this analogy because it plays out in real life. I recall a marketing campaign by Nike from the late 1980s/early 1990s that said "Bo Knows \_\_\_\_\_ [insert whatever there is to know here]." In the 1980s, Bo Jackson played everything, or at least he played baseball and football, and he played them well. This ability was enough to grab an audience's attention because Bo's athletic ability was uncommon. Few athletes cross borders the way Bo did, because *learning to use a ball in sports is not a transient skill*. If it were, we could switch baseball players with ping-pong champs and get the same results.

Writing, like using a ball, is never in general. It is always in particular. Baseballs would make terrible ping-pong balls because of their size and weight. An email written to my friend would make a terrible email to my boss because my boss doesn't need to know how my kids are doing, and I generally dispense with boss-level formality when talking about my family.

Because writing is always in particular, we need to keep those particulars at the forefront of conversations about writing. Otherwise, that difference slides into the periphery—but it does not go away. That difference will affect writing and conversations about writing in ways we cannot name and cannot see, and we therefore cannot account for them. We need not put the Wizard of Oz back behind the curtain, and I hope we don't because I want to know what all those levers back there do.

Please use this book however you see fit. It is for all of us.

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# Homage to Dr. Marcia Littenberg, former Chair, FSC WID

At the end of 2021, while we in the FSC WID Committee were embroiled in planning this book, former chair of the WID Committee and beloved member of the English and Humanities Department, Dr. Marcia Littenberg, passed away. Though I did not get to meet Marcia in person, she graciously met with me over the phone to discuss the book and offered her expertise as a reviewer for contributions. As a former WID Committee chair, she had an interest in the book, and she encouraged me to focus on the community that had formed around the committee and consider how that sense of community—its needs, its function—changed with the times. COVID put us all out of arms' reach of each other, but it did not undo Marcia's work, as WID continued to keep us united, shaking hands virtually, but shaking hands, nonetheless.

As you will read in the reflections below from faculty in the English and Humanities Department, Marcia brought people in. She welcomed new faculty members, she advised and supported students before they committed to majors, and she helped established faculty move into new roles. Marcia held a two-hour phone conversation with me on a Wednesday afternoon even though I was a new faculty member in a department from which she had already retired, and even though we would never meet, which I suspect she knew at the time.

Finally, regarding her role as a reviewer, Marcia could only review the contributions of students and faculty members who arrived at FSC after her retirement, those she did not know. In other words, Marcia helped the new folks come in because Marcia brought people in.

– Chris Iverson

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I first met Marcia when I interviewed for an adjunct position at Farmingdale. As I recall, she had recently announced her retirement. I had no idea at the time that I would end up staying at Farmingdale full time, and she was certainly on her way to spending more time at her beloved animal shelter and traveling with her family. It seemed unlikely that we would have much further interaction, and I fully expected to walk out of that interview with a polite smile, maybe a farewell handshake. But that's not who Marcia was. She wasn't done with me. She wanted to talk about Edwidge Danticat.

Many people collect experiences—from travel, books, relationships—like lines on a CV, to make

themselves look impressive. Not Marcia. She used the wealth of her experiences to find common ground, to connect with others on their terms. No doubt what fueled much of her academic drive was an insatiable curiosity and a keenness for understanding, but she was also eminently hospitable. Maybe that's what made her such a committed teacher. When she saw the name Edwidge Danticat on my CV, it was more than academic curiosity that prompted her to discuss my research; it was hospitality. I couldn't have felt more welcomed, more nurtured, more seen if she were setting out cups of tea.

In retirement, she was never really gone from the department, and so, over the next, too few years, I witnessed again and again her unrelenting habit of making people feel seen—of insisting on their wellbeing and making them feel valued. She'll never really be gone from my life either; such is the legacy of her fierce kindness.

– Jason Lotz

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Marcia was a champion for her students, a passionate writing instructor, and an integral part of the Writing in the Disciplines Committee's development and success. Her accolades as a scholar and educator are prolific, her commitment to community service was tireless, and her work with animals was inspiring. She began as my office roommate and quickly became my dear friend. Marcia, you are missed.

– Mary Caulfield

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While most of us in the English Humanities Department remember Marcia as an outstanding teacher and a stalwart colleague, for several years she was also the chair of the Undeclared Major. At that time Marcia was the sole advisor for the over 400 students in the program. She was an outstanding chair, and she was more than an academic advisor to her students; she was beloved.

– Marlene Groner

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Marcia was my rock. When [the former English department chair] died and I had to serve as chair, Marcia volunteered to come in to help me, even though she was retired. When Marcia turned WID over to me, the program was in great shape so I could hit the ground running. When I ran the Sunshine Club, Marcia was the first person in the conference room on party day with a fan-

tastic dish that she had “just whipped up.” She always arrived fully prepared, too, the food in an electric frying pan with all the appropriate condiments and serving utensils, And oh! It was always something extra special and so delicious!

In short, I will always be grateful for knowing Marcia and I will dearly miss her.

– Laurie Rozakis





# Writers on Writing

## JOHN NADER

I write a lot, and I enjoy doing so. In fact, writing this essay has helped me realize how much writing is at the heart of my work. It is really *the* principal way in which I focus, formulate, collect, and integrate my thoughts. At its core, my job requires that I clearly and, hopefully, succinctly and effectively, express facts, opinions, arguments, questions, and data. I consider myself the College's chief "storyteller" and initially these stories always assume written form. Even when my work requires public speaking—which I also enjoy—nearly any set of remarks is the result of multiple written drafts.

Clear writing and clear thinking are integrally related. Each reinforces the other. Writing is not simply something that I do as a part of my work. When I deal with a personal challenge, writing can be a way—no, actually is the way—in which I truly figure out what I think. My family and friends seem to know how much I write and often ask me to comment on their written work. Drafts of essays for graduate school applications, legal letters, communication to public officials, obituaries and eulogies, early versions of term papers, and many other documents have all come to me for comment, correction, and critique.

My affinity for writing surfaced and grew during my undergraduate years. I had professors and friends who carefully read and critiqued my written work. As students, many of us swapped papers. We criticized, corrected, and commented on the papers each submitted. It made writing a lifelong habit, and a good one. It's four decades later and I'm still in touch with several of those friends.

The act of writing involves continuous revision. That includes correcting typos, grammar, spelling, punctuation and the like but, more importantly, it should involve reflection and rethinking. I share nearly everything I write for correction, editing, and feedback. For my speeches, remarks, presentations, messages to campus, college-documents, and external publications my approach is nearly always the same. I just start writing and keep going for as long as possible. I make almost no corrections to the initial draft. I do not proofread my own work, as I'm really bad at it. After an initial version is complete, I begin the process again, again, and again. I label each successive iteration: V1, V2, V3... You get the point. After the crude initial draft, each subsequent version is the result of arguments with myself over the ideas, the length, the evidence, the voice, the best way to prioritize and organize a document that will ultimately be shared with and (I hope) read by its intended audience.

I'm very fortunate to work (and live) with people who will constantly read and re-read my work and comment honestly on my countless drafts. Here's some good, free advice. Avail yourself of friends, teachers, peers, or family members who can carefully read and critique your work. Take seriously their comments. You need not accept these, but keep in mind that writing is a form of communication: their comments may make your thinking and writing better, clearer, and sharper.

Writing rarely seems like work, even when it's slow or when I notice that the current version is marked V7. Perhaps that's why I enjoy reading about writers and how they go about the craft of writing. Mind you, I don't read their novels or short stories. But I do enjoy reading about *how* they work, which is often more interesting to me than their writing itself. A couple of years ago, I read Vanity Fair's *Writers on Writing*. Nearly four dozen writers were profiled. Most were novelists, essayists, or poets. I had read very few of their works, but I could not put down the book about how they approach their writing.

Strange as it may sound, writing is an integral, essential, and even enjoyable part of my life. Insofar as I have any retirement plans, these too involve writing for a broader audience. Coincidentally, I was lost in thought while writing part of this essay. Though it made me late for a meeting, it was time well spent.

# MESSAGES FROM THE NURSING DEPARTMENT



# Utilizing a Writing in the Disciplines (WID) Course to Teach Nursing Students about Their Profession

## *Reflection*

### **NANCY MAGGIO**

Teaching nursing students about the profession they have chosen in a writing-intensive course can be daunting, and at the same time be a very rewarding and challenging experience. Nursing is not just about patient care at the bedside. Nursing is a profession that follows a code of ethics, has a commitment to society as a whole, and is constructed on sound philosophical foundations and evidence-based practice.

A course of this nature presents an overview of nursing as a professional, scholarly discipline and its significant role in healthcare. Emphasis is placed on developing students' ideas about related topics that provide foundations for current professional nursing practice through writing, such as historical and social factors, reflective practice, emotional and social intelligences, theoretical and empirical knowledge, ethics, advocacy, therapeutic communication, sociopolitical and emancipatory knowledge, sound clinical judgment, teaching, learning, cultural awareness, skills acquisition, and evidence for practice.

Evaluation of students' understanding of such topics and their development of ideas and scholarly writing is accomplished through assigning two concept analysis papers and a final paper. The student has the opportunity to rewrite the two concept analysis papers for a better grade after reading the professor's feedback. There is no rewrite option for the final paper.

The challenge I faced as a nursing professor teaching a WID course was how to give constructive feedback that didn't appear too harsh to the beginner writer as it relates to the writing component (APA format, sentence structure, grammar, etc.) and the analysis component (paraphrasing to demonstrate understanding of topic). Many semesters ago when I first started teaching this course, I spent hours making corrections and writing comments on student papers. When the rewrites came back, I found many times my own words and corrections were reflected back to me, and the student was not demonstrating understanding of the topic and/or APA scholarly writing. I have since changed my technique of giving feedback. I always start with a positive statement, followed by a question that will hopefully encourage more critical thinking and research of the

topic. I then comment on what could be improved or where they can seek further information (i.e., by rereading sections of the assigned material and referring them to a particular section in the APA Manual).

Using a WID course to teach students about the nursing profession not only develops their writing skills, it makes them aware of the many facets and uniqueness of the profession; it encourages them to be critical thinkers, to form educated opinions, and to seek evidence. Assisting with the development of undergraduate nursing students' scholarly writing will not only prepare them to be well-rounded competent nurses, it will pave the way for their future success as direct patient caregivers and as graduate students advancing their education with master's and doctoral degrees, enabling them to become advanced-practice nurses, researchers, educators, administrators, and entrepreneurs.

# The Importance of Correct Perspective of the Nursing Profession

## *Student Writing Excerpt with Reflection*

### **GRACE BURKART**

The definition of nursing is constantly being redefined as medical professionals reconsider the responsibilities and duties of serving patients. As the definitions expand to encompass all aspects of a nurse's profession, so too does the public image of what a nurse is. Many people have a limited view of nurses as only being assistants to doctors. However, this perception of nurses is wrong, since nurses do so much more. Though some television programs present a myopic view of the nursing profession, in reality nurses are extensively trained and think of intellectual ways of how they can better treat their patient.

The general misconception of a nurse's responsibilities within their designated workplace mainly stems from the individual's prior informal knowledge (Black, 2020). One such misguided idea is that nurses are mainly assistants to doctors. A factor that facilitates this viewpoint would be television shows, such as *House M.D.* and *Grey's Anatomy*. Both shows mainly focus on the doctors and their struggles in diagnosing the patient; while nurses are portrayed as maids who clean up after the doctor's messes, as well as health care personnel who are ordered around by the doctors to administer medication. Since the shows are scripted to dramatize the medical cases in order to enrapture the audience's attention, it should be noted that the shows contain incorrect ideals and methods when assessing and treating the patient. However, individuals who do not have the extensive knowledge that a certified professional has, would not know that the show was fictitious and would thereby be convinced that the actions and roles of the doctors and nurses were accurate. The idea that nurses are merely background characters within the hospital setting is inaccurate, as they not only conduct basic tests to check the patient's current status, but they become reliable pillars for patients to emotionally and physically depend on. Nurses are dependable registered medical officials who are responsible for noting physical, emotional, and spiritual changes within their patients, advocating for medication that would best help ease patients' symptoms, and providing patients with unbiased, open-minded attention (Black, 2020).

As nursing students advance in their education, their perspective of what defines a nurse tends to change. According to Benner (1984), all nurses go through five main stages as they transition

from a new nursing student into a qualified expert in the nursing field. The five stages are novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert. To progress to each stage, the young nurse will progressively show specific qualities and correct procedures which will then prove that they have advanced into a further skill level (Benner, 1984). As they develop, young nurses don more responsibilities such as an advanced beginner nurse into a competent nurse. Whereas the advanced beginner nurse may correctly complete all the procedures as instructed by the mentor, they are unable to determine which of the procedures are most necessary to conduct on the patient, based on the patient's situation. With more years of experience, the competent nurse is able to consciously prioritize more important procedures over unnecessary procedures. As the developing nurse surpasses their previous skill level and becomes more experienced, their progress into critical thinking and critical reasoning also develops, resulting in a new mindset and way of thinking like an expert nurse. This new mindset in turn causes a change in perspective as to what aspects define a nurse.

As well as experiencing increased competence and self-esteem while becoming a self-reliant and adroit nurse, a nursing student may likely experience many changes spiritually and emotionally as they evaluate their internal thoughts about the importance of the nurse's role in providing health care. When asked about what core beliefs keep her motivated to provide the best health care to her patient that she can, Patricia Banner disclosed that she felt that it was always in her nature to want to help others and that she believed that the community as a whole should look out from one another. She states that no one could get by daily without caring practices. She also believes that individuals within the community are so busy competing with one another for monetary success that they lose sight of the true reason that health care is essential (IHI, Open School, 2010). This humble and idealistic attitude towards health care shows that nurses should strive to be selfless in their actions and to dedicate their best efforts to caring for their patients simply because it is their duty as a nurse to attend to members of their community.

Nurses play one of the most vital roles in bettering a patient's health. The televised depiction of nurses does not encompass the entire scope of a nurse's duties while servicing their patient. While a nurse does assist a doctor in some procedures, a nurse also has vast knowledge from previous experiences as they develop into expert nurses. In progressing into the most advanced stage of nursing, nurses draw on their experiences from prior patients to properly attend to the members of their community, and prove to their patients and anyone who knows them, that nurses are much more than medical assistants.



## Reflection

Before I began the writing intensive course, I am embarrassed to admit that I was not aware of the full extent the nursing profession has within the healthcare system. Many of my misconceptions were based on inaccurate television shows that entirely misconstrued what a nurse's profession entailed. Having no prior experience with nurses in a hospital setting also led to my misconceived notions as to what a nurses' responsibilities are to their patients.

I am currently a junior nursing student at Farmingdale State College. I took the writing intensive course in my spring semester of freshman year. When I first started the writing intensive course, I was apprehensive as to how my professor wanted the essays to be formatted. In prior literature classes, there would always be a learning curve in which one's essays would improve as one adapted to the new writing style presented in the beginning of the class. I was vaguely familiar with the American Psychological Association's (APA) essay formatting from my prior English courses; however, applying this format to factual essays about the nursing profession was another challenge. The course consisted of writing three essays reflecting upon a singular topic learned in the course, and a final paper about several of the topics learned in class. Through writing the essays, I not only became stronger in my writing, but I also achieved more confidence writing in the APA format.

When writing an essay, I have noticed that I have a routine. First, I create an outline for myself based on the rubrics the essays are graded on. This keeps me focused on the task at hand. Next, I find the information that I wish to include in my paper, and find appropriate and credited sources to reference. At this point, I usually find some music to listen to as I begin to write my paper. I find that a relaxing playlist doesn't distract me from my writing and acts as a form of comfort as I spend time concentrating on the paper. After finishing a rough draft, I revise my work until I am satisfied with the outcome. Each essay took me approximately three to six hours to write, with the exception of the final paper that took me eight hours to write. Collecting evidence to prove my points was easy, but learning to prove my claims through cohesive explanations was time consuming.

In my opinion, points throughout the essay must flow easily into one another, lest the reader become bored and lose focus of the author's arguments. When writing a paper, I tend to struggle finding the appropriate words that both convey the meaning of my argument and reflect the more intellectual level of writing that I wish to utilize. I have learned to achieve my goal through trial and error, as well as consulting others to review my writings before submitting it for final grading.

Another of the many struggles I experienced in the class was the lack of in-person clinical experience, as I had to write the papers since I had just started college. Researching information from credible sources gave my classmates and me a deeper view of the history of nursing and showed us, before we had any personal experience interacting with patients, that nurses should always advocate for their patients. Evidence-based practice and the professional attitude of nurses were two concepts that would have been easier to relate to had the papers been written when we began clinicals.

Most writing-intensive courses require you to write a certain number of papers and receive a grade of C or better; however, my professor for the writing-intensive course gave my classmates and me the unique opportunity to rewrite any papers we were unsatisfied with or if we received a failing grade. When writing my second paper, I made many errors, including spelling errors, making generalized statements that expressed opinions rather than giving a critical analysis of the subject with supporting evidence, and claiming that nursing was just an occupation. Initially I had used the term "occupation" only because I thought it was interchangeable with the word "profession" and using a synonym would help prevent my paper from becoming monotonous to the reader. However, I soon came to understand that there is a vast difference between an occupation and a profession. The generalized statements I made in the essay came from previous writing habits developed in English classes. They were meant to lead the reader to my argument; instead, they diminished the analysis of the argument. This is another example of my becoming accustomed to a more highly educated writing style. I was disappointed to receive an average grade of a B-; however, my professor's comments made me reflect heavily upon my paper. She prompted me to further research the distinction between a profession and an occupation, which made me aware that my thesis was weak; also, my long run-on sentences detracted from the points I was trying to make. The thesis is the crux of a well-written paper, so

to say I was disappointed with the grade is an understatement. Keeping the faults of my first essay attempt in mind, I made sure to evaluate my arguments, as well as to limit the wording in my explanations. I revised my thesis to encompass the new argument and found that the paper appeared to fit better under the overall theme. The rewrite of my essay earned me a grade of a B , which I was satisfied with.

The writing intensive course was extremely beneficial to me as a student nurse. Familiarity with APA has greatly benefitted me in my later courses, since my professors expect me to apply the APA format to all papers in their courses. The course also broadened my horizons on what it truly means to be a nurse through deep explorations of the reading material and captivating conversations. My overall takeaway from the course was that it enabled me to gain further insight as to what the nursing profession truly is about, and to become a well-educated writer who can convey and support my arguments with strong evidence.

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# How Nursing Taught Me to Write Scholarly

*Student Writing Excerpts with Reflection*

**RICKY HSIAO**

## **Excerpt from Paper #1—The Importance of Civility in Nursing Practice**

Incivility and bullying are most rampant and prevalent in nursing. Bullying can range from employers to employees, employees against employers, or employees against employees (Deans, 2004a). When superiors bully their inferiors, they project the idea that such acts are tolerated and acceptable. Novice nurses may be subjected to harassment by their superiors and not speak out against it due to fear and intimidation. In 2009, a study on workplace bullying revealed 20 percent of 249 emergency room nurses admitted to experiencing bullying at work, with 50 percent of them identifying managers and directors as the bullies (Johnson, Rea). In 2012, an online survey with a sample of 197 novice nurses revealed 73 percent of the participating nurses experiencing workplace bullying at least once in the previous month (Berry, Gillespie, Gates, Schafer). In 2014, the American Nurse Association (ANA) surveyed 3,765 nurses and revealed 43 percent of the participants were verbally and/or physically threatened by a patient or family member of a patient (LCWA Research Group). In 2015, the ANA published a code of ethics dictating the requirement for nurses to “create an ethical environment” (p. 4). It is the nurse’s responsibility to prevent incivility in their workplace. Incivility includes any action that may be disrespectful towards coworkers, whether it is direct or indirect. It comprises the partaking in active violent and/or discriminatory actions and failing to intervene when such actions are present. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), some actions may be more obvious—such as using intimidation tactics, gossiping, or belittlement of coworkers—while other actions may be more inconspicuous—withholding information or ignoring blatant harassment (2015).

## Excerpt from Rewrite—The Importance of Incivility in Nursing Practice

In 2015, the ANA published a code of ethics in their position statement on incivility, bullying, and workplace violence, dictating the requirement for nurses to “create an ethical environment.” It is the nurse’s responsibility to prevent incivility in their workplace. Incivility includes any action that may be disrespectful towards coworkers, whether it is direct or indirect. It constitutes participating in active violent and/or discriminatory actions and failing to intervene when such actions are present. Some actions may be more obvious—such as using intimidation tactics, gossiping, or belittlement of coworkers—while other actions may be more inconspicuous—withholding information or ignoring blatant harassment (ANA, 2015). Nurses can protest incivility practices by promoting communication, speaking up to superiors, and advocating against bullying at work through posters or seminars. More experienced nurses should also take on the responsibility of setting a positive role model by punishing bullies or preventing any occasions where bullying may originate. This includes not allowing an experienced nurse to diminish the capabilities of a novice nurse through intimidation or any other means. By allowing incivil treatment of staff to occur, it not only interferes with the nurse’s ability to work efficiently and drains resources, but also discredits the profession as a whole. How are nurses supposed to be respected if they cannot respect each other? This behavior also gives the nursing profession a bad reputation and deters future nurses from entering the profession.

Incivility must be stopped because it contributes to the shortage of nurses, decreases productivity, and is financially consuming. No one would willingly work in an environment where they were constantly belittled or depreciated, especially if they were exposed to highly stressful situations as in the health profession. Nurses are tasked with a heavy workload: having to care for individual patients and their families, filing patient paperwork, making sure that all health professionals are well informed on each and every patient’s records, as well as many more responsibilities. In such a stressful environment, it is easy for tempers to shorten and for bullying among the staff to flourish. However, bullying among the nursing staff prevents the victims of bullying from efficiently providing care to the patients, like distracting the nurse from placing his or her full attention on the patient, and stymying the cooperation of professionals, causing a decrease in quality of patient treatment. Working in such an atmosphere can deplete the confidence and teamwork of the staff (Danza, 2018)

# Reflection

## Introduction

Nursing is a profession that constantly undergoes changes, always aiming to improve the quality of care for patients. I am currently in my first clinical rotation as a nursing student and I previously took a writing intensive course dedicated to developing a nurse's way of thinking. The course focused on the analysis of weekly readings composed of various articles, case studies, and guidelines intended to introduce nursing as a professional and scholarly field. This writing class greatly improved my scholarly writing skills and furthered my appreciation for nurses.

## Struggles

My experience in taking this writing class was overall positive but challenging, because I had to learn how to write in an analytical and scholarly fashion. Prior to taking this course, I thought of myself as a pretty good writer. I have always received scores in the high 90's in other classes; thus I was relatively confident when I submitted my first analysis paper focusing on incivility in nursing. I received an 84 on that paper. Granted, it wasn't a bad grade but I knew I was capable of doing better and I wanted to improve my writing skills. The difference between my past writing experiences and this writing intensive course was analysis. A majority of my writing experience pertained to research papers, focusing more on using studies and statistics as the foundation for my writing. I was not prepared to read a text and synthesize my own inferences using said text. I did not know what to focus on when writing an analysis paper in the American Psychological Association (APA) format. Furthermore, I was not familiar with the proper technique for in-text and/or parenthetical citations. The first papers I submitted

had a substantial amount of errors due to incorrect in-text and parenthetical citations.

The biggest challenge I had, something I still struggle with, was putting my thoughts into words. Having to convey my thoughts in clear and concise words was and is still the most difficult part for me when writing analysis papers. Many of my “arguments” that seemed logical to me were actually very unclear and unspecific to my professor. The arguments were just summaries of my articles or definitions. I was simply restating what I had read in my resources. My professor would often comment, “Why? Explain more,” and I didn’t know how to expand on my thoughts. This is something I still struggle with, but I’ve gradually gotten better at it.

## Successes

The start of the course was challenging and it took many trials and errors to finally improve my analysis skills. As I previously stated, a majority of my writing skills were centered around research papers. So it was very difficult to switch gears and take a step back from using only the evidence in my resources. In my excerpts, you can see how little analyzing I actually did in my first paper. In my rewrite there is a noticeable increase of my own ideas synthesized with the authors’ thoughts. It took a bit of time before I realized that the assignment was not just summarizing articles but, instead, actually understanding them and making my own meaningful connections. A critique from my professor I always think about is to be specific and opinionated. That enables me to be able to argue and support my ideas with the readings or statistics from other sources. Another tip I learned was to always try and explain my theories in a clear and straightforward format. While it is great to sound sophisticated and professional, you never want that to get in the way of potential readers understanding what you are writing about. As you will see in my excerpts, the rewrite has much more elaboration which provides the context necessary to further understand the topic that I am writing about.



## Thoughts on the Writing Expectations

My overall expectations in taking a nursing writing intensive course was positive and enlightening. The course really helped me improve my writing and analyzing skills. I've learned how to analyze articles and use the author's reasoning to support my own ideas and thoughts. Aside from helping me expand on my scholarly writing abilities, this course also prepared me for the reality of working in a clinical setting. The topics discussed in class include empirical knowledge, ethics, compassion/empathy, professionalism, and sociopolitical concerns. It was greatly beneficial for me to take this class before entering a clinical setting because it prepared me for what to expect. While I have not personally experienced workplace incivility, I have seen and heard it with other medical professionals. Nursing is an amazing profession, and with every semester that I progress with my studies, I find a new appreciation for nurses.

## Document's Purpose

These two excerpts are from the first analysis paper I submitted for a writing intensive course called "Developing Nurse's Ways of Knowing." The topic was incivility in nursing. Many of my articles were sourced from the American Nurses Association (ANA) Code of Ethics and peer-reviewed studies composed of case studies on incidents of bullying and/or incivility in the nursing profession.

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# My Education in Writing as a Nurse

## *Reflection*

### **DARCY MCREDMOND**

When I first began my education in nursing, I had already completed a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, and countless prerequisite science courses, all of which required the submission of written assignments, including lab reports, research papers, and an original undergraduate thesis and scholarly project. Each individual educational path I have walked has required a specific type of learning to convey information unique to that discipline. Adapting to the style of writing required of the nursing profession has been my longest journey, first starting at Farmingdale College, when I began my Associate of Science degree in Nursing, through my Bachelor of Science in Nursing, my Master of Science in Nursing as a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse practitioner, and finally as I begin to enter my doctoral program to complete my Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree. The written submissions from my psychology degree required structure, concepts, and communication styles that could not be applied to assignments in my nursing education. Communicating information in the field of nursing and medicine requires a style that allows for the reader to extract and apply information, while considering that the reader could be a patient, a colleague, a physician, a nurse, a student, a practitioner, or any of the countless other healthcare professionals who work toward a patient's health and wellness. Effective communication is one of the most important aspects of nursing, and its importance is underestimated when thinking of what it means to be a nurse. It was through my time in writing-specific courses, including "Developing Nurses' Way of Knowing," at Farmingdale College, that I first learned of the skills I would apply through all those degrees and would go on to appreciate many years later.

In nursing, the greatest goal is safe, efficacious, and high-quality patient-oriented care, but when we look at the art of writing as a nurse, the perspective of the reader determines how the written material must be presented. Nurses are researchers, teachers, advocates, lobbyists, and philosophers, forced to ask questions, seek answers, and present this information to contrasting groups of readers. Learning to develop written assignments as a nurse was a struggle that would not have been as tolerable without the writing intensive courses that I attended through my nursing education. From learning to write care plans, discharge summaries, research results and papers, grant applications, process recordings, history and physicals, and case study presentations, the process of developing a nursing-centric way to writing has been a work-in-progress that continues to this day.

One of the key components to successful writing that I have learned as I developed my writing

skills as a nursing student, is approaching each individual project as a unique entity, requiring a personalized plan based on the topic and who my reader is going to be. The further along I traveled in my nursing career, the more the requirements of the profession evolved. As an entry-level nursing student enrolled in an ADN program, I received written assignments based on presenting information that I had obtained from other people's written research and from nursing theorists. I would formulate a paper that identified that topic with the purpose of educating the reader on the basics of the idea. When I began my Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree, I was expected to take those ideas and apply them to different aspects of the nursing profession and practice, aiming to enhance the art of nursing, which often included patient education and understanding the process of becoming an expert nurse. Finally, when I entered my Master of Science program at Stony Brook University, my writing was focused on analyzing my own work and clinical experiences and expressing how my perceptions affected my patients and my ability to act as a provider through professional reflections. As I look to the future and begin my Doctor of Nursing Practice degree, I will now have to merge each of the other educational paths into one trajectory as I develop my clinical practice thesis, with the goal of contributing to the existing body of knowledge for other providers so that together we can better patient outcomes. Each step of my education has required the development and building upon the writing skills that I learned and applied in prior coursework.

Learning to accept that the first draft of an assignment will not be my only draft was paramount to my success as a writer. The journey from draft to draft has become one of the most rewarding aspects of my process, and watching the evolution of an idea through self-reflection, application of crucial writing rules, formatting, and self-preservation has taught me more about myself than I anticipated. I have often struggled to stay organized throughout the writing process, and by accepting that the finished product will progress from a collection of itemized ideas in an outline to a coherent and cohesive submission, I have prospered through my career. The running head has stereotypically become the last step of every paper I have written in APA format, and I have learned to look at it as the finishing touch, the final garnish to a job well done.

When I first became a nurse, I do not think that I understood how important the art of written communication would be in my career. Assignments in the freshman years of my education were focused on putting together concepts so that others could understand them; it was not until many years later as a nurse practitioner that I realized it was just as important that I understood exactly what I was writing so that I could reflect on the ideas I compiled. I realized how crucial this would be to not only everyone's understanding of me, but also my understanding of myself. Nurses are not necessarily known for their writing skills, but there are few jobs that require regular, original documentation in the same quantity demanded of nurses, with as many adjustments depending on the target audience and where the writing is displayed. Care plans, process recordings, case studies, quality improvement projects, research papers and electronic health records

are just a few of the many regular avenues where nurses are required to write, regardless of their place of employment. The skills that I developed in those first few months as a nursing student in my first nursing classes are just as relevant to me now, as a DNP student, as they were back then.

As I enter this final chapter of my nursing education, I know that the goal of “effective communication, regardless of the topic,” which was first proposed to me in my first writing intensive course at Farmingdale State College, remains the biggest priority as a scholarly writer. As writers, nurses must be able to convince the reader that they are intellectually elevated, compassionate, adaptable, and unbiased, all while constantly reflecting on the purpose of their writing. If not for the writing intensive courses that I was forced to weather as a nursing student at Farmingdale State College, I would not have had the skills, practice, patience and understanding of the writing process as a nurse and I would not be the advanced practice nurse that I am today.



# MESSAGES FROM STEM AND HEALTH SCIENCE SCHOLARS





# Sexual and Asexual Reproductive Stages of Fungi

*Article Excerpt with Reflection*

**CHARLES ADAIR**

The traditional name for the sexual spore stage of fungi in the field of Mycology had originally been the “perfect stage,” but this has been replaced by the term teleomorph (“end form”). Parallel with this terminology, the traditional name for the asexual spore stage had been the “imperfect stage,” and this has been replaced by the term anamorph which describes all structures (including hyphae) that are not involved in the sexual stage of the organism. Finally, the term holomorph describes the complete picture of both the sexual and asexual stages of a fungus, so it is a combination of the teleomorph and the anamorph.

## **Sexual spore stage**

The sexual stage of a fungus life cycle consists of the events leading up to the fusion of two compatible haploid nuclei to form a diploid zygote and its subsequent division by meiosis to produce haploid nuclei typically packaged within spores. The fusion of the compatible haploid nuclei is more accurately known as karyogamy [“nuclear marriage”] than “fertilization,” since there are no equivalents to male or female gametes among fungi. Some fungi employ elaborate methods for bringing together the two compatible haploid nuclei in this process, often having mating types that prevent karyogamy of nuclei within the same colony or between closely related strains. A fusion of fungal cells is necessary to bring these two compatible haploid nuclei together, whether these are two hyphae, a hypha and a specialized spore, two spores, or other specialized structures, and this cell fusion is known as plasmogamy [“cell marriage”]. Following meiosis of the diploid zygote (or comparable cell), the resulting haploid nuclei, or their mitotic products, are immediately or eventually packaged into characteristic spores that are associated with the sexual stage of the fungus. The events of plasmogamy, karyogamy and meiosis are so unique to each phylum of Mycota, and to each of the various taxonomic subgroups within each of those phyla, that they are a dependable basis on which to identify and classify these organisms.

## **Asexual spore stage**

Those spores that are produced by mitosis from various hyphal structures are known as zoospores, sporangiospores, or conidia depending on their properties and the structure in which or on which they are formed. There is a tremendous variety of asexual spore morphology, and also in the modes of asexual spore formation and dispersal, all of which are utilized in recognizing fungal species. However, the asexual spore stage is much less reliable than the sexual spore stage for establishing the identity and taxonomic placement of an unknown fungus because of the wide variability in spore morphology and in the mode of production of these spores that can occur within a given taxon. Because their mitotic origin results in cloning, the reproductive function of zoospores, sporangiospores and conidia is asexual.

## **Practical challenges caused by the teleomorph/ anamorph duality of many fungi**

A recurring theme in the field of Mycology has been the difficulty in making the connection between the teleomorph and the anamorph of a large number of fungi in several of the phyla of the Mycota, especially those in the Ascomycota. One of the reasons for this is that the sexual and asexual spore stages are typically quite dissimilar, and often produced at different times during the development of a fungus in its natural habitat. Also, the successful initiation and outcome of the sexual spore stage in many fungi requires the interaction of two compatible mating types which may not always be present in the same location at the same time, so the teleomorph may occur rarely or never. The mitotically-produced spores associated with the anamorph of most fungi function effectively as a means of asexual reproduction, and they can also function as an effective means of initiating host infections by necrotrophic and biotrophic fungi of clinical or agricultural importance. Because of this characteristic of many fungi that have an impact on human affairs, these fungi have been historically recognized by their anamorph stage, have been given Latin binomials based on that stage, and are described in the scientific literature by those binomials.

At the same time, the teleomorphs of many of these same fungi have been identified as unique species and given Latin binomials, but the connection with the corresponding anamorph may or may not have been recognized at the time they were first described. As a result, there are many fungi that have two Latin binomials, one for the anamorph and one for the teleomorph. Advances in mycological techniques, including both the availability of genomic data and methods of ultra-

structural analysis, have resulted in the publication of increasing numbers of teleomorph binomials that are linked to their corresponding anamorph binomial.

While the publication of two different binomials for the same fungal species would appear to be cause for confusion, most scientists investigating these organisms in the context of agricultural, clinical, and industrial applications have recognized the basis for these binomials and have cited them appropriately in the scientific literature. However, there is a debate arising from the principle of “one fungus one name” that is consistent with the current interpretation of the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature, the recognized authority on scientific naming of fungi. While the use of both the teleomorph binomial and anamorph binomial was originally considered to be acceptable, the current standard that is being advocated is to utilize only the teleomorph binomial, even in cases when the anamorph binomial was published first. In practical terms, much of the scientific literature regarding clinical, agricultural, and industrial investigations of fungi has identified these organisms by the anamorph binomial, since that is the stage that is relevant to these fields. The exclusion of the anamorph binomial from future publications in these fields would appear to be a more significant source of confusion than following the earlier convention of identifying the organism with both binomials when appropriate.

## Reflection

My intention in offering this piece is to provide a relatively accessible example of my writing in my field of Mycology. This selection is part of a rather long chapter on fungi that I was invited to write for the *Practical Handbook of Microbiology*, 4th ed., CRC Press 2021, edited by Lorrence H. Green and Emanuel Goldman, and I hope it serves as a relatively accessible window into this field of specialization and some of the issues that are encountered within it.

In writing this chapter I was conscious of the fact that my audience would be quite varied in their backgrounds but also very pragmatic regarding their use of the information that I was presenting. The nature of the audience for this *Handbook* is so effectively described on the Routledge/CRC Press website that I would like to quote it here: “Useful to anyone interested in microbes, the book is intended to especially benefit four groups: trained microbiologists working within one specific area of microbiology; people with training in other disci-

plines, and use microorganisms as a tool or “chemical reagent”; business people evaluating investments in microbiology focused companies; and an emerging group, people in occupations and trades that might have limited training in microbiology, but who require specific practical information.”

Given this audience, I tried my best to define the technical terms used to describe the organisms and their structures and processes without letting those definitions intrude on the flow of the language and the concepts that I wanted to present. I felt that the only way I could accomplish this was to take the approach that I would take in introducing a fairly unfamiliar Biological topic to a classroom full of fairly advanced undergraduates who had some previous background in Biology. I certainly didn’t want to appear to be talking down to the audience of professionals described in the quotation above, but I didn’t want to lose them by using terms that might be unfamiliar to them.

There was an extensive introductory section of this chapter in which I took this stepwise approach in describing the way fungi grow and obtain their nutrition, but in which I referred to fungal spores in very general terms. The section of the chapter that I have presented here deals with the Sexual and Asexual Stages of Fungi, but the fairly straightforward definitions and comparisons of these stages lead to a discussion of the very inconsistent ways in which these processes occur in these complex organisms. I have tried to guide the reader through the rather involved nature of the sexual reproductive process itself, the importance of the sexual stage in the classification of fungi, the challenges posed by those fungi whose sexual stage is unknown or rarely seen, and the practical necessity to identify and name many fungi by their asexual stage even though it is seen as “less reliable” as a basis for naming these organisms.

I had to assume that my audience was familiar with terms describing relative chromosome numbers (haploid or diploid), the modes of cell division (mitosis or meiosis), the characteristic numbers of daughter cells produced, and the genetic implications of sexual vs. asexual reproduction. At the same time, I made a point of defining certain seemingly obscure terms (such as plasmogamy and karyogamy) for which there are no common synonyms, since they become essential in later sections of the chapter as the only way to explain certain events.

Another objective that I felt was important to achieve in this section of the chap-

ter was to “re-educate” those members of my audience who may have learned Mycological terminology at an earlier period of time when less precise definitions were applied. A specific case is the naming of the sexual and asexual stages of fungi as the “Perfect” and “Imperfect” stages, which was so prevalent for so long that one of the standard reference books still on my shelf is the *Manual of Imperfect Fungi* (with beautiful line drawings of the asexual spores used for identification of species). Practitioners in a field like Plant Pathology tend to be very attached to familiar names of organisms that they deal with on a regular basis, so I wanted to gently prepare them for the current terminology that is employed in this field.

Finally, I felt I had to address the controversy regarding “correct” names of fungi, given the fact that many of them have two entirely independent names—one for the sexual stage and one for the asexual stage—yet the purists insist that the name for the “Imperfect” stage should be discarded entirely once the named sexual stage of the organism is known. Naturally for those practitioners who know (and often look for ways to control) the asexual stage in their work, this approach is impractical and confusing. I try to hint strongly that it is better to keep both names in circulation and just refer to the other whenever either one is used in a publication.

Aside from the issues of audience and my method of communicating with them, I realize this reflection should also address my writing method. I suspect that it is fairly typical, in that I am not very disciplined and just write as much as I can when I am mentally focused on the topic at hand. I’m often most productive in the evening, but this can result in working too late at night.

The first draft is very transitory, since I tend to edit and re-edit constantly as I write (something much harder to do years ago when everything was on a typewriter). I always edit further when looking at my work the next day or next week, and I often have to revise an earlier section if I discover that a prior understanding of an additional point is needed in order to effectively present a concept in a later section.

My teaching experience definitely influences my narrative style, since I tend to present concepts in a stepwise approach, building on earlier definitions when presenting new topics. I don’t like long paragraphs or lengthy chapter sections,

and I like to employ a hierarchy of headings and subheadings to provide clear guidance to the reader as to where they are. And I hope my readers have a good memory, since terms defined early will then show up later without a definition.

# Medical Maladies and Existential Healing

*Article Excerpt with Reflection*

**JOHN F. DECARLO**

## **Unity of Actions: Epigenetic Transcription, RNA, LncRNA & Mitochondria**

In the 1980s the great hope in medicine was gene therapy and/or precision medicine. As the human genome, once estimated to be as large as 60,000 genes, was whittled down to about 20,000, there was the expectation that particular genes could easily be identified in relation to particular diseases and ailments, and easily turned off. However, of the 20,000 protein coding genes, only about 2000 have been studied in depth, and over 5000 have never been examined. Second, targeting genes is tricky and complex, especially as there are often hundreds, if not thousands of genes involved in a given cellular and organ activity. And even if one is able to correctly isolate and indict a particular gene as being responsible for an illness or disease, once it is turned off or eliminated it is no longer able to participate in other bodily functions. Consequently, as recently reported by Francis Crick Institute, researchers are calling for greater awareness of unintended consequences of CRISPR gene editing, which allows scientists to remove and replace sections of DNA in cells.<sup>1</sup> For example, in a study which examined the role of the OCT4 protein in human embryos during the first few days of development, while the majority of the CRISPR induced mutations were small insertions or deletions, in approximately 16 % of samples there were large unintended mutations.<sup>2</sup>

Genes are also interacting with the environmental heredity, via diet, climate, land masses, and

1. The Novina Dana Farber Lab also notes that a major challenge for genome editing is that such “editors” have many unintended off-target effects including promiscuous binding of Cas9 to loci with high sequence similarity to the intended target site and unspecific enzymatic activity of editors leading to unwanted modifications. The lab recently described a novel tool for targeted DNA methylation by tethering a “split-fusion” methyltransferase to an endonuclease-deficient mutant Cas9. Its split-fusion approach minimizes off-target effects by ensuring that enzyme activity is specifically reconstituted at the targeted locus.
2. Niakan, Kathy. “Researchers call for greater awareness of unintended consequences of CRISPR gene editing,” Cambridge University Research, April 9, 2021.

disease.<sup>3</sup> In these respects, DNA tells only a portion of our biological historical nature. In fact, RNA's long primeval history involves its self-replicating molecule combining amino acids into proteins, its mutations, and it creating a double-helix DNA molecule to store its complex intracellular regulation. When the Human Genome Project was complete in 2001 it was a major surprise that protein-coding genes accounted for as little as 1-2% of the human genome, leading the remainder to be termed as genetic noise or junk DNA. But it is now understood that most of the DNA, while non-protein coding is transcribed into RNA.

Accordingly, epigenetics, which lends insight into the functions of the RNA genome, as per gene expression, and gene splicing to produce an even greater number of proteins, examines how the overall epi-genome interacts within its given environment. More specifically, "Epigenetics is what enables every cell to act differently despite having the same DNA sequence."<sup>4</sup> In this respect, while cells in the body inherit the same DNA, they don't use all of it. Instead, they transcribe different regions based on their needs and in response to their environment. Epigenetics regulates this process through various means, such as small chemical modifications to DNA or to the chromatin and histone proteins that package DNA. In fact, at any given moment in the human body, in about 30 trillion cells, DNA is being "read" into molecules of messenger RNA, the intermediary step between DNA and proteins, in a process called transcription.<sup>5</sup>

Transcription begins as proteins called RNA polymerases are recruited to specific regions of the DNA molecules and begin skimming their way down the strand, synthesizing mRNA molecules as they go. During the transcription sequences of nucleotides, introns or In-Coding regions are set aside, and remaining segments called exons are spliced together and introns are removed by RNA splicing, as RNA matures. In other words, the introns are not expressed in the final messenger RNA (mRNA) product, while exons go on to be covalently bonded to one another in order to create mature mRNA. Not surprisingly, considering their long primeval history, research suggests the products of transcription—namely, RNA molecules, regulate their own production through a feedback loop. Too few RNA molecules, and the cell initiates transcription to create more. Then, at a certain threshold, too many RNA molecules cause transcription to draw to a halt.<sup>6</sup>

3. Zimmer, Carl. *She Has Her Mother's Laugh*, 2018.

4. Greer, HMS assistant professor of pediatrics at Boston Children's Hospital.

5. Crick has aptly noted that the flow of information from DNA to RNA to protein is fundamental to all planetary life forms. Nurse, Paul. *What is Life?*, 135.

6. Through a series of modeling and experiments at the lab bench, researchers have confirmed their hypothesis that the effect of RNA on transcription is due to RNAs molecules' highly negative charge. It was predicted that initial low levels of RNA enhance, and subsequent higher levels dissolve, condensates formed by transcriptional proteins. Because the charge is carried by the RNAs' phosphate backbone, the effective charge of a given RNA molecule is directly proportional to its length, insuring its accuracy.



In molecular biology, a transcription factor is a protein that controls the rate of transcription of genetic information from DNA to messenger RNA, by binding to a specific DNA sequence. For example, animal cells undergo fundamental shifts in gene expression when there are changes in the oxygen levels around them. These changes in gene expression alter cell metabolism, tissue remodeling, and even organismal responses such as increases in heart rate and ventilation. In a similar way, circadian oscillators within individual cells respond differently to entraining signals and control various physiological outputs, such as sleep patterns, body temperature, hormone release, blood pressure, and metabolism. Changes in daylight, temperature, and metabolism are similar types of transcription factors.

MicroRNAs are small RNA molecules that regulate the expression of certain genes through interaction and protein production with mRNA targets. But beyond gene transcription and protein production, RNA also functions as regulators and supervisors of cellular functions, so as to prevent glitches in cellular performance that can lead to defective proteins or insufficient protein production which are involved in most biological functions of the body. For example, a group of proteins, including: A-Raf, B-Raf and C-Raf transmit signals that control proliferation, differentiation, and survival in every cell in the body. Raf proteins, especially B-Raf, when not properly regulated by RNA, are well-known cancer drivers. Hence, Raf's full name: rapidly accelerated fibrosarcoma. In the normal state, the B-Raf has three parts, including: Mek1, B-Raf, and 14-3-3, whereas the slight difference in the abnormal, which causes the entire protein to get stuck in ON position, is that there an additional B-Raf. As a result of this mutation, the Mek1 continues to send its growth promoting signal, uncontrollably.

In order to fully grasp the complexity of these types of RNA, let's take pancreatic cancer as an example, as it is one of the most widespread of cancers due to the fact that the natural rate of cell replication is one of the highest in any of the human organs, and since replication involves careful copying and transcription of genetic structures, errors and mutations are inevitable. Accordingly, an integrated analysis was performed of miRNA and mRNA expression data to explore the deregulation of miRNA and mRNA and regulatory processes underlying pancreatic cancer. Combining mRNA and miRNA expression data with miRNA, target predictions were constructed to infer new miRNA regulation activities in pancreatic cancer. The results show 42 differentially expressed miRNAs, 1376 differentially expressed mRNAs were identified by combining three expression profiles of miRNA and mRNA separately in pancreatic cancer, and 146 miRNA target genes were found in the gene list of integrated mRNA expression profiling based on bioinformatics prediction. These findings may provide new insight into the knowledge of molecular mechanisms of pancreatic cancer and the development of novel targeting therapies, but also indicate the multiple levels of complexity.

# Long Non-Coded RNA Complexities & Unknowns

On yet another level, in addition to the complex and dynamic functions of RNA, research provides some insight into the potential roles of the thousands of lncRNAs that are not translated into any proteins which are common in mammals and have mystified scientists for decades. Technically, long non-coding RNAs are loosely described as non-coding protein-coding transcripts of more than 200 nucleotides which promote and inhibit gene expression via a variety of mechanisms, and like protein coding mRNA, the majority of lnc-RNA's are transcribed by RNA polymerase. However, epigenetics reveals that all cells of the immune system rely on an integrated and dynamic gene expression program that is controlled by both transcriptional and post-transcriptional mechanisms, which in turn, are regulated by lncRNAs.<sup>7</sup> In this respect, as proteins might be conceived of workers in a factory, DNA is the supplies and materials, and RNA are the managers and supervisors; and as will also be seen—lncRNA can be considered Upper Management.

Moreover, with lncRNA also independently performing activities of proteins and enzymes, and its circular shape directly communicating with the immune system, researchers wonder how its specific sequences provide other new kinds of instruction for the cell.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the field of epigenetics is witnessing a burgeoning paradigm of lncRNA-mediated control of gene expression and the differentiation and function of innate and adaptive cell types.<sup>9</sup> Next-generation sequencing also provides a more complete picture of the composition of the human transcriptome indicating that much of it contains poorly understood non-protein-coding transcripts. In sum, the human genome may transcribe over 100,000 lncRNAs, mediating their functions through interactions with proteins, RNA, DNA, or a combination of these, and are implicated in a variety of disease states, such as cancer.

7. lncRNA plays a vital role in cells, tissues and organs, including: physiologic cellular processes, genomic imprinting, inactivation of chromosome X, maintenance of pluripotency, formation of different organs via changes in chromatin, transcription, and translation. BBA, *Gene Regulatory Mechanisms*, 2020.

8. Chang, Stanford Chem-H, 2019.

9. While traditional biochemical methods to define RNA protein interactions are limited by low throughput and are biased towards identifying the most abundant RNA-protein interactions, the Novina Lab has developed technologies integrated into a platform that can efficiently define lncRNA function by systematically identifying their associated proteins. For example, non-coding RNA binding to transcription factors or histone-modifying enzymes implicates those RNAs in transcription or locus control, respectively. Moreover, by screening fragments of a disease-relevant lncRNAs against the human proteome, their platform can define the RNA sequence and structural determinant that specify protein interaction.

# Mitochondria & LncRNA

Mitochondria is a molecule capable of releasing energy very quickly, but beyond being the bodily ‘batteries’ in providing the needed energy for our cells to function by converting the food that we eat into ADP, mitochondria’s function is affected by the internal and external roles of Nuclear Factor kappa B, which maintains mitochondrial structure or activity.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, mitochondrial metabolism is fully dependent on factors encoded by the nuclear DNA, including many proteins synthesized in the cytosol and imported into mitochondria via established mechanisms.<sup>11</sup> Nuclear factor kappa B is an ancient protein transcription factor and considered a regulator of innate immunity, and its signaling pathway links pathogenic signals and cellular danger signals organizing cellular resistance to invading pathogens. The Nuclear Factor kappa B also plays a role in cell death, as Howard Chang at Stanford notes that his earlier research revealed that the aging process was not one of decay and deterioration, but rather a metaphorical on/off switch at the biochemical level, organized, directed by a key regulator, namely, Nuclear Factor Kappa B.

While it has been well documented that our adrenals glands convert cholesterol and release cortisol, causing a bodily response via mitochondria in all cells & organs,<sup>12</sup> there are now correlations between neurologically processed psychological stress and deterioration of mitochondria cells & organs. In fact, to maintain homeostasis of the entire cell, an intense crosstalk between mitochondria and the nucleus, mediated by encoded noncoding RNAs (lncRNAs), as well as proteins, is required. Mitochondria-associated lncRNAs have also newly been discovered to work in concert with transcription factors and epigenetic regulators to modulate mitochondrial gene expression and mitochondrial function.<sup>13</sup> There also occurs a culmination of an overproduction of Reactive Oxygen Species ROS—with the end result of cell toxicity.<sup>14</sup> These negative effects of

10. During the heyday of single-celled life about 2 billion years ago, the forerunners of mitochondria were bacteria that found a niche inside larger cells, providing them with energy. This symbiosis was so beneficial that it likely powered the evolution of multicellular organisms. As a relic of their bacterial origins, mitochondria still carry their own small genome, separate from the cellular genes in the nucleus,"Social mitochondria, whispering between cells," *Quanta Magazine*, 7, 2021.
11. Bola De Paepe, Steve Lefever, and Pieter Mestdagh. "How long noncoding RNAs enforce their will on mitochondrial activity: regulation of mitochondrial respiration, reactive oxygen species production, apoptosis, and metabolic reprogramming in cancer," *Current Genetics* volume 64, 2018, 163–172.
12. As per stress, as noted by Sapolsky at Stanford University, human beings, unlike other species, have difficulty turning off the fight or flight response.
13. Blumenthal-Perry et al. "Retrograde signaling by a mtDNA-encoded non-coding RNA preserves mitochondrial bioenergetics," *Communications Biology*, volume 3, article number 626, October 30, 2020.
14. As per the issue of ROS, we now have the complete atomic structure of MnSOD via neutron diffraction of crystals and how it guards against oxidative stress caused by an imbalance between production and accumulation of oxygen-reactive species. This is done by the manganese superoxide dismutase/antioxidant enzyme, which protects the mitochondria.

ROS from oxidation, have been offset by supplementing the subjects with antioxidant enzymes in the gut. In this respect, emphasis is placed on the involvement of lncRNAs in cancer metabolism, as tumor cells rely heavily on modifications of mitochondrial functioning as an essential component for sustained tumorigenesis and cancer progression. Due to their key role in cancer progression, they represent potential targets of innovative lncRNA-based treatment strategies.<sup>15</sup>

These points regarding mitochondria and its RNA regulators being involved in a vital and deeper inter-bodily physical sense of connection are compelling, and also suggest that one very fundamental job of sleep—perhaps underlying a network of other effects—is to regulate the ancient biochemical process of oxidation, by which individual electrons are snapped on and off molecules in service to everything from respiration to metabolism.<sup>16</sup> Sleep, the researchers imply, is not solely the province of neuroscience, as previously asserted by Hobson in *Nature*: “Sleep is of the Brain, by the brain and for the brain”—but something more deeply threaded into the biochemistry that knits together the animal kingdom. Sleep loss alters metabolism in humans, as noticeable in changes in the microbiome, and there are related connections to diabetes and metabolic syndrome and other chemical processes. Just what the findings mean still needs to be explored, but they suggest that sleep is vitally important to the body’s regulation of oxidation, particularly in the gut.

## Reflection

In keeping with my scientific writing submission dealing with cancer research, titled: “Unity of Actions: Epigenetic Transcription, RNA, LNCRNA & Mitochondria,” which is an excerpt from a longer journal article, I am attaching a short reflection on the long-standing personal intellectual process that led to its creation. As this process was particularly dramatic, I have chosen to categorically list the stages of its development in terms of a five-act play.

dron by a mechanism involving electron and proton transfers to lower ROS levels in mitochondria (University of Nebraska Medical Center and Department of Energy, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, April 6, 2021).

15. A non-exhaustive list of lncRNAs, including ANRIL, AS cmt-RNA, H19, HOTAIR, lincRNA-p21, MALAT1, RMRP, SAMMSON, and VL30, which have emerged as potent regulators of mitochondrial metabolism, in *Cell*, June 4, 2020.
16. Yijing Zhao, Lemeng Sun, Rachel R. Wang, Ji-Fan Hu, Jiuwei Cui. “The effects of mitochondria-associated long non-coding RNAs in cancer mitochondria: new players in an old arena,” *Critical Reviews in Oncology/Hematology*, volume 131, November 2018, 76–82.

## Act One

My first memory of the foreboding “C” word took place when my mother and her sister came home from the doctor’s office, after hearing that their father’s case was terminal. He was dying of lymphoma. Their emotional cries lingered in the air like sour milk. We had intimations of his fate, earlier on. I remembered my grandfather sitting in the rocker on the porch, with a blanket covering his frail body, with him moaning a low murmured moan as the cancer had now overtaken his entire body.

In contrast, he had been a virile man, even in his seventies, who had tendered to a flower and vegetable garden, grew his own grapes, made his own wine, baked bread, and cooked all the family’s meals. There were now no nutrients to revive him.

## Act Two

Heidegger speaks of the un-thought thought, referring to those experiences that are in some way known to the individual, but about which the individual is unable to think; and in that preverbal sense, I had been preoccupied with development of cancer, even as a child. With a mutational strain of genetic eye turn (strabismus) running on my father’s side, amid my sister and I, along with two cousins, I was dealt with the worst blow of crossed eyes, requiring surgery at ages 3 and 7.

Hence, when I met with Howard Gardiner a few years ago at the Radcliffe Institute, after corresponding with him regarding my writing of poetry, he asked me why I was studying and teaching cancer research, so I told him of my existential torments as a child. To my surprise, he took off his glasses and gestured to his own long-lasting turn in one of his eyes. I was taken back by the fact that I had not noticed it in prior viewings of his videos and photographs. I also realized why I had felt a need to meet with him, beyond my interest in his theory of multiple intelligences.

## Act Three

Kierkegaard centers much of his philosophical thought around the notion of the subjective thinker: how one considers a topic deeply from an intellectual point of view and is also driven by an unspeakable passion. Such a restless meditative state had permeated my mind and came to fruition during my college years, as I embarked on an introspective philosophical search into the conceptual motifs of self, truth, and meaning, in both Western and Eastern traditions. This in turn, led to a more instrumental and methodological study in the social and physical sciences, and the teaching of a writing across the disciplines course, called: “Brains, Genes, and Lingo.” Students who had been haunted by family cancers of their own, contributed to a new sense of gravitas and urgency, leading to the development of a course which exclusively centered on cancer research.

But the cause(s) of cancer remain elusive. Like Freud’s replacement of singularly pointed theory of etiology with that of over-determinism, disease caused by multiple causes, cancer research reveals numerous paradoxes, ambiguities, and complex mysteries yet to be unraveled. In this regard, I have offered a particular section of my writing on the nature of cancer research, which deals with the dimensional connections between DNA, RNA, long non-coding RNA, and mitochondria. But in terms of completing my dramatic narrative, it should be noted that new research into the nature of mitochondria provides insight into both strabismus, and cancer development.

## Act Four

During the heyday of single-celled life about 2 billion years ago, the forerunners of mitochondria were bacteria that found a niche inside larger cells, providing them energy. This symbiosis was so beneficial that it likely powered the evolution of multicellular organisms. As a relic of their bacterial origins, mitochondria still carry their own small genome, separate from the cellular genes in the nucleus. Strabismus is associated with deletions or point mutations of mitochondrial

DNA, as tissues with a high metabolic demand such as the retina, heart, and skeletal muscle are commonly affected.

As per mitochondria's connection to cancerous developments, mitochondria's function is affected by the internal and external roles of Nuclear Factor kappa B, which maintains mitochondrial structure or activity. Nuclear factor kappa B is also an ancient protein transcription factor and considered a regulator of innate immunity, and its signaling pathway links pathogenic signals and cellular danger signals organizing cellular resistance to invading pathogens. In the other words, when functioning properly, mitochondria is the farmer who ensures the fox stays out of the chicken coop, but if it is malfunctioning, the strike of fatal disease is often forthcoming.

## Act V

In sum, what was very, very inward and personal, has become very societal and scientific, leading to new and surprising connections, relationships, and understandings of self and truths about the human body and its functioning in larger contexts, and to what mysteriously lies on the edge of human understanding.

## Coda

Perhaps, above all, this passionate intellectual quest, about that which I had always known something, but had not been able to fully think about, would not have been possible without the tools of language and the creative writing process.





# Who Runs Boston? A Descriptive Report of Performance-Related Characteristics of Boston Marathon Qualifiers

*Article Excerpt with Reflection*

**DEREK HANSON**

Marathon running is a sport that is increasingly attracting participation among runners year after year. From the six World Marathon Major races that attract tens of thousands of runners per event annually, to the local events that include runners by the thousands each year, all around the world people are training for, participating in, and completing marathons in large numbers. Among these runners, tremendous variation exists in training strategies, demographics, goals and reasons for running.

The Boston Marathon is considered the premier and elite event for most runners. Entry into this race is based on meeting a qualifying standard, within the year prior to registration, by completing a certified marathon that must be faster than a specified time. This standard time, known as BQ (Boston Qualifier), is based on gender and age that helps to normalize the criteria for all entrants. Over the past decade the BQ standard has been lowered twice due to the enormous number of applicants, with many people who have met the standard by at least 2 minutes still being rejected. The allure of participating in the Boston Marathon is something that drives many runners to push their limits and has even become part of runner culture. Evidence to support this includes an almost universally asked question among runners “did you BQ?” and the hosts of the race (Boston Athletic Association) adopting a unicorn as the marathon emblem to signify the elusiveness and mystical quality of gaining entry to the event.

Sport performance and the science of running are well documented. There is an abundance of studies that examine a wide array of training characteristics for runners (e.g., determinants of velocity, effects of climate of performance, nutritional strategies, pacing strategies, psychological aspects).<sup>1-4,4,5</sup> With the wealth of knowledge available to runners, there still remains the difficulty of translating this information into practical information and useful guidelines to support runners who wish to achieve their best race in an attempt to gain entry into the club of runners who have ran the Boston Marathon. When striving to attain their BQ, there are some clear

indications that a runner is actually increasing the odds of successfully achieving that difficult goal. The purpose of this study is to explore and report some of the key descriptive performance-related characteristics of runners who have successfully qualified for the Boston Marathon.

## Reflection

Passion, excitement, grief, anxiety, frustration, self-doubt, agony, curiosity, and confidence begin to describe the spectra of emotions that have accompanied my efforts in the scientific writing process. Reflecting on this experience makes me wonder if this emotional roller coaster is typical to the writing process or if it is an artifact of attempting to enter the world of writing at the beginning of a global pandemic. My guess is that it is a combination of the two, and most likely different and unique to each writer.

Coming from a clinical background working with athletes, using strategies that rely on evidence-based practice and the scientific method, I was familiar and something that I had become comfortable with. My prior training and experience that helped foster this ability include a research assistance position, courses in research methods and scientific writing, along with frequent literature reviews to guide practice. Across my time as a “user” of the literature, I increasingly had questions that I couldn’t find answers to, leaving me with the feeling that perhaps I could be a “contributor” one day. This sense of responsibility was fully awakened in me when I accepted a position in academia, which required that I produce original scientific work. During this clinical-to-academic transition, I soon realized that my comfort in using scientific work was not the same as creating and writing about it.

The translational process of investigating a specific, measurable, and practical question that could provide answers and be useful for athletes in the real world was my starting point into the process and production of scientific writing. This journey, I was soon to learn, requires a series of steps, each with its own challenges and barriers that must be overcome prior to the production of the actual written product. Knowing that each step could, or most likely would, be scrutinized in the peer-review process added a layer of uncertainty to each decision that

I made. Nevertheless, I systematically went through each of the steps with careful attention to detail to ensure that my final manuscript would be considered good science and, more importantly, published, so that people could read and use the information.

This process began with a draft of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application, and after many revisions, it was finally approved. I was on my way to the next step of the scientific process, data collection, which presented an impossible barrier. The 2020 global COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, and all public gatherings were canceled, making it impossible to carry out the planned experiment, write about it, and disseminate my findings. It was a heartbreaking moment when I realized that the planning, IRB revisions, and dreams of answering a long-debated question were not possible. Following the grief and mourning over the loss of my work and efforts up to that point, panic started to set in. Fear that the new professional role that I have pushed myself towards, which requires me to be a scientist and “produce” original work, all within a deadline, would not be possible.

I anxiously tried to think as objectively as possible about the situation. This process started by asking, “How can I perform research with human subjects if this is not allowed?” The answer to this question was straightforward and provided me a glimmer of hope, I needed to find something to measure on human subjects that is allowed without physical contact—a web-based survey! However, finding the “something” [to be measured?] was the challenge that continued to test my emotional state and creative energy, particularly because of my desire to write about a topic and question relevant to the work that I had done in the past.

And so, the creative process was back on track, albeit only at the beginning. I created an almost ritualistic habit of reading through various articles related to my interest, writing down some thoughts, and then reflecting on them for a day or two to see if my emerging questions were answerable, made sense, and were useful. This study formula allowed me to think of what articles to look to next so that I could repeat the process over again. After the mental exhaustion of repeated cycles of thinking through a researchable question, forming a hypothesis and potential conclusion worth reporting—followed by the frustration of seeing the flaws in my thinking—I stumbled on a related idea that renewed my excitement to start over once more!

My focus shifted from the exploration of the physical characteristics of runners towards an investigation of their psychological characteristics. I was back at square one with the scientific research and writing, which carried with it the same anxiety and uncertainty as my original intended study. However, since the question that I wanted to investigate was a little outside my expertise, a new layer of uncertainty and anxiety set in. The thought of writing and reporting new findings on a topic that has been investigated in dozens of studies over the past 20 years by researchers who exclusively specialize in this area made me question every word I recorded. Particularly because my hypothesis was refuting most of the previous work that has been done! Thoughts like “Who am I to go against these experts on this topic?” or “Is there something that they know that I am not seeing?” were preventing me from moving forward.

After finally battling through these emotions, I forced myself to sit and write. The opening sentence took the most time and energy, with what seemed like agony at the time, to commit to every word that I recorded. When I finally had the opening statement pointing me in what I thought was the direction I wanted to go, it felt like a faucet had opened and words started to flow. I began connecting thoughts, citing relevant papers describing my rationale, and strengthening the argument for my hypothesis. It became easier the further I made it through the manuscript and even stimulated my curiosity for future follow-up studies that would build on that study within the discussion. More importantly, it served as a much needed boost to my confidence that this work was conceptually sound, important, and good science.

Currently, I am preparing to submit this manuscript to a targeted journal for publication. Although I am still at the very beginning of this process called “scientific writing,” I have learned so much. I learned that scientific writing can be very much an art form that allows the author to use a combination of the scientific process along with written words to demonstrate something that is novel or unique. I learned that an attempt to answer a question and then be able to write about it requires a combination of more work than meets the eye and the ability to be adaptable. Most importantly, I learned that science and writing can be fueled by a process that elicits the widest range of emotions that a human can experience. I am grateful for learning this lesson early on in my career as a scientific

writer who is contributing to the body of knowledge. I will be even more grateful to experience the emotion of relief when that paper is accepted for publication.

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# Writing in Science: Creating a Lab Write-Up

*Article Excerpt with Reflection*

**CESAR HERNANDEZ AND THAWANHATHAI KIATSUTTHAKORN**

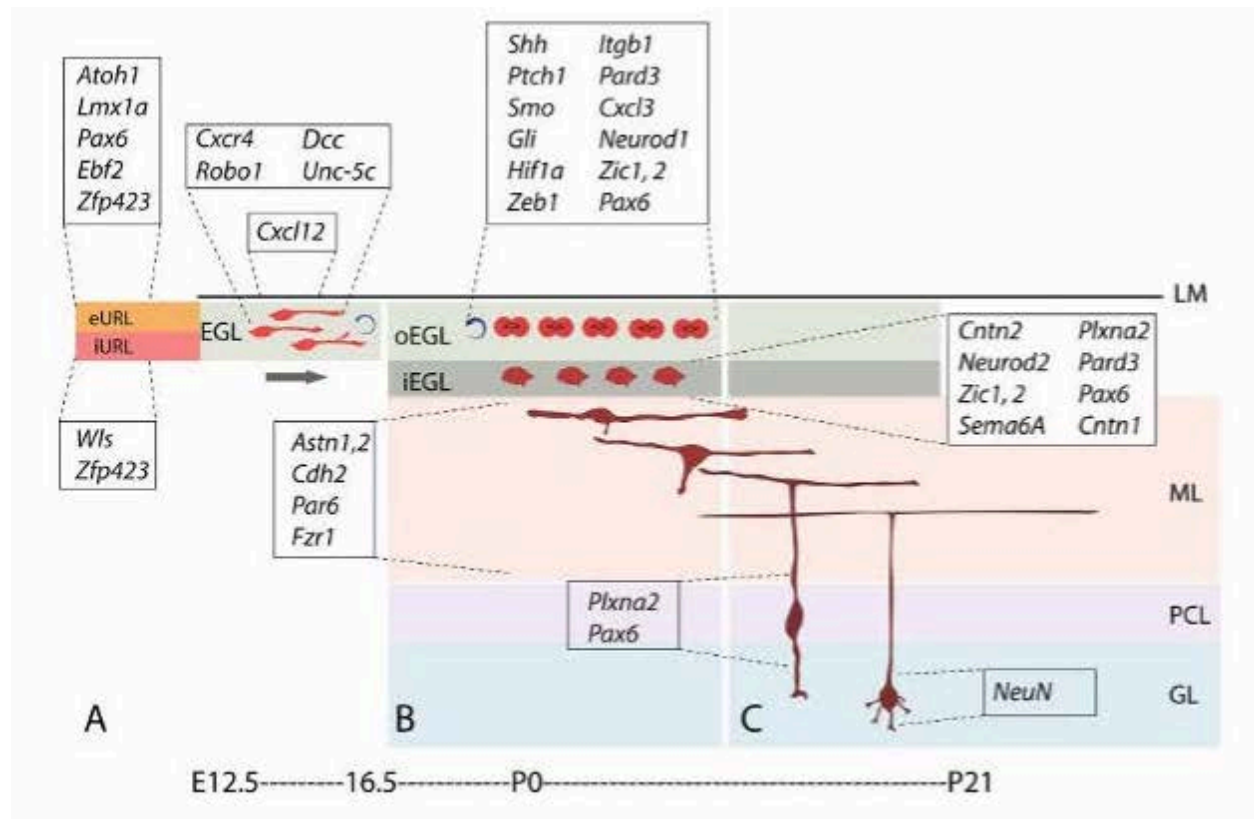
## **Optimization of the Growth of Neuronal Stem Cells in Vitro**

### Introduction

The cerebellum (CB) is a part of the brain that functions in coordination and balance, and holds the most abundant amount of neurons, roughly 80%, of the human brain (Azevedo, 2009). Due to the proliferation of granule cell precursors (GCPs), the CB is able to grow the most during infant stages. The three layers found in the cerebellum are: molecular layer, granule cell layers, and purkinje cell layer (PCL). The PCL gives rise to purkinje cells, which are inhibitory neurons in the ventricular zone (VZ) of the CB. Purkinje cells are important because they release Sonic Hedgehog, a signal that is responsible for cell differentiation, especially post injury to the brain. Progenitor cells that express the neural stem cell marker Nestin, known as Nestin expressing progenitors (NEPs), are typically found in the purkinje cell layer; however, recent studies have shown (Wojcinski, 2017) that after granule cell ablation in the external granule layer (EGL) resulting from traumatic brain injury, NEPs migrate to the EGL and become granule cells instead of becoming purkinje cells in the PCL. The abnormal expression of the *Atoh1* gene responsible for neuron differentiation (Mulvaney, 2012) in the VZ can convert VZ neurons to be descendants of the upper rhombic lip, which is the area that produces granule cells (Yamada, 2014). The migration of NEPs are a crucial component of post-injury cell behavior, and has been known to be mediated by sonic hedgehog signaling. Thus, experimenting with in vitro cell culture using neurons derived from mice can give further insight on this pathway, and whether or not the pathway is only effective in an in vivo environment.

The proposed experiment of how Nestin expressing progenitors could grow in culture to mimic in vivo behavior can be observed by using monolayer cell culture, TUNEL cell death assay, fluo-

rescence microscopy, and live imaging. It is hypothesized that NEPs grown in vitro could mimic the behavior of those grown in vivo.



## Procedure

### *Cellular behavior found in vivo must be replicated in vitro*

The main objective is to figure out how to grow cells in a monolayer culture. This is a culture technique that involves the use of a substrate to create a surface. The cerebellar cells will be used in the implementation of this technique, and the use of trypsinization to allow adherent cells to stick to the surface of the culture will be used to test for the survival of cells in the cell environment that is trying to be replicated. The media that will be used is Dulbecco's Modified Eagle Medium (DMEM). Cells will be incubated after the procedure and will be monitored every 72 hours. Successful implementation of this technique will examine the cells as they grow to make sure they are mimicking the cell behavior found in vivo. Once cells are functioning as they do in the cellular pathways of a healthy brain, the concentration is shifted to the implementation of a post-injury cell environment.



## *Cells ablation after traumatic brain injury must be proven*

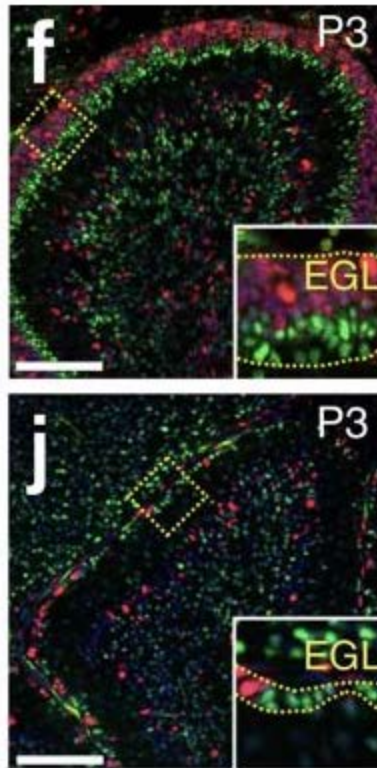
In order to recreate a post-injury environment in vitro, there must be an injury sustained to the cerebellar tissue. To do this, mice were exposed to irradiation at P1. To prove that cell ablation was in fact occurring after the occurrence of injury, the TUNEL cell death assay technique was used. This assay is used for confirmation when it is presumed that cells are experiencing apoptosis. When there is cell death, one of the key characteristics that is happening is DNA fragmentation. When this happens, an enzyme called TdT(Terminal transferase) migrates to the fragmented pieces of DNA and adds fluorescently labeled nucleotides(dUTP) to them. This way the dead cells are able to be seen using microscopy.

## *Monolayer cell culture must be able to sustain cells*

Besides using a TUNEL cell death assay to prove that TBI results in apoptosis, it is also used to make sure that cells are able to survive in the monolayer cell culture. The culture serves the purpose to act as an environment where cells can be sustained and maintain a healthy growth pattern. If the death rate of the cells is too large then the in vitro environment is inefficient to observe migration and differentiation of the cerebellar cells.

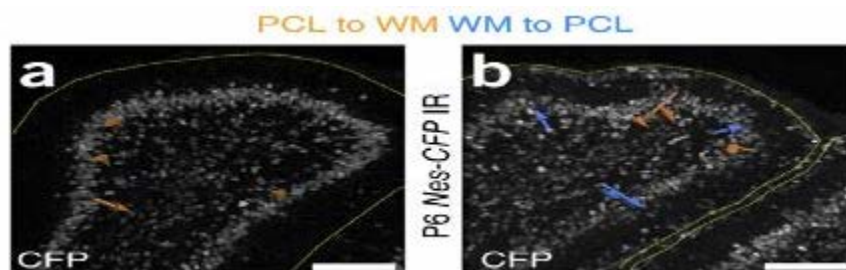
## *The migration of NEPs into the EGL is observed using fluorescence microscopy.*

The migratory patterns of NEPs must first be observed to gain insight and confirmation that cells are in fact moving from the PCL into a foreign brain region, specifically the EGL. To see the migratory patterns of the NEPs immunohistochemistry proves to be efficient in that it allows for differential properties of the cells in focus. Green fluorescent protein(gfp) was the cell marker used to track the NEPs. The gfp protein was attached to the NEPs in the PCL by binding to the DNA of the individual cells. As long as there is oxygen present in the cellular environment the protein has the ability to fluoresce due to the three amino acids- Serine 65, Kerosene 66, Glycine 67- found in the helix of the structure. No further action is required to maintain fluorescence of gfp. Gfp fluorescence was used further to track different proteins such as PAX6, SOX2, and Ki67 so that observation of a possible change in gene expression during migration could be visualized. This way, once migration is observed, the differentiation of the NEPs in the EGL can also be observed.



### *Cellular activity in vitro must be visualized*

The use of immunofluorescence allows for better visualization of the cells in an in vitro environment. Once the cells are visible in the cell culture the use of an inverted microscope provides further aid in the examination of the cell activity. Periodic imaging of the cells under the microscope allows for time lapse videos of live cell behavior in the cell culture. This is important because not only does it help in the acquired results of a particular experiment, it also allows one to check if the correct behavior is occurring in the cell culture or if the in vivo environment failed to be replicated in vitro. This is characterized by different cell growth, expansion, and movement in the culture than what is typically observed in vivo



## Discussion

Before it can be established whether or not NEPs are able to mimic the in vivo behavior outside of the live mice, it must be determined that NEPs are able to grow in a cell culture. After performing the monolayer cell culture, it is expected that NEPs can grow in an in vitro environment. With this growth, the TUNEL cell death assay will show that these cells could, in fact, be damaged. This would develop a baseline for the observation of migration in NEPs to the damaged area for regeneration. By using dsRed coral discosoma sp, mutated gfp (citrine, mcfp) as fluorescent markers and time lapse imaging, the migration pattern of these cells could be observed and recorded. The NEPs are expected to migrate to the EGL to replenish damaged granule cells, as seen in the cerebellum of live wild type mice.

It is anticipated that understanding the migration pathway, and how the cerebellum is able to repair damages during developmental stages in infants can contribute to the prevention of cerebellar hypoplasia which is a risk factor for autism (Wang, 2014).

A research study (Miller, 2008) has uncovered new pathways that can also be held accountable for the migratory patterns of NEPs to the EGL, such as the CXCR4/CXCL12 chemoattractant pathway. The cells that cover the surface of the EGL have SDF1 expression which is the ligand that the CXCR4 receptors in this pathway bind to. Therefore, by putting emphasis on the function of the receptors, the understanding of the chemoattractant signaling on the migration of NEPs during cerebellar regeneration can be enhanced. In the future, the SDF1-CXCR4 chemoattractant pathway can be investigated to understand how this pathway contributes to the migration of NEPs.

### Reflection

As aspiring science professionals, it is imperative that we get experience working in the research field. It gives the opportunity to witness firsthand how today's scientists make contributions to their field of expertise by addressing the gaps in knowledge, brainstorming ideas to dive into those unknown areas, and using the newfound information to expand basic and applied knowledge. The specific experiment that we were presented the opportunity to take part in involves the investigation of the regenerative capacity of the cerebellum after traumatic brain

injury. Working on this project let us develop a skill that is often overlooked by many young scientists: writing scientific papers using proper language in order to summarize background information, experimental planning, procedures, results, and the significance of the findings.

Having to create a lab write-up is a very unique experience due to the fact that one cannot just decide to type one up on any day that they feel like it. First, one must gain experience reading empirical articles relating to the subject of study in order to gain comfort with the complex vocabulary that is found within an article. Many times, the key words included in scientific writing are largely new to the reader experience in related fields of research. It can be compared to learning a new language: one has to learn the meanings of words to try to make sense of the reading material. Once one has gotten the hang of the language, one must decide how to use it. To explain this, just because scientists are comfortable with the language that they use, it does not mean that their audience will have the same level of fluency. Often, the information will have to be simplified in writing so that the reader can gain an understanding that matches the amount of knowledge in their possession.

While looking into the background and analyzing previous experiment results presented a lot of difficulty, it was still not the most challenging part of our research project; the most difficult obstacle to overcome was proposing methods to test our theory but not being able to perform any in an actual laboratory setting. We were unable to obtain the actual stem cells we wanted to investigate because of its exclusivity and price. We could not afford to take any risks mishandling the cells or damaging them accidentally. Not only were the cells out of our reach, the CDC and campus guidelines for the COVID-19 pandemic also restricted us from working in the laboratory at our university. Had we been able to work with the stem cells we were investigating and been able to perform our proposed methods in a laboratory, we would have had evidence to either support or refute our hypothesis. Because of this, our project could only be explained theoretically, not in actuality.

Even though we did not perform our experiments, we spent most of our time reading through previous studies to grasp an understanding of the behavior of NEPs. As previously mentioned, reading new research articles can be difficult due to a new and different jargon that we normally don't use in casual conver-

sations. As undergraduate students with little experience in the research field compared to the post doctoral researchers, adjusting to their language took a lot of time. We spent many weeks breaking down each figure, trying to dissect the experiments and understand what the results meant. We also had to find the aim or purpose of the experiment; we had to figure out what questions the scientists were asking before we could fully understand the answers that they got. Learning any new language takes time, but because we were able to dedicate most of our project to understanding previous studies, coming up with new methods to test our hypothesis was easier than we expected.

This is a lab write-up of our research that is meant for amateur scientists with above-average knowledge or non-science college students. The introduction, procedures, and discussion all aim to use the correct scientific names for the cells and anatomical structures that we focused on for our research, while also giving a detailed, yet not overwhelming, explanation of the expectations and interpretations. We tried to avoid going too deep into any advanced explanations of the occurrences expected to be found in the post-injury cellular environment of our proposed experiment, so that a casual reader with a basic, or even slightly below basic, understanding of neuroscience could follow along with our write up. We also explained our proposed laboratory material to paint a clearer picture of the steps we were planning to take in our research to test our hypothesis. This write-up also gives the reader a basic understanding of the theory behind the experimental tools, and it allows for the possibility to brainstorm about when a scientist may use these tools in other experiments relating to different cellular pathways or different anatomical structures altogether.

After spending hours gathering background information on cellular processes, biochemical tools, and experimental procedures, the work ended up paying off, as it resulted in the communication of scientific information. While reading our proposed study on the behavior of nestin expressing progenitor cells in an in vitro environment, we encourage you to look up anything that you may not understand, or are curious about, whether that may be a single word, a study that we reference, or any structure that you want to gain more knowledge about. Perhaps most importantly, you may want to dive deeper into the background of nestin-expressing progenitors by reading one of the referenced studies, if time allows. By doing this, even though you may not feel like you are doing so, you are thinking about

the reading as an intuitive scientist would. If you want to take it a step further you may even want to think about how this research can be expanded in future studies.

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# It's a Marsh Mallow World in the Summer

*Article Excerpt with Reflection*

**JONATHAN LEHRER**

It is August now and marsh mallows abound. They dance with cattails along the wetland edge in Riverhead and loom large over Levittown lawns. Marsh mallows are scattered haphazardly at the local Aldi and King Kullen. Not in the baking aisle beside tubs of icing and colorful cake mixes, but near the entrance by potted plants, discarded circulars, flung face masks, and a lonely mechanical horse waiting for a quarter. Yes, real marsh mallows.

The subject of these sightings is the *true* marsh mallow (open compound noun with a space) that has faithfully welcomed midsummer long before glamping and gobbling smores marshmallows (closed compound noun with no space). Marsh mallow is a plant, one of myriad herbaceous (non-woody) species in the mallow family (Malvaceae), many of which persist in muck and mire to earn their aquatic appellation. They are justly famous for their gaudy flowers held atop six-foot stalks during the dog days like a constellation of red, pink, and white dinner plates fluttering in the breeze. These mallows may be more familiar as “hibiscus”; our native Long Island “rose mallow” is the beautiful *Hibiscus moscheutos*.

The connection between flowering marsh mallow and gooey marshmallow runs deeper than their prominence during summer. As early as 2000 BCE, the original Egyptians were first to discover that pulp scraped from the fleshy roots of local marsh mallow plants (*Althaea officinalis*) could be boiled with honey to create a thick, soothing medicinal salve. Sugar makes it better, so early 19th century French bakers learned to whip marsh mallow root pulp with sugar to create the forerunner of our familiar tasty treat. The romantic notion of enjoying a confection extracted laboriously from swamp roots gradually fell victim to automation and artificial ingredients. Today's stiff white pucks crammed into clear plastic bags are conjured in a primordial industrial soup of sugar, stabilizers (such as gelatin and xanthan gum), and protein-based “whipping agents” before being extruded onto an infinite conveyor belt. Yum!

The duality of mallow—hibiscus and their kin—as horticultural hero and culinary curiosity runs deep. Every spring between Tax Day and Flag Day a parade of tractor trailers leaves from Florida plant nurseries laden with woody-stemmed *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*, the Chinese (or Hawaiian) Hibiscus. These tropical plants arrive just in time to decorate backyard pools in Pennsylvania

and patio pots in Paducah. All summer long the shrubs, some trained into small trees with artfully braided stems, flaunt blooms in bright pink, red, and yellow. The fall arrival of freezing temperatures brings this show and the plants' existence to an abrupt end. More hardy and permanent is *Hibiscus syriacus*, known colloquially as rose-of-sharon and found everywhere in gardens, roadsides, and waste places. This woody shrub begins its strut around Independence Day with stiff stems that erupt into clouds of white, pink, and purple flowers until early fall. The show overlaps with its swamp- and garden-dwelling marsh mallow cousins, meaning that hibiscus reigns supreme in the summer landscape to delight plant lovers and insect pollinators everywhere.

Beyond our gardens, mallow is ubiquitous with a culinary connection that extends far beyond sugary puffs. Just as summer hibiscus flowers unfurl, we savor the molten marshmallow of campsite smores sandwiched between wafers of chocolate. The key ingredient of chocolate is cocoa derived from seeds of the "chocolate tree" (*Theobroma cacao*), a tropical shrub allied to the mallows that is found in Central and South America. While the flowers of chocolate tree are tiny and decidedly un-hibiscus-like, the hidden treasure of its fruit (indeed, *Theobroma* is Greek for "food of the gods") was well-known to indigenous people centuries before Spaniards introduced cocoa to Europe in the 1500s. Though less familiar than chocolate, okra is equally beloved by connoisseurs of fine cuisine. Okra's iconic tapered green pods (capsules in a botanical sense) lend texture and taste to gumbos, stews, salads, and many other delicacies of the American South. Most folks have never seen okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*) growing in the garden or wild Africa but spy its beautiful yellow flowers and the alliance with hibiscus is confirmed. The 16th century introduction of okra to the Americas from Africa coincides with the slave trade, a troubled history it shares with roselle. This utilitarian plant from West Africa (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) migrated by ship across oceans to Asia, Caribbean islands, and elsewhere by the 17th century. Its flower parts are still beloved today in Jamaica and other sultry summer locales as the basis for a refreshing, brilliant red tea. Roselle leaves are also collected across Asia and enjoyed as a popular vegetable in many cultures.

The summer landscape and warm season menu would be sinfully incomplete without marsh mallow and kin. Thankfully, successful garden cultivation is a breeze and malvaceous culinary ingredients are readily accessible to cooks on a budget. Be on the lookout for mallows in your local garden center, food emporium, or marshy swamp.



## Reflection

This essay benefitted from a semester-long dormancy. Originally conceived in August, it was buried at summer's end, seasoned through the frenetic fall, and harvested in January. Protracted downtime (or “extended growth,” if you will) is a luxury seldom afforded writing assignments, though every writer should acquiesce and let prose rest—be it for 24 hours or 24 weeks—to be revised with fresh eyes. If you do it, defects once hidden will emerge from the void. I hope my readers agree this mallow musing was favored by the extended breather.

My new review once again revealed verbose tendencies and the opportunity to “Omit needless words!” in true Strunkian-style. I accept that many more remain. More important was the chance to revisit the wide divide between two key segments of my audience: the larger group for whom marshmallow is a mere gooey treat and the small minority familiar with mallow as a botanical wonderchild. A central goal for every horticulture communicator, professor or otherwise, is to broaden appreciation for plants within the greater population. This should be easy in our post-pandemic world, where mini-succulents are the new pet rock and everybody loves plants as much as Baby Yoda. Such inclusivity, however, spans widely to encompass casual weekend gardeners, millennials, retirees, and aspiring students. I even hoped to reach those black thumbs who despise the living and prefer plastic grass. Or rocks. Herein lies an opportunity and challenge. How can a writer with one voice craft a message that serves the needs of a mixed (and often strongly elementary) readership? This is a quandary with which my colleagues and I wrestle every day in the dynamic and highly specialized field of horticulture and landscape design. But the struggle is universal.

My strategy was to first embrace my swooning base of hopeless plant lovers—the low-hanging fruit, per se—with botanical descriptions and scientific rigor. Those among you who write about psychology might likewise invoke Freud, while the mainstream economics essayist could name-drop Adam Smith and describe his invisible hand. Regardless of discipline and audience, we should all flash our credentials to quickly get *somebody* on-board the bus! I surmised that my Latin binomials and botanical jargon would prod loyal supporters to quench their thirst for

knowledge and drink the Kool-Aid (or hibiscus tea)! But what of the throngs for whom marshmallow is best intended as an antidote to the healthy potential of sweet potato casserole? Would they embrace the rich backstory of the cultural icon that is mallow? I chose to pique human interest with references, short narratives, and factoids made accessible with imagery, metaphors, and descriptive language. As a species we are fascinated by our mysterious origins and relish “the rest of the story” conveyed through genealogy, etymology, celebrity Wikipedia profiles, gossip columns, and television shows such as *Dirty Jobs* and *How it’s Made*. I hoped my audience would be similarly smitten by the genesis of okra.

Achieving this goal was clearly a tall task! Humor and anecdote are reliable tools for writers seeking to build trust with a novice audience that is skeptical and uninformed. I wagered that even if folks were unmoved by tales of Egyptians harvesting roots to concoct early Marshmallow Fluff, they would certainly be swayed to learn that convenience store Hershey Bars are “food of the gods.” I like to build reader confidence by reinforcing the familiar before tentatively teasing the botanical backstory. I also believe in the tactful use of shock and awe. Can I broaden the botanical umbrella and quicken the pulse of the blackest thumbs and most zealous rock-lovers with stories of hibiscus flowers so large and colorful they border on the obscene? Maybe. Writers cannot predict if their painstaking efforts to draw such connections will ensnare readers and coax them to venture beyond the initial paragraphs. But in this case, I was hopeful.

Many writers can appreciate my struggle to meet the needs of a multi-faceted audience characterized by uneven levels of understanding and interest. The challenge arises in every discipline. No matter how carefully crafted, your battle plan threatens to fail since sacrificing detail for artifice may repulse the mavens in your back pocket, while clinging to lingo threatens potential readers who lurk beyond the edge of the crowd. But this is a risk worth taking. Much of my professional communication—both in the classroom and extracurricular settings—targets an audience rich in horticultural interest but lacking practical experience. I do not gravitate to the peer-reviewed journals only frequented by fellow academics. I prefer to enrich the experience of practicing professionals by sharing anecdotes and novel perspectives, while empowering raw students to gain confidence by citing references and observations to which they can understand and

relate. Writing to meet these goals is laborious, but I find the process rewarding and the source of great pride when the task is done and done well.



# Discourse Analysis: The Impact of the Unspoken Word

*Article Excerpt with Reflection*

**DONNA CEMPA-DANZIGER**

## **Abstract**

Changes in nursing ethics curriculum and pedagogy are of crucial importance now more than ever. Increasing diversification of patient populations (Wilson-Stronks, Lee, Cordero, Kopp & Galvez, 2008) demands that healthcare providers become trained in ethical and empathetic care of people of various cultures, languages, class, gender, and religion. Cultural norms may cause patients to have views of their sense of disease and treatment that differs from our society. Healthcare providers need training to be aware of and sensitive to such differences. Current ethics training may not provide a solid background for new nurses to be comfortable with decision making in treatment decisions. Additionally, there are discrepancies in teaching ethics as well as where to insert ethics content. Some curricular design suggest to insert such ethics content throughout course training (Numminen, van der Arend, & Leio-Kilpi, 2009). Other research has suggested that effective ethics training should occur through singular courses (Gaul, 1987; Gorgulu & Dinc, 2007). Additionally, there is also concern over the quality of instructor knowledge in conducting ethics training (Borhani, Alhani, Mohammadi & Abbaszadeh, 2010). One approach to comprehensive ethics training is to examine current pedagogy and curriculum design through an intersectionality approach as well as through nursing ethics. Intersectionality examines how race, class, gender, and culture overlap and intersect to define individuals and their experiences. By utilizing both approaches, students will gain a greater understanding and foundation for treating diverse people with dignity and quality care.

## **Introduction**

*“We need nursing scholarship that conceptualizes the intersection of class, racialization, gender*

*relations, and other social relations, because we experience our lives not solely as gendered persons, but as classed and racialized persons.” (Anderson, 2006, p. 226)*

There is a critical need to address current nursing pedagogical practice. This need includes the training of nurses to meet the needs of an ever-diversifying population. An increasing influx of patients of differing cultures and languages has left gaps in the education of nurses. These gaps include cultural differences, language barriers, knowledge of cross-cultural diseases, and ability to make ethical decisions pertaining to the care of patients and clients (Campesino, 2008). The present nursing program curriculum at \*\*\*\* College, a demographically diverse community college, does not fully address these gaps in a way that will enable nurses to respond to and execute the needs of their patients appropriately. Current courses of study utilize textbooks which are written for White, middle-class populations, leaving nurses ill-equipped to respond to culturally diverse patient needs. This paper proposes a mapping of the current curriculum through the theory of intersectionality. Intersectionality is the examination of how race, class, gender, and culture overlap and intersect to define individuals and their experiences.

## **Limitations of Intersectionality and Nursing Ethics**

While both intersectionality and nursing ethics are valid tools to elicit pedagogical change, there are limitations. Perhaps the greatest challenge is in changing the majority perspective (Lyiscott, 2019; Velazquez, 2016). People may be resistant to change and could be unresponsive to changes in practice and beliefs. It is crucial in this global society to promote awareness of unjust practices, including legal policies as well as educational pedagogy (Kuczewski & Zaidi, 2017). Conversations surrounding intersectionality are uncomfortable within dominant groups not willing to move away from a position of power or unwilling to acknowledge their role in the perpetuation of oppression (Lyiscott, 2019).

The concept of intersectionality is expansive (Muntinga, 2016). It is daunting to begin the task of how so many variables overlap and how to address specialized needs. Meeting healthcare requirements specialized for ethnicity, gender, and culture, compounds needing the use of intersectionality in healthcare. Attempting to educate nursing students in the ethical and culturally responsive care of such a broad population may be impossible. Do we educate towards the majority or try to address every background? Where is the line drawn? In addition, as intersectionality and nursing ethics meet, some cultures may have different ethical positions than the healthcare provider. How do we, as educators, address potential clashes between beliefs of the patient versus the healthcare provider?

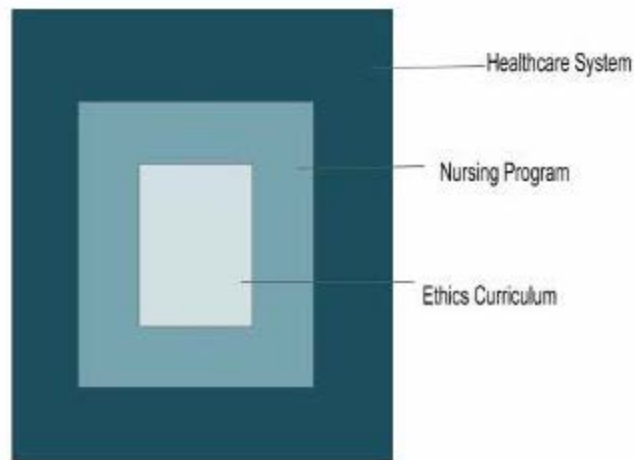
Nursing ethics, as it relates to intersectionality, has several foundational limits. Most textbooks are written by White, middle-class men and do not address the health needs of our diversifying society and its needs (Van Herk, 2011). Nurses, in general, have to take a submissive position to medical colleagues regarding ethical and healthcare issues (Wood, 2005, p. 6). Decisions made by nurses may be met with disapproval or dismissed. There is also a need to keep up ethics pedagogy with ever advancing biomedical advances (Wood, 2005). Many younger nurses, while receiving some ethical training, may not possess the confidence to assert ethical decisions (Martin, 2006). A final foundational limit is the role of care as it applies to intersectionality. There is a duality in care ethics as it applies to intersectionality. While nurses may run the risk of harboring subconscious bias towards patients based on their ethnicities, culture, and socioeconomics, patients may also possess such feelings (Capesino, 2008). Discrimination may cause some patients to resist being cared for by nurses due to ethnic and cultural differences.

## Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a tool to examine if there is a need to change the current bioethics curriculum. Discourse analysis examines the use of language and how it relates to social context (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui & O'Garro Joseph, 2005). Fairclough established a means of language analysis, which is known as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). According to CDA, there are three dimensions to analyze language and its role in society. The first is text, which has multiple interpretations based on the words we choose. Words can reflect underlying attitudes. The second is discursive practice. The words and language used can lead to change, or have the societal dynamic remain the same. Words can present certain values. The last way we can analyze discourse is how words mold societal views and affect social practice (Fairclough, 1992).

This paper examines the use of discourse through intertextual chains (Jorgensen & Philips, 2002). In this process, one examines multiple texts and looks for common themes. For this paper's purposes, the common themes include a need for reform in where ethics is taught within nursing programs as well as a need in reform as to how to teach ethics. This includes a need for reform in incorporating intersectionality within nursing ethics programs as well as the provision of qualified instructors.

Using Fairclough's three-dimensional model, we can see the following:



In this analysis, the meta-level explores the current bioethics curriculum within the pre-nursing program at \*\*\* College. The topics taught within the course are analyzed. The mesolevel examines material presentation, including how and where, within the pre-nursing/nursing program. The macro-level includes how the healthcare system incorporates this material. Discourse on the macro-level includes the examination of how the healthcare organization supports or dismisses the role of nurses in executing ethical decisions, as well as how young nurses are suppressed and dismissed by higher-level or more experienced colleagues (Van Herk, 2011). Missing from the conversation is how to teach ethics with an intersectional approach.

## Need for Curricular Change

Many nursing ethics training programs fall short in providing students with a firm foundation for ethical decision making nor being adept at contributing to the current healthcare environment (Wood, 2005). There is little time allotted to ethics education with many programs offering few, if any, stand-alone nursing ethics courses. The curriculum only allows modules interspersed throughout degree programs. Students and faculty may not realize the importance of ethics training. Many students find the classwork uninteresting and unimportant (Park, Kjervik, Crandell & Oermann, 2012). The lack of qualified instructors is a final concern with ethics training (Ion, 2018). There is a discrepancy in student decision-making confidence based on being taught by an expert versus non-expert instructor (Lin, Lu, Chung and Yang, 2010). All of the above have led to a lack of confidence by nurses in making ethical decisions.

Van Herk (2011) has pointed out a need for discourse regarding “power relations” within nursing



interactions. Struggles between colleagues, doctors, and at the institutional level can impede the ability of nurses to provide quality care. Improving nursing ethics education through an intersectional approach can better equip nurses to address oppression, privilege, and promote social justice (p. 30). According to post-colonial feminism, we need a healthcare system that will respond to the differing social positions of patients (Anderson, 2002). Additionally, an intersectional approach to nursing ethics education may “assist with racism and struggles which occur on the colleague as well as care recipient levels” (Ion, 2018, p. 4). Global nursing is a branch of an intersectional approach. The goal of global nursing is to cultural sensitivity, with nurses collaborating globally to relieve suffering and “safeguard human dignity” (Holmgren, 2017). The basis of this perspective is the premise that diseases and empathetic quality care have borders. Holmgren (2017, p.172), emphasized the “need to address global issues to develop knowledge regarding healthcare, people, suffering and ecology in local and global context.”

## Reflection

“The most difficult and complicated part of the writing process is the beginning.”

– A. B. Yehoshua

Writing any paper has been a struggle for me due to my being out of school for over 30 years. Most of my recent writing is for doctoral course work. When I began the doctoral program, my writing was less than “academic” or “professional.” With each paper I write, I find that I have improved my higher-order thinking. My current work on a book chapter has also challenged my ability to synthesize ideas and find my voice. A technique I have been using while I work is writing down terms with definitions that I am not familiar with. This has greatly improved my working vocabulary and provided me with a personal synonym list. One great challenge I have faced is staying focused and on task. My normal writing schedule consisted of writing for hours on the weekends. One of my instructors suggested that I instead write every day in 15-minute chunks, then take a break. This timing is based on studies of cognitive focus, which have shown that our ability to stay focused is limited to 15-minute segments. A brief explanation is found within this link: <https://jovanevery.co.uk/15-min-writing-challenge/>.

The preceding paper was written for a doctoral course on curriculum design and took approximately two months to write, with the finished product being 28 pages. I have included only certain aspects of it, since its purpose was to redesign a course or program. What makes this paper unique is not the premise, but the technique used—discourse analysis. I had never heard of this type of paper or the term other than knowing discourse involved a “conversation.” A discourse paper looks at word use and how it may reflect current societal thinking or create change. My paper focused on what was missing in the conversation regarding teaching nursing ethics, and that is intersectionality. Not every paper has to present words already said or written; sometimes the most powerful ideas come from what isn’t said. The use of discourse analysis enables the writer to look at what is missing from conversations.

Sometimes when we are given a writing task, we are not aware of its future use. At the time that this paper was written, I truly could not see the purpose or use of discourse analysis in my future work. Since beginning my dissertation writing process, I am seeing the relevance of this type of writing analysis. My dissertation topic uses feminist methodology which looks at unspoken words and conversations. Writing this paper has given me a foundation and practice for my data analysis, which is based on interviews of female faculty. I will be analyzing the interview for what is implied and not overtly stated in addition to what is said.

When beginning any paper, I conduct a Google scholar search on the topic. From the initial search, I select a few papers to scan over, looking for in situ citations that may lead me to more references on my topic of interest. Sometimes I will find an article that is so well written and organized that I emulate the style. I begin every paper with a “hook” which can be a quote or statistic. The goal is to capture readers’ attention and make them want to read more. The quote I chose for this paper sets the stage for the paper’s purpose and is much more interesting than saying “The purpose of this paper is...” The paper goes on to provide a more detailed explanation of the purpose, as well as a brief outline of the paper’s direction. By providing an outline, the reader is given an idea of what to expect. When I am scanning papers for review, I will sometimes look for the outline to decide what areas I want to jump to for fast reading. I also tend to include in the introduction brief definitions of terms that the reader may not be familiar with. This particular paper includes a visual representation of Fairclough’s

three-dimensional model of discourse analysis as it relates to my area of study. The chart provides the reader with a more tangible understanding of the content within the discourse analysis.

My personal writing technique is to “vomit” my ideas onto paper. This allows me to get all my thoughts out at once. I will then try to arrange my ideas into somewhat organized paragraphs. As I write, I re-read previous sections and edit. I do not track my editing, choosing rather to delete and rewrite. Sometimes I will move a sentence down and rewrite it above to decide which one I prefer. I usually walk away from my writing for ten or fifteen minutes before doing any editing, repeating the process in between fits of writing. Once I have finished the writing and editing process, I edit one last time by reading my work aloud. It’s shocking how different the writing sounds when you hear it aloud instead of reading it. A final step in my writing is sending it to an editor who spends most of the time catching my active–passive errors. I would say that in addition to struggling with academic writing, my active–passive usage is poor.

Realize that writing is a slow process and a true labor of love. I hope that by discussing my experience, I have shown you that all writing is important, that writing in short chunks can be more efficient than spending three hours all at once, and lastly, you must edit, edit, edit.

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# MESSAGES FROM WRITERS ON WRITING AND EDUCATION





# Former Beat Writer Reflects

*Reflection with Newspaper Article Excerpt*

**PATRICK CALABRIA**

## Reflection

Before entering the academic world, I was a sportswriter for *Newsday*. My first beat on a professional team was the New York Islanders. I covered the team from 1975 to 1984, including their four straight Stanley Cup championships. Al Arbour, their legendary coach, became a good and trusted friend of mine, and that relationship endured long after he retired (and I left journalism) and we stayed in touch. When Al passed a few years ago, *Newsday* reached out to me—by then I was Vice President for Institutional Advancement at Farmingdale State College—and asked me to write a remembrance of him. That’s the story I have included below.

In putting together my thoughts, my goal as a writer was to provide insight into the kind of person Al was. Readers of sports pages or TV viewers ordinarily do not get a sense of what a coach is outside of the rink, ballpark, or stadium. My objective was to explain what an extraordinary individual Al was, and why he was so beloved. To demonstrate this, I had to come up with examples that would resonate with the *Newsday* audience, whether or not they were even hockey fans. So I came up with a few you will see in the story—examples that I’d hoped would give readers a glimpse of the man behind the player’s bench.

To achieve this, I was conscious of avoiding overly technical sports language. And I wanted to write in simple, clear sentences that revealed my admiration and respect for Al, without anointing him as saintly or flawless. Clarity can’t be achieved with winding, aimless text. Every sentence has to have a point or a purpose. In effect, writing is like a chess match. One move leads to another which leads to another. The moves are not isolated. Rather, they are connected until

arriving at a conclusion. And that conclusion—the ending—has to be unequivocal. It has to make a statement. It has to sum up everything you have said.

So this is what I wrote when I learned Al had passed.

## Former Beat Writer Reflects on Islanders Legend Al Arbour

*Courtesy of Newsday, August 29, 2015*



*Islanders coach Al Arbour after winning the Stanley Cup in 1983. Credit: AP, 1983*

Al Arbour wasn't the coach that opponents and fans always saw—the genius with the frozen glare and the drab suits that ran the gamut from blue to dark blue. He was an innovator and a visionary, and no one ever handled the competing personalities of a star-studded team better. He was a great coach and an even better man.

He pioneered the use of videotape—don't let anyone tell you differently—viewing the flickering images in a darkened room of his sprawling home in Cold Spring Harbor that his devoted wife, Claire, called “the dungeon.” It was there that he noticed between games of the 1976 quarterfinals

against Buffalo that star center Gil Perreault regularly skated across the blue line with the puck and screeched to a stop at a spot between the faceoff circles.

Arbour directed his defensemen to converge on that space, forcing Perreault to surrender the puck. And Perreault scored only two goals while the Islanders swept the last four games to take the series, 4-2.

He and lifelong pal Scotty Bowman were among the first coaches to borrow the Russian concept of using five-man units, pairing defensemen with the same forwards, and there wasn't a coach alive whom Arbour couldn't outfox. He fooled his players, too, so they nicknamed him "Radar," because he always seemed to know what they were thinking or doing.

And when the Islanders heatedly discussed whether to draft a young sniper, it was Arbour—who'd built his reputation as a player and coach on impenetrable defense—who told chief scout Jimmy Devellano, "Let's go for the home run hitter."

That's how an overlooked right wing named Mike Bossy came to be an Islander.

He was before his time in so many other ways, some of them off the ice. When the Islanders were debating whether to allow a female reporter into the locker room in the prehistoric era of the 1980s, Arbour said he'd leave the decision up to the players, but urged them "not to do anything that would cost that young lady her job."

And they relented.

He pretended to be hard-boiled, but the truth is he had a heart as soft as a jelly doughnut. He peeled the paint off the locker-room walls with his thunderous voice and a slam of his fist when the team needed a kick in the pants, but he cared about his players and loved most of them. When he was told that Jean Potvin, a pet defenseman, had been traded, he wept.

Returning after a stomach-roiling propeller flight from Boston one morning, he noticed that I'd caught a virus. But seeing the blood drained from my face, he told me to cancel the taxicab and gave me a lift home. I was around a long time, and I can't think of another coach of his stature who would do that.

When I sat beside him on the deathly silent charter flight back from Edmonton after the dynasty was ended, his voice was choked to a whisper. I told him after four straight Stanley Cups that he had no reason to be sad. "I'm not sad for me," he replied. "I'm sad for them," and he pointed around the darkened cabin at his inconsolable players.

Once he retired, I called him at his home in Florida about once a year to check up on him, and

after the last conversation we had, I knew the outlook wasn't good. That time, I was the one who wept.

He had a combustible temper and he could stubbornly hold a grudge. He wasn't perfect. But he was as close to a perfect coach and a perfect man as I've ever met.

# The Process of Writing as a Spontaneous Act of Storytelling: From the Classroom to a Published Essay

*Reflection with Article Excerpt*

**CHIARA DE SANTI**

If I think about the development of my writing style and philosophy, I see it as a learning process that never ends. However, there was a starting point. Mine dates back to when I was a little girl in Tuscany, Italy, writing in her diary. I thought that my entire family—not just my parents—was interested in my journal entries, so I typed up the words from my written diary on my father’s typing machine (an old Olivetti), made copies, created a cover, and gave it to everybody as a Christmas gift. I was very proud of that accomplishment, but I am not too sure how happy my family members were with what they received. This was my first publication, and as far as I was concerned, it might have been my last. It was not the case, as I discovered decades later.

My writing process became a little bit more serious in high school, including some notable disasters, such as getting an F in Italian composition on the final exam before going to college. It is not that I was a total disaster in writing (earning lower C’s), but I never did as poorly at writing in K–12 as I did during this last exam before leaving high school. Therefore, I completed my teenage school years believing that I was not able to write, and I started my university degree in languages at the University of Florence—eventually graduating in Russian and French—laboring under this certainty. However, something changed during a seminar that was taught by well-known and renowned British historian, Paul Ginsborg.<sup>1</sup> Students had to write a long research paper (35–40 pages) on a European modern history topic, and I candidly and openly stated to the whole group of students and my professor as well that I was not able to write decently. Ginsborg’s assistant gave me confidence just by saying that this was more my perception than the reality,

1. The extensive Ginsborg bibliography includes *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943–1988* (Penguin Books, 1990) and *Family Politics: Domestic Life, Devastation and Survival, 1900–1950* (Yale UP, 2014). I was still finishing this essay when Paul Ginsborg passed away on May 11, 2022, in Florence, leaving a notable empty space among those who were fortunate enough to have known him. I dedicate this chapter to Paul Ginsborg.

and that writing is a process that can be learned. It seems that I have learned some lessons since then.

With a Ph.D. in history and a second one in Italian, I am now an academic with several publications both in Italian and in English, in a myriad of formats: books, book chapters, printed and online articles, encyclopedia entries, translations, newspapers articles, book reviews, and also a (self-published) children's book that I did with my family: *C'era una volta un Pidocchione who travelled the world* (later translated into Italian by my mother). Academically, I mostly write on pedagogy, film, history, and literature, and if you ask me what type of writer I am, I can say that I am a spontaneous one. We all learn differently and we all write differently, following processes that work best for us. In K-12, my mother, who is a retired high school teacher, tried to make me study like she did; unsuccessfully I would have to say, because I found my own personal way of learning that is rather different from hers. I believe that graduating with honors from the University of Florence—where Paul Ginsborg taught for many years—proved to my mother that I had found a way of learning that suited me and brought me success.

The relationship I had back then with my mother with regard to my reflection upon the writing process has been mirrored within a more recent family dynamic. This time, my husband is involved. He is a former attorney and academic who is now an administrator. He has a different way of writing, for he is a far less spontaneous writer, but rather a more structured one, who diligently plans and follows outlines. I can't create an outline for my writing—I get allergic reactions to it!—and I am not as structured as he is. He tried to teach me how to write by starting with an outline, again unsuccessfully. It is not that his way is better than mine, or vice versa; they are simply different ways of approaching the same process. This was made clear to us when we attended together a workshop on writing at our previous institution, where we were reassured that both ways are fine, just different. Back then, I discovered that I am a spontaneous writer. Now, let's see how my writing process may start—"may" because it does not follow the same process every time.

Usually, the topic of a writing piece emerges by chance. It can be informed by my teaching, by having read a novel, or having watched a film that stimulates my curiosity; and with me, curiosity is the key. Once my curiosity has been set in motion and I chose the main subject of analysis, I think of how to tackle it, namely my focus, the points that I want to make, my main thesis. My analytical approach also informs my research on that specific primary source. Researching and reading secondary sources is a process that continues throughout the actual writing, however I certainly always start with research. Then, I start writing: I sit at the desk and type, usually starting from the introduction. Although professors, mentors, and advisors (and my husband) have tried to teach me that the introduction and conclusion should be written last, I start with the introduction because I need to have a beginning, and I can't start from the second paragraph,

omitting the opening. Obviously, I revise the introduction multiple times, and sometimes the introduction becomes something completely different from the first draft, but mentally it gives me structure and order.

If I have to visualize my writing, I see it as a flow of words that splash out of my thoughts like a waterfall, continuous and incessant. I love to write, and I do it out of passion and for fun, although it is required for my job. And I see it as a storytelling act; namely I am telling the readers a story, something that they might be curious about. As storytelling has become my current approach to writing, I can recognize that my style has changed over the years. When I started writing academic pieces years ago, I tended to have a very academic style, strictly following the formal rules of my disciplines, the dos and don'ts. With time, I have developed a more conversational and less formal approach to writing, precisely because I see it as being in conversation with the readers. This means that if you are reading these lines, I might have stimulated your curiosity until this point, but if you had stopped earlier, it might indicate that I was not able to converse with you. As a writer, my goal is to keep the attention of the reader until the end of the essay, and if it doesn't happen, it means that I was not able to communicate with the reader in the right way. Obviously, one doesn't know how many readers can reach the end, but a writer of any sort still hopes to have achieved this goal because writers want to be read, not just published. Now let's look at the sample I provide here to explain how the essay entitled "'Eat First': Motherhood and Italian American Gastronomy in the Films of Martin Scorsese" was born.

The piece I'm going to talk about is part of conference proceedings published first online in the spring of 2017 through the University of Toronto, and later that year in print.<sup>2</sup> I believe that everything one writes has a story behind it that might link together various layers of their lives, from the professional side to the private, from interests to *il caso* (fate), as we say in Italian. When I can, I try to explain to my readers the story behind my work to help them understand why I wrote it. In this case, I will share with you the behind-the-scenes process that brought me to this publication, since I did not disclose it in the publication itself.

To tell the story in one sentence: I first presented the research at a conference organized by the University of Toronto at Mississauga in mid-March 2016, and then I published an essay based on the presentation the following year. The story is not as simple as one might think. Let's start with the conference, devoted to *Gastronomy, Culture, and the Arts: A Scholarly Exchange of Epic Portions*. In my conference paper and later published essay, I focus on some of Martin Scorsese's films, but how did I choose to present them, specifically focusing on motherhood and gastronomy? Certainly, Scorsese is a well-known Italian American director, but few critics, academics, and film

2. Chiara De Santi. "'Eat First': Motherhood and Italian American Gastronomy in the Films of Martin Scorsese." Teresa Lobalsamo, Adriano Pasquali, and Caroline Lebec (eds.). *Gastronomy, Culture, and the Arts: A Scholarly Exchange of Epic Portions* (New York, Ottawa, and Toronto: Legas Publishing, 2017), 129–142.

studies scholars have focused on a theme that is so specific and possibly, in the view of some, narrow. To further understand, we have to step back in time.

Let me tell you that everything started at my prior institution several years previously. I was asked to teach a course on documentary history and criticism. A colleague of mine, who was scheduled to teach it, had to take a leave of absence, so she suggested me as her substitute. Although I can't say that I had specialized in the documentary genre back then, this course ended up being one of the most fulfilling experiences of my career so far, letting me dive deeper into documentaries from the United States and other countries. While I was expanding my horizons in this territory, I bumped into Scorsese's documentary *Italianamerican* (1974) and then his first short, filmed while he was still at New York University, *It's Not Just You, Murray* (1964). Watching them, I noticed the presence of Scorsese's mother, and the connections between mother, motherhood, and gastronomy, specifically Italian and Italian American gastronomy. I became curious and watched other Scorsese films, adding more titles to the list that exemplify this connection. When the Call for Papers for the University of Toronto at Mississauga's conference was circulated, I decided to send an abstract and I wrote the first full-length one included below (635 words):

When Martin Scorsese filmed *It's Not Just You, Murray*, it was 1964, and the Italian American filmmaker was 22 years old and still attending New York University. In this short film (15 minutes), Scorsese's mother, Catherine, portrays the mother of the titular Murray, who always offers her son a plate of spaghetti ("eat first", she tells her son), thereby establishing two important features of Scorsese's filmmaking: the importance of the family and of food as identifying ethnic values of Italian Americans. With this in mind, my intention is to analyze the films by Scorsese where his own mother, Catherine Cappa Scorsese, plays the role of a mother of a character to evaluate the role of food and motherhood, especially considering that she often actually cooked the meals for some of the scenes and for the cast (Catherine Scorsese, *Italianamerican: Il libro di cucina della famiglia Scorsese*, 2010: 123). Among the films taken into consideration are *It's Not Just You, Murray* (1964), *Who's That Knocking at My Door?* (1969), *The King of Comedy* (1982), *Goodfellas* (1990), *Casino* (1995), and the documentary *Italianamerican* (1974), which stars Scorsese's parents, who share their families' history, and which makes the food a central aspect of this (auto)biographical documentary. Important in the analysis of these films and documentary is Simone Cinotto's study on *The Italian American Table* (2013), where the historian contextualizes the importance of food and family in the Italian American community of New York City in the first decades of 20th century up to the 1940s. If food defines Italian American ethnicity (Cinotto: 3), as Cinotto explains, "the construction of Italian American food culture was a heavily gendered process, resulting in a feminization of the ethnic domestic sphere and in women's specialized roles as supervisors of food preparation and consumption" (Cinotto: 11). Furthermore, the role of the mother within the fam-



ily, principally responsible for preserving the unity of the family and its moral values and traditions (Cinotto: 57–71), helps explain why this role is so embedded in some of Scorsese’s films, to the point of having his own mother play the role of a mother who prepares food for her son, and in this way reproducing the ethnic microcosm of an Italian American family. To understand the presence of the mother in Scorsese’s films, one should not forget that “the prevalent image of the Italian immigrant mother in children’s memories is that of a woman completely absorbed by her role, ‘always’ busy in the kitchen and the home” (Cinotto: 57). This is why Catherine Scorsese continues to act in her son’s films as she acted in her own life, thus blurring the borders between fiction and reality.

However, because the required words for the abstract was limited to 200, I had to reduce my full-length abstract before submitting my proposal to the conference committee (201 words):

When Martin Scorsese filmed *It’s Not Just You, Murray*, it was 1964, and the Italian American filmmaker was 22 years old and still attending New York University. In this short film (15 minutes), Scorsese’s mother, Catherine, portrays the mother of the titular Murray, who always offers her son a plate of spaghetti (“eat first,” she tells her son), thereby establishing two important features of Scorsese’s filmmaking: the importance of the family and of food as identifying ethnic values of Italian Americans. With this in mind, my intention is to analyze the films by Scorsese where his own mother, Catherine Cappa Scorsese, plays the role of a mother of a character, to evaluate the role of food and motherhood, especially considering that she often actually cooked the meals for some of the scenes and for the cast (Catherine Scorsese, *Italianamerican: Il libro di cucina della famiglia Scorsese*, 2010: 123). Among the films taken into consideration are *It’s Not Just You, Murray* (1964), *Who’s That Knocking at My Door?* (1969), *The King of Comedy* (1982), *Goodfellas* (1990), *Casino* (1995), and the documentary *Italianamerican* (1974), which stars Scorsese’s parents, who share their families’ history, and which makes the food a central aspect of this (auto)biographical documentary.

For all my abstracts (conference and publications alike), at first, I do not adhere to the maximum required words, but I write my proposal in full and then I reduce it, adjusting to requirements and guidelines. Very often I incorporate the full-length abstract in the actual conference paper or publication, but this part of the story will be shared later.

Once my abstract was accepted for the University of Toronto conference, I started my research. Having an historical background beyond the one in film, literature, and pedagogy, very often my theoretical framework tends to be historical. The conference paper was no exception. To ground the piece within history, my readings started with a book that I had to review for CHOICE, the publishing house of the Association of College and Research Libraries, for which I have been a reviewer since 2009. In 2014, I was assigned to review Simone Cinotto’s academic book, *The Ital-*

*ian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City*, and this book was fresh in my mind. From there, I dove into more history works—books, book chapters, and articles—dealing with Italian and Italian American gastronomy as a defining identity of this specific group. Once I read what I would call preliminary readings, I wrote the conference paper in a very spontaneous way (namely, without an outline), starting from the full-length abstract and producing four drafts. In my field, at conferences we usually read papers for which we are generally allotted 15–20 minutes. With practice, I learned to calibrate a conference paper for the time that I have at my disposal: in this case, I wrote eight double-spaced pages in 12-point Times New Roman, with a total of 2,724 words.

The conference went well, and the paper attracted interest and received feedback, and when the presenters were asked to publish their contributions in the conference proceedings, I accepted with joy because, for me, writing is an act of love for the discipline. It is one of my passions, and I take the opportunity to do it when the occasion knocks at my door, as in the case of the piece that you are reading right now, if you got to this point. Obviously, there is an ocean between a conference paper and a publishable and published work, because a conference paper is still a rough draft, including developing thoughts, with some research still needing to be carried out later (the second phase of readings after the preliminary one, or further readings). In my case, the research for the conference paper did not include the bibliography on Scorsese, which I fully explored through library databases (MLA and JStor among the others) for my published essay.

Once the research and my further readings were completed and I had in mind my final framework, I visualized the puzzle of the various connected pieces, with the pieces representing the ground research (the secondary sources: preliminary and further readings) and Scorsese's films that I was focusing on (primary sources). I went back to the last draft of the conference paper and saw it as the skeleton of the final product that I wanted to achieve for publication.<sup>3</sup> Between April and June 2016, I produced ten drafts of the essay, which I numbered from one to ten. This means that I wrote, sometimes printed out, read, and revised ten times before submitting my piece to the editors. Some drafts were not so different from the next, but since I let every draft sit for a few days before looking at it again, there was always something to change, adjust, add, and cut.

For the first submission to the editors (yes, there are more than one), I followed the guidelines that we were provided (MLA style, which is the preferred style in my field, but sometimes we also deal with Chicago style, APA, or other options provided by individual publishing houses). At this point, my essay was already quite different from the conference paper if you only think that I ended up with 5,562 words—from the 2,724 of the conference paper—without counting the bibli-

3. At this point, I created a folder in my Drop Box where I placed the conference material, including the conference paper, and where I added everything that could be useful for the final piece, such as secondary sources, publishing guidelines, etc.

ography, which added another 770 words. The work was not done, though. A few months later, I received the chapter back from the editors with requested revisions, and I worked on them, producing five more drafts of the essay before resubmitting my final version to the editors. In the spring of 2017, the essay was published online and in the fall of the same year, it was published in print. The circle that began with the University of Toronto conference was closed and I felt happy and accomplished. Unfortunately, the ecstatic moment of full enthusiasm and happiness that I experienced with my first publication<sup>4</sup> has never repeated itself again: the subsequent publications have never given me the same level of excitement as the first one, even when they were books.

Anyways, once an essay is published, it can be useful to look back at the process. As for many, for me (and for some of my students) the introduction and conclusion are always the most difficult part of a work because they represent the perfect circle: in the introduction, you present your research to the readers and you tell them what they are going to find in reading it, and in the conclusion, you wrap up your work and you might also open the doors to an expansion of your research, a sort of “wait for the sequel,” even if there might not be one. The introduction is key because you want the readers to become interested in your piece, and you don’t want to lose them at the end of the first page. So, if you are reading this last part, I have been successful. And yes, you want to get the readers curious and ready to go on a journey with you, with an author (in this case, a film director such as Martin Scorsese), and with the characters that you are transposing from a film to the page, electronic or in print. To attract the attention of whoever is reading, if I can find a suitable one, I like to add a meaningful quotation before the introduction. In this case, the quotation is from Martin Scorsese himself:

The Italians of my parents’ generation are held together by the notion of the family. That is why the pasta sauce is so sacred to the Italian family.<sup>5</sup>

This quote immediately tells the readers that the piece is about Scorsese and the notion of an Italian (American) family at whose center are mothers and food. The introduction then becomes academic and reminiscent of the conference abstract:

When Martin Scorsese filmed *It’s Not Just You, Murray*, the year was 1964, and the Italian

4. My very first publication right after graduating from the University of Florence with a degree in languages (the equivalent of a Master’s degree in the United States) was “La donna nell’Asia centrale sovietica negli anni Venti [The Woman in Soviet Central Asia in the 1920s].” *Il Calendario del Popolo* 659 (Dec. 2001): 26–35. Cristina Carpinelli, who guided me through the publication process, was the first scholar to believe that I could publish what I wrote, to the extent that she later included another essay of mine in a monograph of her own. Let me thank her again from my heart.
5. Quoted in Scorsese, Catherine: *Italianamerican: The Scorsese Family Cookbook*. Edited by Georgia Downard, Random House, 1996, 3.

American filmmaker was twenty-two years old and still attending New York University. In this short film of roughly fifteen minutes, Scorsese's mother, Catherine Cappa Scorsese (1912–97), portrays the mother of the titular Murray, who continuously offers her son a plate of spaghetti ("Eat first," she exhorts her son), thereby establishing two important features of Scorsese's filmmaking: the importance of the family and gastronomy as identifiers of the ethnic values of Italian Americans in New York City, both of whose production of ethnic identities are explored by Simone Cinotto in his *The Italian American Table*, published in 2013. With this in mind, those films by Scorsese where his own mother Catherine plays the role of a character's mother, often portrayed in the act of cooking or serving food, further the "representation of ethnicity" (Braudy 27), which is analyzed in order to evaluate the role of gastronomy and motherhood in Scorsese's cinema.

As I said, the conclusion closes a circle that was started with the introduction:

As this analysis of films across Scorsese's career confirms, the Italian American director has undoubtedly paid homage to his ethnicity, which he accomplished in part by casting his own mother in the role of a mother cooking for her son(s) and her family. Moreover, it is the Italian American—possibly Sicilian—food prepared by the mother that carries a precise gendered, social, gastronomic, and ethnic connotation. It is specifically Catherine Scorsese who helps the director to define those family values that are renegotiated by Scorsese himself, as his search for the self passes through Italian American gastronomy and motherhood. Furthermore, Catherine's mothering roles themselves have transformed across the films: while in both *It's Not Just You, Murray* and *Who's That Knocking at My Door* she is a silent Italian American mother wearing black, cooking for her children, and very likely intended to invoke an Old World stereotype, in *Italianamerican* and *Goodfellas*, as a mother dressed in colors (pink and blue) rather than black, she emerges as a stronger, talkative Italian American woman, prioritizing family and ethnicity through complete meals. In fact, while in the first pair of films Catherine Scorsese serves only a single dish (spaghetti and a sort of meat pie), in the second pair of films she serves full meals, yet still without consuming them in front of the camera. Even as the mother's role has gone through a (re)definition and maturation in these four films, the gendered and mothered preparation of food continues to be an identifier of ethnicity even as it goes through generational changes. However, notwithstanding an overall development of the mother figure within Italian American society, the *mamma's* first and foremost command remains: "Eat first."

As you can see, the last sentence of the essay is a key one: "the *mamma's* first and foremost command remains: 'Eat first.'" I closed the reading of my paper at the conference in the same way, giving dramatic and theatrical emphasis to the "Eat first" (*mangia*, in Italian). Why? Because it

represents the piece itself: it recalls Scorsese's short, *It's Not Just You, Murray*, where Scorsese's mother always reminds her son "to eat first," highlighting the importance of motherhood and food in the Italian American community and in some of Scorsese's films. And this is also what I always do: before writing...I eat first!

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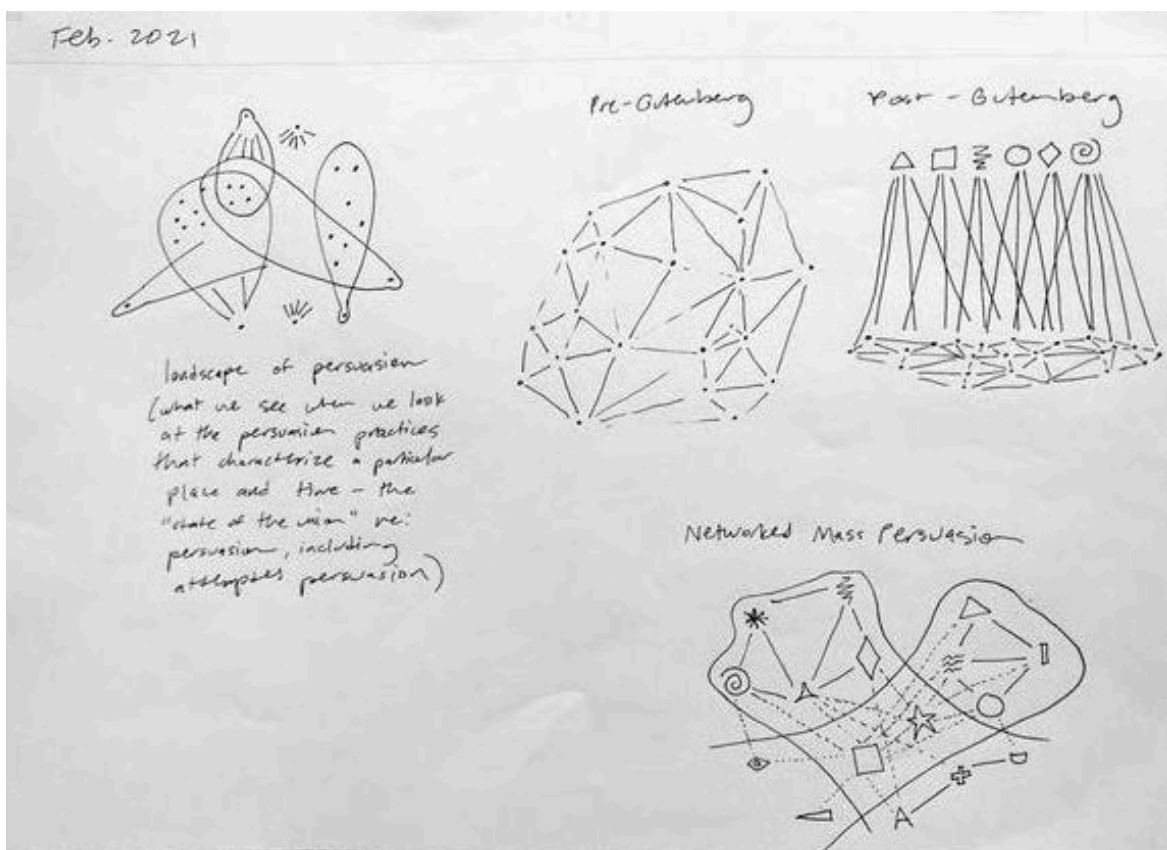
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# “The Generation and Uses of Chaos”: Rhetorical Invention as the Taming of a Wild Garden

Reflection

**DAN EHRENFELD**



In 1991, George R. R. Martin began writing *A Game of Thrones*, a fantasy novel that would eventually become a *New York Times* bestseller and an Emmy award-winning HBO series. As of this writing, Martin is seven years late delivering the sixth book of the series (Flood, “Barbarians”). His fans are not happy. When he says that he’s going on vacation or watching a football game, he gets hate mail (“how dare you do that, finish the book”) (Flood, “Getting More”). He says the book “will be done when it’s done” (Brown).

Conventional wisdom would say that Martin needs discipline. He needs plans. He needs schedules and outlines. But Martin's own explanation of his writing process makes it clear that he's not that kind of writer. Speaking to the *Guardian* in 2011 he said, "I think there are two types of writers, the architects and the gardeners....The architects plan everything ahead of time, like an architect building a house. They know how many rooms are going to be in the house, what kind of roof they're going to have, where the wires are going to run, what kind of plumbing there's going to be. They have the whole thing designed and blueprinted out before they even nail the first board up. The gardeners dig a hole, drop in a seed and water it ... And I'm much more a gardener than an architect" (Flood, "Getting More"). For Martin, planning a piece of writing means starting with a seed of a story. He digs a hole and plants that seed. He waters it.

But he's never quite sure what's going to sprout out of the ground. He doesn't know how many branches it's going to have. He has to let it emerge. In its own time. On its own terms.

Unlike Martin, I don't have a fanbase that sends me hate mail. If I miss a deadline, no one will notice except the editor. But I'm definitely a "gardener." I sometimes feel, like Martin, that I have no idea where a piece of writing is going. I dive in before I'm ready. I get stuck. I try something different. I don't know what I'm doing. And I have no idea whether I'm going to pull it off.

Sounds terrible, right? But being a "gardener" has actually served me well. Each time I start a project, there's a "seed" that I know I want to plant. For Martin, that seed was a fully-formed vision that came to him one day—a vision of a boy witnessing a beheading and then finding some direwolf pups in the snow (Gilmore). For me, a scholar who studies rhetoric and writing, the visions are a little bit less dramatic. For the past few years, I've been asking myself questions about persuasion, activism, and social media: What do people share? How do they coordinate with one another to spread certain ideas? How do they influence one another? I've doodled some ideas, which is one way that I try to tend a garden that's particularly weedy. The vision that keeps coming back to me—the "seed" of this project—is a zoomed-out view of the whole "ecology" within which persuasion happens. This doodle isn't a blueprint. It's just a vision, put on paper. Maybe nothing! Or maybe a seed of something. When I drew the doodle that you see here, I was thinking a lot about how our "rhetorical ecologies" have changed over the course of three different eras—the pre-Gutenberg era (before the advent of print), the post-Gutenberg era (after the advent of print), and the digital era. In this doodle, you can see that I'm trying to map out these different eras. It was my first try. In the months after I made this doodle, I wrote pages and pages of notes and outlines. Sometimes it led nowhere. Sometimes I started to find my footing. Even now, there are moments when I curse the mess of this project. I tell myself that I'm never going to do this again. Next time I'm going to plan this all out, like an architect. No more waiting. Not more tending the soil. No more uncertainty. No more false starts. I'm just going to draft the blueprints and execute them.



But I'm not an architect. Trained in rhetorical studies, I know that new ideas and arguments are not just invented during the "prewriting" phase of a project; they are invented throughout the writing process. Rhetoricians call this *inventio*, or invention. As compositionist Janet Emig teaches us, writing is "a unique form of learning" that eventually yields "a record of the journey from jottings and notes to full discursive formation" (Lauer 82). Ann Berthoff similarly writes that "meanings don't come out of the air, we make them out of a chaos of images, half-truths, remembrances, syntactic fragments, from the mysterious and unformed." And here's my favorite part from Berthoff: "When we teach pre-writing as a phase of the composing process, what we are teaching is not how to get a thesis statement but the generation and uses of chaos" (qtd. In Garrett, Landrum-Geyer, and Palmeri).

Eventually, I know that I want my work to be valued by a community of rhetoric and writing scholars around the world. In other words, whatever I write needs to help my field get closer to its goal—understanding how rhetoric and writing work. But the alchemical process of making order out of chaos usually remains a private struggle. Emig and Berthoff perfectly describe this "gardening" approach to writing. It's not about the finished product. It's about the generation and uses of chaos. The doodling, the note-taking, the crumpling of papers—all of these practices should be understood not as steps done before writing but *as the writing process itself*.

If I've done my job well, the dirty work of taming this garden won't be visible to my audience at all. Only I will know that one of my chapters was based on the doodle that you see here. Only I will know that I couldn't have developed the argument that I developed if I hadn't spent months doodling and jotting down half-formed thoughts. In my experience, this private self-torture is a crucial part of the writing process. And yes, designing the architecture of a text is important. I've done some of that too. But giving myself the time that I need to wrestle with a project—to tame it, but also to watch it get out of control—is important. It's something that you can't really plan in advance. There is no blueprint. You just have to let it happen.

By opening up my notebook and sharing one of my doodles, I hope that I've been able to offer a glimpse of "the generation and uses of chaos." This doodle, like many of my doodles over the years, is a record of an obsession working itself out. And though I haven't read Martin's books, my guess is that his success is at least partly attributable to this "gardening" approach to *inventio*. When Martin began writing *A Game of Thrones*, it was just a few mental images. And then it became a story. And then it became a trilogy. As he cultivated a garden of characters and plot-lines, he re-envisioned the whole thing as a seven-part series. As of this writing, an HBO spinoff is in the works, with Martin serving as co-creator and co-producer. Who better to manage this chaos than a gardener tending such a wild garden?

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# Re-Gendered Words

*Op-Ed Excerpt with Reflection*

**STEVIE FAMULARI**

## **On the Topic of Yous**

*Op-ed, updated May 2021\**

As a new experience one December, I spent a holiday as a sales associate in a retail clothing company on 5th Avenue in New York City. This is an elite area where countless hours each day are spent on presentation—all collars folded and opened to the same distance, hangers placed one finger distance apart, all edges that face the first view are lined, phones are answered in less than 2 rings, the experience of shopping is a priority, and customers are greeted by first names if known. To customers who walk in, if their names are not yet known, “sir” or “ma’am,” “miss” or “ms” are the choices. When the customer is at the purchase area “guest” is also used.

Behind the scenes there is a different dialogue for salutations. The most common salutation between the majority of womxnagers when addressing a full group of people who identify as womxn, or occasionally the group with the exceptional male identifying sales associate, is “guys.” The consideration shown to guests for acknowledgwomxnt connected to their gender using “sir” or “ma’am” is quickly diminished to referring to womxn as men, and it is largely done without concern to any generation of people.

Presently there is not a salutation that is acceptable in definition solely to womxn, or for distinct multiple genders. Using “ladies” to address a group of males is considered offensive. Refer to military training where calling soldiers using the term “ladies” is meant to imply that they are weak, suggesting the femxle gender is less than that of males.

Nonetheless, there presently is not a salutation that is specific to womxn yet acceptable for both genders. Granted, there are some non-gender specific greetings that are used for a group of people. Some examples include “People,” “Ya’ll,” “Crew,” “Everyone,” “Yo Peeps,” and “Yous.” I can appreciate that not everyone can, or wants to, pull off the last choice of “Yous” which requires skill and dedication to a full Brooklyn accent, a la Joe Pesci in *My Cousin Vinny*.

Perhaps a new word can be created and popularized in my lifetime that is used solely to mean

womxn or to equally address both genders in a non-offensive or demeaning fashion. I propose one of the following words would fill this void:

- xxax (pronounced zaks)
- gynes (pronounced jīns, with a j sound)
- gynz (same pronunciation as previous, with modern spelling)
- caplans (pronounced KAP-linn)

The words have thought from this author, though not all are existing words in the dictionary.

Xxax is a new word based on the xx, xy chromosome, and the idea that everyone starts off as a femxle in the womb, and then the biological gender is further developed as either male or femxle. The spelling celebrates the xx chromosome.

Gynes, is an existing word, simple to roll of the tongue as ‘guys’, but with a j sound. This is even based on a word that means a femxle social insect that is or has the potential to become a leader, in contrast to workers. The alternative spelling, ‘gynz’ is a new word with a modern twist, such as the use of ‘thx’ for ‘thanks’.

“Caplans” has a backstory, such as the derivation of “guys” also does. The word “guys” is derived from a longer herstory, starting with an individual named Guy Fawkes, who along with his followers, attempted to burn down the parliawomxnt, not successfully. The word changed meanings through the centuries from its origin of a group of men who fuck up something, and ultimately made it to the United States where it became used in the modern culture to mean a group of males and later a group of mixed gender. In single use ‘guy’ is an individual male, but in its plural use womxn are expected to role into the blended group of men. The same cannot be said of pluralizing ‘gal’ to ‘gals,’ with men feeling they should role into that group.

The choice to find an obscure story of a womxn led me to Frieda Caplan, a story I remember per chance. For those of an older generation, they may recall that kiwis were not easy to find in supermarkets in the United States until more recently. It is through the efforts of Frieda Caplan that kiwis are now readily available for an affordable price in the United States. Thus, the choice of an obscure event lead by the efforts of a womxn and the resulting word of “caplans.”

In addressing colleagues then and now, I state my offense to the use of “guys” in reference to the group of people I am included within, and stated why it is not an appropriate salutation. For my part, I have stopped acknowledging questions and cowomxnts from any individual who continues to use salutations that are not suitable to my gender, or at least acceptable to both genders, and call groups of all people ‘gals.’ Admittedly, my lack of acknowledging a question and calling groups with men ‘gals’ causes a few conflicts and discussions with both co-workers and strangers.

The fundamental issue comes to choices on how we treat people, and the level of consideration, respect, and equity shown by the words we use. Deliberateness and attention to our words is a true sign of mindfulness. Until a new word—a true original, a true first of a greeting—is popularized, you have choices when talking to ya'll. As everyone makes their choices of acknowledgments, you peeps can realize that caplans are affected, in seen and unseen ways, by these choices.

*\*in an effort to use words that are gendered towards womxn to address equity, some words have been adjusted accordingly.*

## Reflection

In this piece as with others I started with the idea in my head and then let it go for at least a day or more to make sure it still stuck in my head and was worth my time and energy to create. This one stuck for a while and made me happy to think about. Meditating also helps me well beyond the words of this paper. Meditation before writing is helpful for me to hear my voice and the story I want to tell; sometimes I can even peacefully hear how to tell it. Quiet and time are absolute requirements for me to write.

The next step in my process for me is to speak part of the article into my phone as a Word document first—without edits. When I express my ideas aloud in the early rounds I am able to think more clearly and able to get most of what I want out of me, in my own voice. Pre-editing discourages me and feels limiting. In this round of speaking into the phone there are sometimes curse words, incorrect grammar, and inaccurate wording. But again, no editing in this round. I have found that starting on my laptop is intimidating—the empty screen feels challenging. The phone with voice recognition into a Word document has been invaluable in my writing.

After these steps, I review the writing on my laptop, with the initial text in red color. Once a sentence is complete and in solid shape, I change the text to black. This allows me to see the red text as the items which need to be worked on and the black text as basically complete. Sometimes single words in a sentence stay in red until I find the best word or check and complete a reference.

In this op-ed piece I was looking for an introduction for just one of the womxn stories of inequity of gender in words both spoken and written. The initial piece was completed a few years ago while I still was working the holiday at a retail store. Since the initial writing I have updated it only once while also continuing to create further writings and artworks about gendered words and the severe imbalance of masculine words, as well as the effects of it on womxn and culture.

This piece steers clear of jargon words—terminology that is specific to a field and used with a definition specific to a field. Sometimes jargon is used without context or explanation and this can be confusing to a reader. When specific terminology is needed due to the nature of the writing it is helpful to explain it to the reader and put it in context or with examples.

When lingo of a specific field is not explained, the writing feels intentionally elitist and becomes uninteresting to me. Elitist writing feels exclusive, uninviting, can show insecurity to not be more inclusive, and is not helpful to those who want to learn the topic but are written out of it. I have found that my field in academia has had this convention in its long herstory, and I will not continue this restrictive practice. I therefore, typically, do not use terminology that is not widely understood.

An important point: writing requires investing time and appreciation in yourself and your stories. Valuing your stories, experience, and knowledge and realizing that they are important is not discussed in writing often enough. There are people who can relate to your stories and writing. Not everyone will. Being confident that your writing is worth sharing—that takes courage.

The courage to write became easier for me after a few publications. My spoken voice is one of my strong traits. It took a while to be able to hear my voice in written words and to write thoughts down as I hear them in my head. I am still not always sure people read the words with the same intention of my writing, even when there are illustrations in the article to help with some points.

In order to understand how some people read my writing and what they take away from it I ask friends of different ages, knowledge levels, and locations in the world, including those outside of my field, to read my writing before it is sent in. This op-ed piece was read by friends in their 20s, 30s, 40s, and 50s. Though some

of my friends are also artists, womxn are not. I do not ask more than five people to read my writing; otherwise there are too womxn voices and opinions. Just five select friends that I feel the best to read it at the time of the writing; that is my choice. The selection of which friends to choose has changed over time. It continues to be a small odd number, with sometimes only three people who I ask to read a work.

On a closing thought—sharing writing is a risk; you are opening a dialogue about your work, and you want to and am willing to engage. Public writing—op-eds, articles, chapters, books—those invite dialogue from friends, colleagues, and complete strangers. Hearing from any of these people may come with mixed responses.

The courage to write the piece also means the courage to join the dialogue about it. There are some days I choose not to hear the dialogue from others, but most days I can and want to. Putting this writing out there is supporting the dialogue and change for gender equity in a culture that continues to be unaware, dismissive and unwilling to address and change the layers and layers of inequity. So, I keep writing, and speaking, and living my words out loud through my words and actions.





# Collaborative Composing: Demystifying the Literature Review and the Writing Process, Together

*Collaborative Reflection with Excerpts*

**SHANNON FANNING AND NICOLE MALLAS**

## **Reflection by Shannon Fanning**

I began research on Project Semicolon, a nonprofit anti-suicide initiative made popular by its social media presence, a little over a year ago. I was struck by the devotion of its members, many of whom went far beyond simply identifying as group members sharing experiences, even choosing to have the group's semicolon symbol tattooed on their own bodies. As I am a scholar of visual rhetoric, it was important for me to figure out not only why the group had chosen this particular symbol, but also how and why it seemed to be circulating so effectively both within this group and across the boundaries of Project Semicolon to other groups and contexts. This inquiry led me to analyze many manifestations of the semicolon tattoo and ultimately to write the article that is excerpted here.

While there are several in-process pieces of writing I could have submitted to this collection, I chose to share this one because it was composed together with my student research intern, Nicole Mallas. The literature review you see here is as much a result of her work as my own.

I am focusing here on the literature review, because it is a type of writing that is often unfamiliar to students and others removed from scholarly publishing. Together, Nicole and I are able to bring some transparency to the academic literature review, while also offering reflection on the writing process from both the

student and professor perspectives. I hope this chapter will prove valuable not only to students and others approaching academic writing with emerging expertise, but to all who enter into collaborative writing relationships.

## **Visual Intervention in Discussions of Mental Health: The Semicolon Tattoo as a Visible Boundary Object**

### Introduction

Project Semicolon is a nonprofit, anti-suicide initiative that promotes mental health awareness. Founded in 2013, the movement is perhaps best known for its symbolic use of the semicolon. The semicolon is meant to represent a pause, as the organization itself describes: “a semicolon is used when an author could’ve chosen to end their sentence, but chose not to. The author is you and the sentence is your life.” In support of the movement and in recognition of their own mental health struggles, many supporters have had the symbol tattooed on their bodies. Using Project Semicolon as a case study, this article utilizes and expands on the concept of rhetorical boundary objects to explore the semicolon’s function as visual intervention in discussions of mental health.

First defined by Star and Griesemer (1989) as an object “both plastic enough to adapt to local needs...yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites” (p. 393), boundary objects have been examined by a host of scholars for their usefulness in fostering integration and collaboration (e.g., Gorman, 2002; Kim and Herbert, 2012; Wilson and Herndl, 2007). Riesch’s (2010) work on boundaries combines science and technology studies with social psychology theories of boundaries to intricately investigate how boundaries are crossed and what the effects are. My work is informed by these various conceptions of boundary objects and seeks to add to the existing discussion by focusing specifically on visual boundary objects and highlighting the ways in which they may function to promote awareness and acceptance. It also draws significantly from theories of material rhetoric to advocate for more critical attention to the rhetorical possibility of symbols like the semicolon.

The semicolon functions as a particularly successful boundary object, as it has united various groups, crossing the boundaries between gender, religion, and race. In addition to crossing these social boundaries among Project Semicolon’s supporters, the semicolon symbol has also crossed

group boundaries, as it has been adopted by other groups to promote mental health awareness like the veteran group IGY6 (I got your six). Like Project Semicolon supporters, IGY6 members have utilized the symbol in many ways, often adapting it in color and style. For example, many in this group choose to use a teal blue semicolon to represent PTSD awareness. Further, the semicolon has crossed media and genre boundaries, appearing on Facebook, Instagram, and most recently in the Netflix series *Thirteen Reasons Why*. Because it holds immense power in all of these contexts, remaining recognizable yet adaptable enough for each group to make the symbol uniquely its own, the semicolon works to transform the representation of mental illness from the kind of rhetorical disability Johnson (2010), Prendergast (2001), and others write about to an empowering symbol Wolfgang and Kwon (2019) describe as “an outward declaration of an ongoing quest ...” (p. 3). My rhetorically informed case study both critically engages with and extends upon the concept of boundary objects. While tracing how the semicolon functions successfully as a boundary object, this article will advocate for the rhetorical power of visual boundary objects and call for more strategic use of them in future mental health awareness initiatives.

## Review of the Literature

This section reviews the existing academic literature on Project Semicolon. It also discusses the concepts of rhetorical boundary theory and material rhetoric, while highlighting the importance of these theories in the context of this study.

### *Project Semicolon*

Project Semicolon was started by Amy Bleuel in 2013 to create a space where people could share stories about their mental health struggles. Originally intended to tell her father’s story about his struggle and lost battle with suicide, Bleuel also used the space to talk about her own struggles and suicide attempt. Participants in the semicolon project draw or tattoo images of a semicolon on their bodies. The semicolon is meant to symbolize a moment in which one could have chosen to end one’s life, but instead chose to continue. The group aims to help reduce suicide by providing a sense of community as well as greater access to information and resources (Project Semicolon). The semicolon is intended to symbolize healing and strength, an act Covington (2015) claims allows users to “shift identities—to move beyond the harmful behaviors of their past and welcome a future self that no longer self-harms or contemplates suicide” (10).

While not much academic research has been published on this movement, the literature that does exist tends to focus on the motivations and stigmas associated with tattoos like the semicolon

tattoo. The simple representation of a semicolon holds immense power for those who struggle with defying this stigma, as it can represent vulnerability and emotional growth without the individual having to utter a single word. Therefore, a semicolon can hold a deeper symbolic representation besides its known grammatical origins. It empowers individuals to “re-author their future selves as healthier individuals dedicated to ending self-harm and suicide” (Covington, 2015, p. 15). Here, the semicolon tattoo both visually and rhetorically represents a permanent marking of inner strength and resilience, immediately recognized by an audience impacted by these same struggles. This allows impacted individuals to vocalize their battles through the use of symbolism. The immense symbolism of the semicolon tattoo not only represents inner strength, but also contributes to the healing process for those facing these struggles. The tattoo represents the transformation from once dark, painful times to a time of healing and accomplishment. Covington even suggests that the semicolon tattoo is a reminder that helps prevent relapses back to negative coping mechanisms. Although some hold negative stereotypes towards those with tattoos, tattoos significantly contribute to healing these wounds. These symbolic tattoos continuously help others overcome moments of difficulty, reminding those impacted that there are better days ahead.

Alter-Muri (2020) describes tattooing as art therapy that helps clients understand their thoughts and emotions and later goes so far as to suggest tattooing as a form of self-care “serving as a vehicle for resilience and self-acceptance” (p. 145). This cathartic experience is essential to the emotional healing process of those impacted by mental illness. Therapeutic tattooing can also be utilized by those who are commemorating loss. “For bereaved persons, death and grief make up the elephant in the room; although they are very much present, this presence is unacknowledged, and the bereaved are silenced. Memorial tattoos as visual images and art are important to this ‘presence’” (Davidson, 2017, p. 34). These semicolon tattoos embody the presence of those who lost their battle to mental illness, while also raising awareness of the severity of mental illness both for the individuals impacted and for those surrounding them as well.

## *Boundary Objects*

Rhetorically based studies have often made use of the Star and Griesemer’s concept of boundary objects. While Star and Griesemer (1989) focused on the demarcation of science from non-science, other rhetorical scholars have focused on how boundary objects may foster integration and collaboration. Wilson and Herndl (2007), for example, focus on how boundary work can be used to foster collaboration rather than controversy and demarcation. They also suggest that boundary objects can generate an integrative exigency. The collaborative nature of boundary objects can be seen in the work of scholars like Gorman (2002) and his concept of boundary-object trad-

ing zones, where people from different fields and different levels of expertise interact around the development of a particular technology. Integrative exigency is also apparent in Galison's (1996) definition of trading zones as spaces that allow different communicative entities to communicate and contextualize local knowledge in relation to the common goal of the communicative network. Kim and Herbert (2012) also focus on the collaborative function of boundary objects, invoking the idea of boundary objects to develop the Inquiry Resources Collection, a resource collaboration developed by scientists to support novice science teachers' lesson design. Houf (2020) combines the concepts of boundary work and boundary objects, arguing that the synthesis can be useful to technical and professional communications scholars in moments of controversy. Using the case of fecal microbiota transplants, Houf argues that the microbiome functions as a boundary object, as it opens up space within medicine's own boundary work for the inclusion of fecal microbiota transplants.

Boundary objects, however, do not need to be concrete. Dunbar-Hester (2013) theorizes that localism functions as a discursive boundary object, mitigating differences for groups that might not otherwise have agreed. Sauer (2003), Scott (2006), and most recently Walsh and Walker (2016) conceive of uncertainty as a boundary object, by which a rhetorical topos helps bridge divides between discourse communities. Walsh and Walker continue to argue that risk communication scholars need to adopt a consistent rhetorical framework for the types of uncertainty they encounter to produce more nuanced studies of that uncertainty. By combining the rhetorical idea of boundary objects with social psychology theories of boundaries, Riesch (2010) further expands our understanding of these concepts. Riesch argues that boundaries can be explained through social psychological approaches of the social representation theory and social identity theory. Using the example of popular science books' representations of Karl Popper, Riesch argues that boundary theory and social psychology approaches interconnect and complement each other and shows that the social psychology approaches are helpful towards the formation of an integrated theoretical framework of boundaries. By examining the semicolon tattoo as a boundary object, we can reach both a fuller understanding of how the semicolon tattoo has crossed borders into different groups and media types, as well as begin to expand our understanding of the complexity of a rhetorical boundary object. The next section on material rhetoric further adds to the richness—and complexity—of this examination.<sup>1</sup>

1. This literature review continues on to a section on material rhetoric and then concludes. Our excerpt has been made to meet length allowed.

## Reflection

I chose to submit this text—and this section of this text—to the collection, because it was written together with my student intern. What follows is our reflection on this collaborative writing process. While the prose below has been cleaned-up and expanded in places, the discussion points represented here were directly informed by actual comments from the Google Doc we shared while composing the literature review.

**Nicole:** This article portrays the significance symbolism holds among varying communities. I believe that the representation of the semicolon was discussed successfully. There were examples of initiatives similar to Project Semicolon, which strengthened the argument that symbols have multiple meanings, while also discussing the material rhetoric within these initiatives.

**Shannon:** I have been lucky enough to work with student research interns for the past four semesters. While I think—and certainly hope—my students benefit from their time with me, I don't think they realize how much they teach me during our time together as well. I think Nicole is certainly aware of the ways I have benefitted from her work in terms of the concrete ways she has contributed (i.e., finding sources, composing sections of articles like the literature review you see here), but she is likely not aware that I also benefit through her unique and well-informed perspective. It's always nice to have a second perspective on a piece of writing, but exceptional students like her also challenge my thinking and my assumptions. In reading the comment I'm currently responding to, she has represented the scope of the article accurately, but somewhat differently than I would have. This will help me as I continue to revise this article and try to anticipate the needs of reviews and readers.

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**Nicole:** Prior to creating this piece, I had very little experience writing literature reviews. This was only my second literature review. I previously wrote one other piece for school. This prior experience helped me understand the rules for writing

a literature review, such as combining aspects of different sources within the article. This formatting was foreign to me, for I previously only wrote basic MLA-formatted essays. When writing this piece, I incorporated this prior knowledge, strengthening my writing skills as a student. I have since written a few more literature reviews and have gained confidence in my writing capabilities.

**Shannon:** I choose to include the literature review section of the article here in part because Nicole contributed significantly to it, but also because it represents a genre so many of our students are unfamiliar with. I've recently begun teaching the literature review in one of my advanced writing courses, and my students are quite resistant—to put it nicely. I don't blame them; I didn't write a literature review until I was in graduate school. My students are capable though, and the vast majority wind up producing very effective literature reviews. What they are missing is familiarity and thus confidence in composing this genre. I'm glad to see that the same seems to hold true for Nicole who has always been a very capable writer, but perhaps lacked some confidence in this still unfamiliar genre.

What also strikes me here is Nicole's focus on formatting. As someone who focuses on higher order concerns like purpose and audience, formatting hardly enters my mind until it's time to submit my work. I think in some respect this speaks to Nicole's diligence as my trusted intern, but also indicates there is more room for growth in terms of familiarity and confidence. Focus on formatting and other issues like information arrangement is reminiscent of the type of procedural approach to writing that Lavelle and Zuercher (2001) claim less experienced students engage in to keep themselves "afloat" (p. 377), trading in personal involvement and risk taking for a more comfortable strict adherence to the rules. This again speaks to the need to increase student familiarity with unfamiliar genres like the literature review so that they might move away from focusing on rules and engage more personally—and critically—with the text.

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**Nicole:** When writing literature reviews, I have some difficulty incorporating different sources into one section of the piece. It is difficult to include multiple sources that have similar connections. This component is an extremely important aspect of composing a literature review. It strengthens the argument and overall

theme of the piece. When composing this piece, I made connections by combining facts about IGY6 and Project Semicolon. Both initiatives are similar in nature, relaying their goals through the use of symbolism to target a specific audience. I believe this strengthened the argument that symbols hold various meanings and are fluid in their ability to construct meaning.

**Shannon:** Putting sources into conversation with each other is one of the most difficult aspects of academic writing for students. While I find other elements of composing the scholarly article more difficult now, this “wrangling” of sources is something that continued to pose a challenge to me well into graduate school. As I reflect on Nicole’s comment, I interpret her challenges here as difficulty in entering the scholarly conversation, the “unending conversation” as Burke’s parlor metaphor so aptly refers to it. As Greene (2001) emphasizes, research is not only collecting information, but discovering its purposeful use in ways that enable entry to the conversation. Participating in the academic conversation, as Nicole learned to do quite well, is something our students need authentic practice doing.

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**Nicole:** The writing and research process of this piece taught me how to write in a way that naturally flows with my thoughts. Introductions to a written piece can be difficult for me because my thoughts are not properly composed, causing me to experience writer’s block. I want my first few sentences to perfectly reveal what I will discuss within the piece. Readers often judge a piece based upon the first few sentences, deciding if they wish to read onward. I am interested in a piece with a captivating introduction paragraph. I attempt to perfect my introductions based upon my own standards as a reader. However, I have learned that it is better to allow yourself to write what you would like to say, and then revise it properly later. As I deepened my understanding of this piece, I used this process of revision to better improve my writing skills and clearly relay the information within this literature review.

**Shannon:** It really interests me that Nicole places so much emphasis on the introduction. She is right, too, however about the importance of keeping things moving. Looking for perfection at the sentence-level or in one small piece of the



paper, such as the introduction, makes us vulnerable to what Elbow would refer to as “premature revising behavior”; similarly, Perl (1979) would caution us that this early focus on revision is likely to interfere with the rhythm of composing. On the other hand, I have found that taking a lot of time and effort to perfect the introduction—as it provides the roadmap for the article—to be something that helps me quite a bit in planning and organizing my manuscripts. While I wouldn’t be so bold as to offer my own experience as a counter to the work of Elbow or Perl, Nicole’s comment leaves me wondering if striving for introduction perfection is perhaps an underappreciated, and potentially useful writing strategy that we should be promoting to more advanced writers.

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**Nicole:** When conducting this research, I found that certain articles fit perfectly with my intended message. From prior research of the Project Semicolon initiative, I understood that the symbol of the semicolon was fluid in nature. This inference allowed me to provide information that coincided with this argument. I believe that the connection of the semicolon tattoos strengthened the idea that individuals can shift identities based upon their perspective of a symbol.

**Shannon:** Nicole makes an interesting observation here about how prior knowledge enabled her to find and use new sources more effectively. Again, this speaks to the importance of familiarity with the discourse and the importance of experiences like this one, through which I was able to immerse Nicole more fully in the academic writing process. This also brings to mind what I refer to as “reading with specific purpose.” This is the frame of mind from which I approach many of my research projects. By this I mean that I’m looking for sources and aspects of arguments that are directly connected to the work I’m doing. I’m reading to find things I can use. I think this reading strategy lies somewhere between the two ways our students are used to reading: reading to get information without any particular goal and reading to find only points that agree with their argument. Perhaps we need to spend more time with our students on reading strategies!

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**Nicole:** I found the writing process to be difficult at first due to the lack of

research regarding the topic of mental health (specifically, symbolic representations of mental health awareness). When conducting this research, I went onto Google Scholar and looked at various articles based upon specific search terms, such as “Project Semicolon,” “Material Rhetoric,” and other topics discussed. I added time constraints to these results for accurate, updated information. The few articles that were found proved credible, as they are newly published and all held similar themes. This lack of research forced me to think outside the box.

I found different search terms and made as many connections as possible. I came to the conclusion that the societal stigma of depression, suicide, and mental health in general should be discussed. This was the primary reason as to why there was little research conducted on these matters. I believe that if there was less of a stigma regarding this topic, there would be much more public research found and included within this piece.

**Shannon:** The stigma around mental health topics could certainly have been a barrier to Nicole finding quality sources. Part of the reason I engage in the research topics I do is because I feel like it’s one small contribution I can make to ending this stigma. I am also fascinated by the intricacies of how information on mental health topics circulates online and in other contexts. This difficulty finding sources likely also stems from a lack of training. Nicole is an above-average student in every way, and she was able to find quality sources despite it being more difficult than expected. I find, though, that even in teaching my 300- and 400-level courses, many students do not know how to locate a peer-reviewed article, let alone quality articles on very specific topics. This is a complex problem, as I don’t think this training should be the job of any one department or course (like first-year comp, for example), but it needs to be happening. Who is doing or not doing this work, and why? Teaching almost exclusively at the 300 and 400 level I expect my students to know how to find peer reviewed sources, but an alarming number of them do not. I struggle to decide how much explicit instruction I should be giving my upper-level students on research tasks like these.

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**Nicole:** When writing a piece, my goal is to have the writing flow as smoothly as possible. This includes proper connections of different articles that express

similar concepts. In this case, the primary concepts I intended to relay included how Project Semicolon, along with the general symbolism of the semicolon, represented suicide and depression awareness. I also wished to discuss the lasting impact this symbol holds in various communities, including those who were not immediately impacted with these mental health struggles. The idea of “reauthoring the future self” connected Project Semicolon’s idea of continuing a story (continuing one’s life) that could have been cut-short or abruptly ended.

**Shannon:** My experience working in college writing centers makes me flinch when I hear the word “flow.” Students would often come in and tell me they needed help making their paper “flow.” Many times, they didn’t have any idea what they meant by “flow,” nor was “flow” the major issue of their paper. Here, though, Nicole is moving beyond the point that something doesn’t sound right to the need to make connections between sources and between each source and the argument. This is definitely something that needs to be done well for an academic article to meet the expectations of its discourse community. Her identification of this step of the writing process speaks to her growing familiarity with academic writing.

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**Nicole:** Concluding my ideas from my research was an easy process for me. I combined all elements that were previously mentioned, allowing the readers to understand how these sources connected to one another. I concluded my thoughts by describing memorial tattoos many use for their lost loved ones, for it helps with the grieving process while simultaneously raising awareness. I felt that this proved the impact the semicolon symbol held, properly concluding the argument that symbols can hold various meanings.

**Shannon:** I’m glad to hear Nicole recognize the conclusion as an easy part of her writing process. To be clear, her work included concluding the literature review, not the article itself, so in her case it speaks to the focus and the strong connections she made between her sources as well as each source and the argument, a task she mentioned was a focus of hers in an earlier comment. Concluding a paper as a whole relies on similar writing moves, which Nicole is probably even better positioned to now do well.

## Conclusion

Composing the literature review with Nicole for use in my paper on Project Semicolon has proven an enlightening experience on multiple counts. I was able to offer her an insider look at the academic writing process, while also deconstructing the literature review into discrete pieces and tasks that she was easily able to master. At the same time, Nicole offered me valuable assistance with locating and summarizing sources, as well as composing sections of the literature review that put those sources into conversation with each other. Working with Nicole and several other interns over recent semesters has forced me to take a critical look at my own research practices and composing techniques. By articulating these more explicitly, I've had no choice but to engage in the kind of self-reflective work we often require our students do. I am happy to report, then, that this work has been challenging, but useful, forcing me to examine my own assumptions and shortcomings as both a writer and researcher.

As for the composition of the literature review, I will end with another one of Nicole's apt observations: "The combination of the different viewpoints of Nicole and Shannon strengthened the piece, as it allowed for there to be a dissection of the intricacy within the construction of this literature review."

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# On Writing Philosophy

## *Excerpt with Reflections*

### **CHRISTOPHER FRENCH**

*Excerpt: From a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Long Island Philosophical Society, 2012: "Philosophical Perspectives on Autobiography: Hermeneutics and Deconstruction"*

In a series of unfinished drafts gathered under the title *The Construction of the Historical World in the Human Studies*, nineteenth century philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey described autobiography as “the highest and most instructive form of the understanding of life,”<sup>1</sup> adding that the “reflection of a person about himself remains the standard and basis for understanding history.”<sup>2</sup> Contained in this view is the idea that our grasp of the human world, as opposed to that which is discussed in the physical sciences, finds its basis in a special relationship of inner to outer. That is, Dilthey suggests that the human studies have as their model the basic acquaintance that given historical individuals has with their own lived experiences – experiences that they strive to give form to, or make objective, in some way.

Hans Gadamer’s own version of philosophical hermeneutics also addresses itself to the question of what it means for the voice of another to communicate within written tradition, while at the same time presenting an account that claims to overcome certain distortions inherent in the outlook described above. When understood in terms of his concepts of play, the authority of the text, and language as the medium of hermeneutic experience, that which we find expressed in the autobiographical memoir greatly changes its significance in terms of what it means to understand these works. It is with regard to autobiographical form of writing that the writings of Jacques Derrida show much in common with Gadamer, while at the same time raising to awareness greater levels of complexity, perhaps even greater levels of resistance, regarding the “miracle of understanding” that Gadamer believes takes place in our engagement with the text as “other.”<sup>3</sup> This paper will relate Derrida to Gadamer by bringing out some important differences and points of contact regarding their reception, within the traditions of hermeneutics and deconstruction, of what may be a pervasive attitude toward autobiographical writing, one which has its basis in certain ideas of the Romantic tradition concerning life, experience, and the self. I would suggest that ways in which both Gadamer and Derrida deal with the distinctive intimacy of autobiography, deemed so important to thinkers such as Dilthey, Rousseau, and others, bring out in a clear

1. Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Writings* trans. H.P. Rickman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 214.

2. *Ibid.*, 218.

3. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New York: Continuum Press, 1989), 156.

way some of the tensions in their respective views. My purpose, however, is not simply to set hermeneutics and deconstructions at odds; rather, I hope to show that a discussion of this form of writing from the perspectives of both deconstruction and hermeneutics will present a new, rich, and nuanced view of what it is for a text to mean what it says and, of the strange nature of the written word in relation to human understanding.

Historical research often emphasizes the lived experience of individuals as central to its scholarly purpose. As such, philosophers of history such as Dilthey thought that there was a way to capture aspects of the historical lives of others in a manner based not simply on non-rational intuitions but as having a methodological foundation of its own. Dilthey believed that this understanding is possible because the sense we have of our lives represents a peculiar grasp of something that no conception or thought can get beneath. This sense is a fundamental ground of its own, with elements that cannot be brought before natural science's more distanced, cause and-effect based concepts. That is, our own lived experiences, and our experiences of other people and of cultural products, are not based in mere causal inferences, but have their basis in something with which we are primordially familiar. This intimate acquaintance we have with our own inner lives represents a key toward grasping those expressions of the cultural world with which the human sciences deal...

## Reflections

When I am writing philosophy, I am aware that I am entering an arena of conflicting views. In fact, I am joining a discussion that has been taking place for centuries, a conversation concerning such questions as the nature of reality, the self, and the good life. As such, an important component for writing philosophy is *the need to be a careful reader*. With this, I not only gain the ability to discuss philosophical views in a fair and informed way, but I also tap into a source of creativity. Reading and rereading, I encounter points that resonate with my own experiences and background knowledge. This in turn can serve as a launching point for my own work.

This initial writing step, this process of reading and reflecting upon works, is not as easy as it may seem. It requires time and careful study. The selection I include here presents the beginning of a lecture I gave at Molloy College when I was just



getting my start in my field. The paper I presented—“Philosophical Perspectives on Autobiography”—was part of a conference held annually by the Long Island Philosophical Society. As with other things I’ve written, writing the conference paper was a journey of learning and discovery. This was especially true in this case, because when I first began working on the paper, I was not sure what I wanted to say about my topic. I was writing about things beyond my usual area of concentration. Moreover, I was trying to discuss ideas that I initially found very difficult to understand.

The topic for my paper had to do with the nature of autobiography and the purpose of writing. However, the ideas it contained were first introduced to me in a graduate seminar that I had taken years before. The seminar focused on two movements that are influential in contemporary philosophy: hermeneutics and deconstruction. Both hermeneutics and deconstruction are concerned with language and meaning, with what it means for human beings understand one another within a verbal or written tradition. When I began graduate school, I noticed that deconstruction seemed to generate a great deal of enthusiasm among my peers. I signed up for the course because I knew very little about the subject and I wanted to see what the fuss was all about.

Before long, I found myself overwhelmed by the course material. I had always thought of myself as a good reader. But with the assigned readings in this course, I often found myself at a loss. Moreover, by the end of the seminar I had to come up with a seminar paper, which I needed to submit to complete the course. To better understand the material, I knew that I could search through what other academics had written. Although these writings can be helpful, I knew that if I was going to produce my own work of scholarship, then I was going to have to wrestle with the texts myself. One of these was a difficult piece that was about hundred pages long. It was by Jacques Derrida, and it was called “Plato’s Pharmacy.” I remember reading through it from start to finish several times. Although at first, I found the essay impenetrable, the moves that were taking place within the writing started to become clearer to me. After all this work, I finally felt like I was beginning to understand. However, the challenge remained of putting into words just what it was that I thought I understood.

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My philosophical writing not only involves reading and understanding the ideas of others. I also need to think about my potential audience and the goal that my own writing is trying to achieve. I need to formulate a main idea for my essay—the point that I am trying to get across. For this paper, I was aware that members of the audience at the conference at which I would be presenting would have some education in philosophy but most likely not in the exact topic that I would be addressing. Reflecting on the difficulties I had when learning the material, I decided that my intended audience would be someone like me when I first enrolled in the graduate seminar. And I decided that a goal for my paper would be to try to offer my own interpretation of the ideas I had been learning and of how to reconcile them, one that would clarify them, bring them to life, and thereby make them more understandable to others. I have always found this kind of writing to be the most fulfilling.

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Given my goal, I would need to discover some angle or way to make the ideas I am discussing concrete and relatable. One way to do this is to create a dialogue or tell a story. Given that I was writing about two accounts of human understanding and how we relate to language—hermeneutics and deconstruction—I had two traditions to place in dialogue with each other. But I also wanted this discussion to center on a lively topic. For this, I chose the topic of autobiography.

Philosophical questions often make us look afresh at things we had taken for granted. In previous years, I happened to read and enjoy some famous autobiographies—in particular, some famous works of the eighteenth century, such as the *Confessions* of Rousseau, *Poetry and Truth*, by Goethe, and the *Memoirs* of Casanova. I came to believe that one terrific thing about autobiographies is that they give a person a lively sense of the period in which they were written. Unlike a mere series of events as presented in a chronicle or in the retelling of the historian, autobiographies give a first-person account of what the life of a period was like; we get to experience another world. Reading the above works, I felt like I could picture the world of a person of letters in eighteenth-century Europe. But now I began to wonder about what it is I came to know when reading autobiographies and how I came to know it. Of course, when we read someone's life reflections, we are not directly experiencing what that person experiences,

but rather we understand that person's character and perceptions through the medium of the written word. And here, some questions arise, and it was these that I addressed in my paper: what is it, I wondered, we are really understanding when we claim to understand another's lived experiences within a written tradition? How does this understanding take place? And are there any problems related to the idea that we do in fact claim to understand? The things that I had been learning about hermeneutics and deconstruction spoke to these very questions.

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As a final point, I would mention something else that I have come to learn from my writing experience. It is the idea that writing is a process of discovery. Often-times I do not know for sure what I really think until I write down and compose my thoughts into readable form. This is not to say that I write with no goal in mind. It's important to know where you are heading, even if this endpoint appears at first as just an intuition. Still, as I proceed, I am reminded that any writing not only has to go from the writer's head to the page, but from the page to another person's head. Through the writing process, I am made to clarify my thoughts, making them more distinct.

Writing philosophy can be laborious, and there are times when I have had to push myself to get to work. But when I consider that with this work, I plunge deeply into ideas present as part of an ongoing conversation, that as a participant in this conversation I can reach people by making complex thoughts clear, and that this writing is a process of discovery, a process in which something that did not previously exist becomes a part of the world, it becomes one of the more rewarding things I do.



# Learning Outcomes

## *Excerpt with Reflection*

### **DAVID HAGELBERG**

Throughout the first half of the semester, the primary focus of the class has been to discuss the controversy around the etymology of the word “terrorism.” By gaining a better understanding of how the concept of terrorism has changed over time, the class has been given the tools to more accurately explore the concepts of terror and its relevancy not only in history, but in the present day as well.

Beginning with Module 2 and continuing as a recurring theme throughout multiple other modules, the class discussed one facet of terrorism as a concept: its notoriously ambiguous definition. This ambiguity is a result of the lack of a single unified definition for what actually counts as terrorism. We learned that, much like many other deeply political concepts, the exact meaning has changed over time. Viewing terrorism as a fluid concept is not a uniquely personal belief, either. As said by one student in their post, “terrorism is constantly changing and has been changing throughout the years” (Student A, DB-2).<sup>1</sup> The idea that a definition can change drastically over time is also explored in the final question for this module: asking the students to create their own definition of terrorism. Rather than provide a broad definition that may function for a long period of time, I chose to focus my definition on what is considered terrorism in today’s political climate. To accomplish this, I defined terrorism as an “evolving political concept of using sudden, but deliberately planned, acts of violence to...draw attention and/or publicity to a cause. The cause being fought for always has the goal of radically altering society in such a way that the group for which the terrorist fights can obtain a more desirable social position.”

Progressing on to Module 3, I chose to expand on why terrorism is so hard to define while obtaining a deeper understanding as to how the definition has changed over time. As mentioned in the previous module, the definition of terrorism is fluid and has evolved over time. During the French Revolution, the term was one used against any who rebelled against the government. This is somewhat different than the vague understanding everyone has of terrorism in today’s world. This is noted by another student when they quoted Hoffman saying, “the meaning and usage of the word have changed over time to accommodate the political vernacular and discourse of each successive era” (Student B, DB-3).

Module 4 acted as a departure from the basic concept of terrorism by challenging us to write

1. Student names have been redacted for their privacy.

about key figures who shaped the world through their association with terrorism and, by extension, political violence as a whole. For this assignment, I chose to write about Mikhail Bakunin, colloquially known as the father of collectivist anarchism as a means to achieve political change. As a result of being a violent means to force change, anarchism is often looked upon as a subset of traditional terrorism, and it is easy to see why. Like terrorism, Bakuninist anarchism divided the organization into small groups and used violent acts to influence the current system of government. Frequently, the term “violent acts” referred to the assassination of political officials. One example of an assassination carried out under the banner of anarchism can be found in Christopher Ochoa’s post. In his final paragraph, he discusses the killing of President William McKinley at the hands of Leon Czolgosz, who was a practitioner of anarchism.

For Module 5, the class was instructed to examine the actions of John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Abraham Lincoln and determine if he should be labelled a terrorist. Noted in my original post, it is important to distinguish how each of his plans fit the definition of terrorism established both by myself in the second module and those of legitimate government agencies with their own official definitions. Although ultimately shooting the president, Booth originally planned to kidnap Lincoln. To determine if this act could be classified as terrorism, I turned to the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s definition of violent crime, a key part of terrorism’s definition. Although many crimes are listed under the umbrella of violent crime, kidnapping is notably not listed. Despite being planned to accomplish altruistic political goals, the objective lack of kidnapping as a violent crime omits it from being included in the FBI’s definition of terrorism. Booth’s plan that actually took place, Lincoln’s assassination, had the same motives but was inarguably violent. Booth’s altruism was also noted by a classmate who noted that “he was driven by what he saw as a patriotic and religious duty” (Student C, DB-5). For this reason, Booth’s assassination of Lincoln fits well within the FBI’s definition of terrorism. The act also fits every aspect of the definition I devised in Module 2.

Moving away from the United States, I chose to view the analysis of political violence in pursuit of national liberation through the lens of South Africa under apartheid. The concept of using political violence to enact change for the better was a somewhat foreign idea prior to this module. However, it was through studying Apartheid that I gained an understanding of how what is definitionally terrorism can be used against a government objectively in the wrong. For context, Apartheid was a period of South African history in which people were segregated by race, much like Jim Crow laws in the United States. As a result of the contention between those being oppressed and the government doing the oppressing, terrorism was seen on both sides. In my original post, I noted that the oppressed began with peaceful protest, but the resistance quickly shifted to armed conflict. In response, South Africa saw the creation of Askaris, or death squads sponsored by the government to dismantle anti-apartheid groups. The use of these death squads fits squarely within the definition of state terrorism, which too is politically motivated, but is car-

ried out by domestic forces within a country's borders rather than protesters. Similar themes can be seen in other countries such as Vietnam. In their post, one student briefly mentions the "pre-emptive strike against the forces [North Vietnam] aligning against him [Ngo Dinh Diem, leader of South Vietnam]" (Student D, DB-6). It is in this act that we can see the themes of state terrorism in another country. In this case, the events that occurred eventually led to a war between the North and South.

Module 7, the most recent covered prior to the midterm, covers the topic of revolutionary terrorism, another subcategory of terrorism. When discussing revolutionary terrorism, it is important to define its place as a form of domestic terrorism, or acts performed against the state in which one lives. In my initial post, I discuss how others have defined it, often mentioning the idea of insurgency. In this context, insurgency can be simply defined as a revolt against the government without organization. The lack of organization was noted by numerous classmates as well. A student, in their second paragraph, notes that revolutionary terrorism comes from "the impatient tendencies of civilians and organizations" (Student E, DB-7). Associating revolutionary terrorism with insurgency, the primary difference that becomes apparent is the scale in which the acts take place. Insurgency, and revolutionary terrorism by extension, occur on a much larger scale than traditional terrorism. To further illustrate this concept, I chose to discuss John Brown, an American revolutionary terrorist fighting to abolish slavery. His case accurately fits the definition of revolutionary terrorism as a consequence of his intention to spread his message in addition to providing the means to enact change. Returning to the student's definition, one could accurately assume that John Brown's "impatient tendency" was his desire to abolish slavery.

## Reflection

Although the basic expectation of my degree is to pursue a career focusing on science or technology, I have always made it a point to take a history class whenever possible. My most recent venture into this realm was a history elective named "*Terrorism and the Modern World*." Although following the general structure of any other college course, the professor for this class assigned a unique assignment, asking students to examine their work leading up to a certain point throughout the semester. The essay examined in this reflection is one of those assignments, written during midterms week, assessing our comprehension of the various top-

ics covered thus far, particularly the intricacies and difficulty surrounding the definition of terrorism.

As this course, and the assignment by extension, was exclusively online, my process for composing my thoughts was somewhat unique compared to previous experiences. In some ways, it made writing the paper much easier. For example, one of the expectations was to reference my classmates' work. With everything accessible without having to reach out, I was able to compile not only my work from all of the previous modules but my classmates' work as well. This made organizing my thoughts, something I frequently have trouble doing, significantly easier. In addition, incorporating the varying opinions of others allowed me to both support my arguments and use their countering perspective to expand my understanding.

Although I said that the paper was made easier by being online, the assignment was not without its challenges. Perhaps the biggest challenge lay in what also made it easier. To elaborate, the large volume of work submitted over the course of the first half of the semester made it difficult at times to find relevant work to cite. This difficulty was only exacerbated by the tendency for each student to be assigned a unique subtopic. An example of this can be seen in the paragraph covering Module 6. For this particular topic, we were tasked with examining the effectiveness of political violence in a variety of countries. As a result of being assigned different countries, I needed to think creatively to relate another student's work into my own.

In terms of successes achieved with this paper, the greatest came at its completion. By finishing the assignment and following the guidelines, I acquired the exact thing the assignment was meant to test—a deeper understanding of the material covered thus far. Not only was I able to develop a deeper understanding, but by being required to incorporate classmates' work, I also gained a much wider perspective on terrorism as a whole. Often when writing papers for school, you are tasked with citing research that supports your position. Not often are you required to use sources that do not agree with you. In my experience, this can lead to one's head becoming an echo chamber of sorts, making it much more difficult to examine different perspectives. By incorporating others' work, regardless of whether their positions were the same as mine, I was forced to consider different aspects of what makes any given topic so complex.



Critical thinking, in essence, can be defined as the process of evaluating information gathered through reasoning or observation and communication. It is only through such observations and subsequent analysis that conclusions that inspire confidence can be drawn. More often than not, the lens through which these observations are made lead to particular views on a specific topic. This inherently human process can unintentionally lead to bias on the part of the observer. As a researcher, it is up to one's self to do everything in their power to look past these biases. As mentioned earlier, the way I moved past this was to incorporate the work of classmates that did not necessarily support my conclusions. In my experience, integrating opposing viewpoints into an assignment focusing on my own observations was exceedingly difficult. By challenging myself to use these differing views and not simply find another classmate that agreed with me, I was forced to reevaluate why I thought the way I did. In more instances than not, this resulted in obtaining a new perspective on the topic in question. To elaborate, my first thought and emotion when reading an assignment that disagreed with mine was predominantly confusion. Although many topics had multiple facets, such as the actions of John Wilkes Booth discussed in Module 5, I was surprised with how often my views conflicted with a classmate on a topic that seemed objective. Once the initial confusion passed, I took a moment to reassess why I thought the way I did and to reexamine the information I had gathered previously—the very essence of critical thinking.

In my experience the basic components of critical thinking are also present in the writing process, particularly how conclusions are drawn from the analysis of observations and communication. Nearly every time I have needed to write for an assignment, I inevitably arrived at a block where I could not decide how to continue the piece. Although frustrating, the same block also aided me in deciding what to write next. Whenever a block presented itself, I knew that there was more to pull out of the topic, both in terms of information I may have been missing as well as reevaluating my preconceived ideas regarding the topic. The concept I mentioned earlier, the unintentional development of biases, served as the basis of my reevaluation. Rather than think, “What more is there to say?” I forced myself to think, “What could I have missed?” It is at this moment that I often read through what I had already written, questioning nearly every line, including those that seemed to be inarguable. More often than not, this brought to my attention gaps in my understanding, or provided insight into how previous expe-

riences could be limiting my willingness to delve deeper into why I think the way I do. As a result, the writing process, in conjunction with critical thinking, has improved my ability to look further than the surface when examining both multifaceted and single faceted topics.

This course not only made me focus on how ambiguous words can be in common usage, but also made me realize how important the specific definition of a word is. The best example of this can be found in the first module: how terrorism should be defined. Without getting into the details, terrorism, at least in America, is defined different by nearly every department in the government. As a result, certain elements are consistently present across the board, but subtleties in wording change what is considered terrorism, even within the same department.

This course, and this assignment in particular, has expanded my ability to think critically.

# Staying Engaged while Staying Home

*A Conference Proposal with Reflection*

**CHRISTOPHER IVERSON**

## **Proposal**

In September 2019, I completed an IRB-approved dissertation on the long-term student benefits of service-learning/community engagement in first-year writing (FYW) courses. I interviewed 13 current and former students at the University of Connecticut, some of whom took a service-learning FYW course and some of whom took a more traditional course. The resulting case studies suggest that those who took the service-learning course had a higher sense of self-efficacy than those who did not. I also found that, rather than inspiring an activist disposition, service-learning FYW courses can teach those who already have such a disposition how to engage with communities outside the university.

In March 2020, COVID-19 closed many institutions and took classrooms online. This complicates community engagement, as instructors do not know what safety/health precautions their students take, which could endanger community members and organizations while the pandemic already disproportionately affects marginalized communities. But, several students I interviewed for the dissertation participated in community partnerships without entering community spaces, partnerships where their writing had to do the work for them.

Here, I present some of those case studies alongside my findings as well as existing research into service-learning/community engagement in writing courses. Service-learning is only one approach to community engagement. I make the case that other forms of community engagement—often ones that do not involve students or are not tied to coursework—do critical work to bridge the gap between universities and communities that Ernest Boyer criticized as early as 1990. This work continues to address problems intrinsic to higher education, but course-based service-learning in FYW has the potential to equip those students with the rhetorical know-how to continue that work beyond graduation. I also share examples of community engagement/service learning that does not require dangerous physical contact to show that COVID-19 need not reify barriers between universities and surrounding communities that we have been working to bridge for decades.

Keywords: community engagement, service-learning, first-year writing, COVID-19, remote learning

## Reflection

The experience of being a reader is misleading. Especially in academia, texts often appear before us fully formed, linear, and polished. When I began reading for college, I felt a great sense of accomplishment when I read and understood a complex, academic text, but that sense of accomplishment did not completely offset my anxieties about being able to write texts like that myself. And when I did attempt to write those texts, the gulf in quality between what I could write and what I read had me convinced that these academic writers were fundamentally different from me; I imagined that they thought and spoke in these logical but poetic paragraphs that transitioned neatly into new, exciting thoughts, and they never forgot a source.

Now, I'm an assistant professor, and I still stumble over words, trying to avoid non-sequiturs, and sometimes, I have a difficult time remembering where I heard that one super interesting fact about writing program administration. But somehow, I publish.

And somehow, I learned that the academic writing that intimidated me as a student did not emerge fully formed from the fingertips of authors who thought and spoke the way I imagined as I read their words. Even for the pros, writing is a process, but even more importantly—for my learning at least—the term “writing” means more than sitting down to research, draft, and revise a term paper or academic article. Sometimes, incredibly valuable writing will never make it into the final “product.” And sometimes, even, that writing was never meant to make it to the final product.

Which is why I share with you a successful proposal for an academic conference. This is a valuable text to me as a writer, but I never intended to show it to anyone other than the conference planning committee, because the genre does not require it. This kind of text does not aim to inform or persuade in the same way as, say, an academic article. In an academic article, the writer hopes to inform

their audience and persuade them, at least, to consider their standpoint and/or argument fairly. But in a proposal like this one, I had a different goal: to persuade the audience that I had something to contribute to their conference. Here, I will explain to you the steps I took to prepare this persuasive document as well as other unexpected benefits of writing it.

This is a proposal for the 29th Annual SUNY Conference on Instruction & Technology (CIT). As a faculty member at Farmingdale State College, I am subscribed to several listservs, and I receive important SUNY-wide messages every day, which is where I learned about this conference. It is my job to publish my research and present it to my colleagues at conferences, so I keep a close eye on my email for Calls for Papers or Calls for Proposals, both conveniently (or confusingly) referred to as CFPs.

A CFP is a document that solicits submissions from writers. CFPs exist for conferences, scholarly journal issues, academic books, and other opportunities to publish or share one's scholarly or even creative work. Most often, they are meant for academics, but more and more often these days, there are important publishing opportunities for students to contribute their research to larger scholarly conversations. CFPs can range from being specific to open-ended, depending on the needs of the publication or event.

The CFP for the CIT conference offered many options for proposals, and the parameters were rather open. The conference focus—as evidenced by the name “Conference on Instruction & Technology”—is teaching, but more specifically, teaching and technology. The CIT 2021 Planning Committee sought proposals having varying degrees of technological depth. One could choose to present on topics requiring introductory, intermediate, or advanced levels of technical savvy, and one could propose a presentation, workshop, or poster, depending on the style best suited for their research. Additionally, the Planning Committee sought proposals in one of five tracks:

- Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion
- Emerging Technologies and Digital Strategies
- Measuring Effectiveness
- Open Education

- Pedagogically Speaking

Often, conference planning committees propose several “tracks” or focal points to encourage an academically diverse pool of proposals to choose from.

My first step in writing this abstract was deciding I wanted to (and should) apply to present at this conference. I am not especially technically skilled. Like many (but certainly not all) college instructors, my first experience with online teaching was hurriedly building an online course for my students in March of 2020, when COVID-19 closed in-person classrooms mid-semester. Even my social media pages are sparse, so I knew that my proposal would be at the introductory level of technological expertise.

Once I determined that I could submit a proposal, I had to decide what I would submit. I could have chosen to write something fresh and new, based on my—at that point—semester and a half of online teaching, but I saw the CFP in November, and proposals were due by the end of December. Plus, my end-of-year job review was coming up, and the next CIT conference would not be until after that. I had to move fast.

And here, my experience of academic writing started to diverge from the expectations I had as an undergraduate student. Rather than having to start a new project, I had a backlog of research and writing to pull from. I had written my dissertation on service-learning in writing instruction the year before, and I had only published a small portion of it. Plus, while COVID-19 had drastically and unexpectedly changed my approach to teaching, it also drastically changed my thinking about service-learning, because service-learning involves students interacting (often in person) with people and organizations outside of the university, and the pandemic made in-person *anything* dangerous.

I don't like to think of kairos (or rhetorical timing) as good or bad, necessarily. It's like karma: it just is. And because I had to rethink my approach to service-learning, I had something to write about and write for. Instead of simply rethinking my approach to service-learning in composition, I would rewrite my approach to see what the existing research could justify and how I could apply that research to my own experience with teaching writing courses with a service-learning com-

ponent. The best part was, if this proposal were accepted, I would have a deadline and accountability for this rewriting.

The first step was writing the proposal, which amounts to a promise. In writing my text, I promised the CIT Planning Committee that, if they accepted my proposal, I would turn up on the day of the conference with something useful to say, helpful visual aids, and thought-provoking questions to inspire audience participation. This promise had to both entice the Planning Committee and prove possible, so I provided some background to my research and how COVID-19 affects that research to show the Committee the exigence (or need) for my presentation as well as some key components to my promised presentation, such as the case studies and past research I planned to present.

This placed my presentation on the “Pedagogically Speaking” track listed on the CFP. Sure, there was overlap with other tracks, but the biggest contribution I felt I could make was to the teaching track, so I chose to fashion my proposal for that track. Finally, I had to choose what kind of presentation I would propose, and I had been writing an article draft about service-learning after COVID-19, so I chose to propose a 30-minute presentation. This would allow me to audition my article’s contents for a live audience, whose reception of my presentation could show me the draft’s strengths and weaknesses.

But I was, after all, only writing a proposal and not the actual presentation. I made a promise to the CIT Planning Committee, but they made no promises to me about whether or not they would accept my proposal. They did, and I am currently working on delivering on my end of the bargain, but even if they had not accepted the proposal, writing it would still have had a great deal of value, because writing this proposal required me to do a lot of the prewriting and planning that I would have done to the article draft anyway. I chose an *approach*: to explore the possibilities and benefits of community-engaged service-learning projects in composition courses after COVID-19. I chose much of the *content*: case studies of student writers, existing research into service-learning, and my own new research into online ways to engage with communities outside of the classroom. Finally, I chose to begin *synthesizing* my research with that of others in this new context so I could come to what it was I wanted to say.

Much academic writing does not make it into the books and articles we read, and

that's OK. I do not say this to comfort writers whose work does not get accepted to conferences or published, though there is comfort there. I say this to assure writers that their writing matters, even the "behind the scenes" writing. Anyone who has taken one of my first-year writing classes has at least heard the name Anne Lamott and read at least part of her article, "Shitty First Drafts," in which she encourages writers to keep going, despite the frustrations she knows only too well as a professional writer.

I often think about "Shitty First Drafts" while I write. Particularly, I remember her encouraging words about drafting, as messy and seemingly wasteful as it is:

Just get it all down on paper because there may be something great in those six crazy pages that you would never have gotten to by more rational, grown-up means. There may be something in the very last line of the very last paragraph on page six that you just love, that is so beautiful or wild that you now know what you're supposed to be writing about, more or less, or in what direction you might go—but there was no way to get to this without first getting through the first five and a half pages. (94)

Not all writing needs absolution in ink. Not all writing has to be perfect, and not all writing has to become perfect to have value. I never intended to share my proposal to the 2021 CIT Conference with anyone other than the planning committee, but this piece of "behind the scenes" writing has proven valuable in my own work, and that would be true even if the proposal had not been accepted.

But now, by sharing this proposal with you, I hope that this text takes on new value as an example of a kind of writing that otherwise gets little attention and proof that the processes you develop in first-year writing may change over time, but they will remain throughout your writing careers.

## Work Cited

Lamott, Anne. "Shitty First Drafts." *Language Awareness: Readings for College Writers*. Ed. by Paul Eschholz, Alfred Rosa, and Virginia Clark. 9th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005: 93–96.



# The Art of Editorial Conversation

## *Author Queries in Editing*

**YOUN-JOO PARK**

The optimal experience for a reader is to enjoy a reading journey unencumbered by writing stumbles or puzzlement over meanings. Provided that the writer has demonstrated facility with expression and the editor has performed a meticulous review to help showcase the writer's skills, the basic activity of reading should offer easy comprehension and confer energy to the reader to focus on the ideas. The achievement of such a smooth publication process calls for a great investment of editorial labor and the negotiation of the boundaries in the communication exchange.

In this scenario, the concept of *roles* is foundational to understanding the relational dynamics between the writer and the editor. The writer's presence is naturally prominent because the objective is for the author to articulate concepts to wide audiences. On the other hand, the editor's presence is primarily subordinate due to the editorial work being veiled behind the scenes. And herein lies the paradoxical challenge in the editor-writer relationship: These roles must be somewhat reversed while the editorial work is taking place. For a writer to fully benefit from editing, the prominent role of the author needs to be momentarily suspended so that the editor can take the lead in guiding the writer.

The writer's passions are laudable, but like many aspects in life, the ego can become an obstacle. Writing involves the emotion of pride for some people because they wish to communicate ideas that are inextricably intertwined with their identity. By the final stage of writing, they have poured thousands of hours over the ideas and the desired expressions. Furthermore, the prominent position of a writer—if not realized and self-checked—may develop into hubris. The initial preparation for a writer working with an editor is to adopt a suitable mindset of not fishing for compliments to reinforce one's literary inspirations and accomplishments but of seeking out constructive feedback that will help elevate the writing.

Relatedly, an editor must operate from the fundamental position of trusting the writer as the content expert. The writer has a compelling stance on the topic or else would not have embarked on a writing project in the first place, so the editor should leave most ideas intact if these are reasonable and well supported. For the benefit of the writer, the editor's job is to comb through detailed nuances of the writing to diagnose muddled language, redress any bumps in verbal eloquence, and ultimately counsel the writer on how to convey ideas for improved readability and maximum impact.

The purpose of the publication notwithstanding, an editor must swiftly adapt to the particular content and accommodate the writer's style. The editor does not have the prerogative to apply one's vision for the publication; rather, it can be perilous for the editor to possess deep content knowledge, lest that imposes one's own ideas and interferes with the writer's intentions. Although the editor likely holds opinions and advanced knowledge on a given topic, originality must be proffered by the author. The objective of the editor is to assist two parties: first, the author, by making edits that result in the best possible expression of ideas—and second, the reader, by making edits that illuminate concepts effortlessly.

To render the final product impeccable, editorial work requires intense concentration, with scrutiny paid to different levels of analyses simultaneously. The review must be *macro* to ascertain how everything fits into the overall scope of the project, *meso* to assess continuity and logical connections from one section to another, and *micro* to account for the minute details. To consider multiple dimensions of a written piece and perform quality work, the process cannot be rushed. If the original document is relatively free of problems, the work can proceed quickly, but it is common that a complication consumes extra, unexpected time and there are at least a dozen issues to address per page.

Some edits can be applied without consulting the writer, such as fixing typos, punctuation misplacements, and small slip-ups appearing in the writing process. For the most part, the formatting can be left alone as well because the writer has the responsibility to adhere to a specific editorial style. However, more substantive edits should be queried, to clarify meaning, resolve inconsistencies, and verify facts.

It is crucial for the editor to conceptualize the editing work as a *conversation* rather than as unilateral feedback, because ideally, this editor–writer team collaborates to achieve the goal of a stellar publication. The editor engages in this conversation with the writer typically through written form, as they each complete their work independently. When the editor provides suggestions, however, there is a chance of misinterpretation or unintended slights, so the work of pointing out problems is a delicate art. The editor's "hard skills" are the expertise on linguistic sensitivity and technical facility, but the development of the "soft skills" (see below) can drive the edits home. Thus, the editor must strive to be diplomatic when presenting the set of questions to the writer, which is collectively known as *author queries*. These questions corresponding to the content are often embedded in the margins of a document for greater accessibility but are sometimes presented in a letter or memo. The next section presents four guidelines for composing effective author queries, with examples.

# Editorial Conversation Guidelines

## 1. Be concise.

The queries should be phrased as succinctly as possible. Too much feedback can muddy the clarity of the communication. Getting to the point will not only save the writer time in having to think about the requested edits but also provide a laser-focused spotlight on the issues to be addressed. Instead of packing a query with feel-good filler content before arriving at the main point, the editor should objectively communicate relevant concepts, as shown in Table 1.

*Table 1: Making author queries concise*

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Ineffective query</b>	<b>Better query</b>
<i>Sentence:</i> “The machine was finally produced and released to the public, after several notable failures.”	The idea is interesting, but I believe it’s possible for you to include some historical context in the paragraph so that readers can be oriented to the development of this phenomenon before understanding how we got to where we are currently.	To better orient readers to the current situation, what do you think about adding some historical context before this?
<i>Sentence:</i> “The medical profession is still investigating unexpected problems regarding the manufacturing and distribution of the medicine to the general populace.”	What I notice in this discussion is that you talk at length about the administrative problems surrounding the medicine in the medical industry but don’t necessarily talk about individual cases like side effects. (I can tell you from experience because my Aunt Sally was prescribed this!) The discussion would be better if you include a section on side effects.	One valuable idea to include in this discussion might be the medicine’s side effects. What do you think?

In the first sample sentence, the compliments of the first query are certainly fine, but the purpose of editorial work should extend beyond praise and instead point out what might provide a fuller context for readers’ comprehension. The second version of the query achieves this goal effectively by stating the purpose of a recommended modification and proposing an idea for the writer to consider. It also has the benefit of being framed as a question, thereby orienting the writer toward taking action rather than positing the editor’s opinionated statement or anecdote.

Especially for a writer working with an editor for the first time, the editorial process may seem arduous and intimidating. To help allay anxiety over this daunting experience, the editor can trim the verbal weeds from the query language and include solely the essential information—no more and no less. This is exemplified by the second sample sentence, in which the second query briefly proposes information to include and then asks the writer to consider it. Even visually, in the side-

by-side comparison of the queries, it is evident that a concise expression of the concern can help the editorial work to not get lost in extraneous details.

An editor can show thoughtfulness toward the writer by economizing on the words in the query. By taking just a few moments to assess whether the query’s verbiage is undoubtedly essential, the editor can guide the writer to quickly focus on the major parts that merit attention.

## 2. Be explanatory.

Before asking a question or proposing a substantive change, the editor can briefly describe the issue so there is little ambiguity in what is requested from the writer. The bonus of an explanation is that it may help persuade the writer of the need to modify the text. This guideline can seemingly contradict the aforementioned tip of concise writing, but it should be utilized in relevant contexts, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Including explanations in author queries**

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Ineffective query</b>	<b>Better query</b>
<i>Independent quote:</i> “Time can be an ally or an enemy.”	Who said this? You need to include sources and put it in context.	A free-standing quote should be incorporated into a sentence and include a citation. Please modify it.
<i>Sentence:</i> “Today, the study utilizes the theory for the interconnected part of these studies to assist in demonstrating the efficiency of the experiments.”	This sentence doesn’t make sense, so please revise it.	Please revise this sentence so there are fewer prepositions used (“for,” “of,” “to,” “in”).

In the first sample sentence, the brevity of the first query might convey an abrupt tone, without imparting the core lesson on why the writer would need to enclose the free-standing quote with some other contextual information. The second query takes care of that issue by describing the missing editorial component that may be unknown to the writer.

Next in the second sample, the first query states “doesn’t make sense,” instead of diagnosing what might be the problem. It is plausible that the writer crafted this sentence without realizing that prepositions are bogging down the meaning, so the second query explains what needs to be fixed. If the construction of the original sentence had been less complex, the editor might have applied an edit directly without querying, but to avoid the risk of misunderstanding the author’s original meaning, the safest method is to give the writer the opportunity to propose an alternative phrasing.

In coaching the writer, the editor is like a teacher who provides explanations so that the writer can be empowered by the knowledge to act and apply the learning to other situations.

### 3. Be specific.

In pursuit of clarity, the editor is constantly on the lookout to help the writer offer sufficient details so that readers can more easily comprehend the ideas. In the same way, an editor must practice what is preached by using precise language in the query and pointing out what should be addressed (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Using specific language in author queries**

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Ineffective query</b>	<b>Better query</b>
There is a spelling error present in a figure. The editor is unable to edit the text because the figure is in the form of an image.	There is a misspelled word at the end of Figure 1. Please fix it and be sure to proofread everything.	At the end of Figure 1, did you intend to say “acceptance” instead of “assistance”?
<i>Sentence:</i> “People’s lack of cultural awareness may make it challenging for them to accept empathy.”	What do you mean by this?	Do you mean “practice empathy” or “show empathy” rather than “accept empathy”?

As shown in the first sample scenario, an editor might surmise the appropriate word choice based on the context, but it is crucial to not assume the correct word and instead query the writer. In this case, specifying the error and suggesting alternatives would be better than requesting the writer to do one’s own proofreading. The second sample sentence demonstrates a similar concept, because the first query—“What do you mean by this?”—may lead the writer to overly explain in the reply due to the confusion about what is being asked, whereas the second query specifically points out a word-choice confusion and thereby elicits a brief, direct response from the writer.

For cases involving short phrases, offering alternative choices can highlight what aspects of the sentence need to be reconsidered. In addition, letting the writer decide on and customize the options allows for maximum autonomy so that the full locus of control rests with the author.

### 4. Be diplomatic.

Since everyone has different levels of sensitivity, using a tactful communication approach is

advisable. Throughout various editorial stages, formulating queries to the writer can be challenging because the written message can be misconstrued without the physical indicators of voice tone and body language, particularly if the writer and the editor are not mutually acquainted outside the editing project. Diplomacy can often make the editorial conversation run smoothly (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Practicing diplomacy in author queries**

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Ineffective query</b>	<b>Better query</b>
<i>Sentence:</i> “It was recognized that climate change might disrupt human activities.”	The sentence isn’t clear because you didn’t provide the subject of the sentence.	Recognized by whom? If you would identify the subject, I can help rephrase this sentence into active voice.
<i>Sentence:</i> “That political party shows it lacks basic sense to even begin comprehending social problems.”	This statement is offensive and may turn some readers away. You should definitely tone down the language to make it more neutral.	Given the controversy surrounding this topic, some readers might disagree. What do you think about making the language less strong?

As the first sample sentence shows, it is good practice to make “I” statements versus “you” statements. In psychological terms, saying “you did this...” can come across as accusatory and create a negative vibe. As with any diplomatic communication, the editor can turn the focus onto the action or oneself. Rather than point out the negligence of the writer, for example, an editor can propose an alternative and suggest how one can help. In the same vein, it is important to tactfully defuse inflammatory communication used in the second sample sentence without resorting to a reproachful tone, regardless of the ideological position of the editor. Thus, instead of labeling a claim as “offensive” or using another negative term, the editor can hedge the query language by pointing out the controversy and suggesting what can be done to avert a problem.

Although the eventual conveyance of an idea might be similar, tweaking the query language can help the editor to modulate one’s tone and garner more ready acceptance of the feedback from the writer. The simple gesture of using empathetic language can help establish that the editor and writer are on the same team.

Little details contribute significantly to showing care in the editorial process and cultivating the editor–writer relationship. The work can be tricky because the editor’s role is to subject the piece of writing through an arduous trial by questioning and challenging all the premises, but the use of a diplomatic approach can edify the writing overall. In certain situations, the editor can even infuse points of humor along the way and engage in a lighthearted dialogue with the writer so that the rigorous editorial process is made more fun.

## Final Words

Editing work is replete with numerous complications and requires concentrated efforts. However, continued practice can help the editor overcome complex scenarios and hone editorial acumen. The guidelines above can begin sensitizing an editor to the various types of edits and author-query responses, but over time, one will likely develop a palette of versatile options that work most effectively to accomplish editorial tasks; this is why editing is an art and calls for discernment rather than a science of methodologies.

The goal of the editor is to build a trusting relationship so that the writer feels comfortable about the editorial process and is confident about the upcoming publication. As the editor often remains an anonymous contributor to the final product, the role of the editor is never ostentatious; rather, the joy is derived from the love of turning words and ideas over in one's mind and analyzing how all the parts fit together. And ultimately, the editor can be happy of a job well done, not only in serving potential readers but also bringing out the best in the writer so that valuable knowledge may continue to spread.





# A Pedagogical Template for Preparing Undergraduate Student Scientific Laboratory Reports and First Submissions to Academic Journals

**J. W. SIMONSON**

This brief essay accompanies a template found on the next pages, which provides guidance to a student who is preparing their first laboratory report for an introductory science course. We teach students in these classes to think and to write like scientists, so much of the advice I offer here also applies to an advanced undergraduate student who is working with their faculty mentor to publish their first article in a peer-reviewed scientific journal. In addition, many students will give their first posters and oral presentations at scientific conferences during their undergraduate years, and a conference typically requires a written abstract to be submitted in advance of the presentation. I hope that this template will support students in all three of these important endeavors, from struggling through their introductory laboratory experience in Science 101, to contributing a talk at their first professional scientific meeting, to pushing their capstone research experiences that extra mile towards publication. A weighty list of accumulated presentations and publications on a résumé or CV will do much to elevate a productive student's job applications and graduate school applications above those submitted by competing students with otherwise similar academic credentials.

The advice here and in the following template is far from the first or the last word on this subject. Much of the advice on the language choices themselves comes from “Wheeler’s Rules” [1], which are available freely online and which I have found to be incredibly helpful in my career. In fact, I keep a printed copy taped up behind my office computer. In addition to Wheeler’s general ideas, a student writing a laboratory report for a college course must make sure they understand their grader’s expectations, much of which are hopefully documented in the course syllabus. On the other hand, writing for a scientific journal is actually easier in regard to identifying any of the publisher’s specific expectations. We begin this process by reading recently published articles in our target journal in order to gain an idea of their scopes, formats, and writing styles. For more specific details and questions, all publishers have a web page dedicated to providing information

for authors, including manuscript content guidelines, as well as formatting and style guidelines, often all the way down to a list of correct abbreviations. Many journals even provide templates, not entirely unlike the one on the following pages. Since academic journals may be initially unfamiliar to students starting along this path, a research mentor is our greatest asset here.

Setting aside the time to think and to write is one of the first critical steps to success. For an academic course, a professor generally expects students to spend twice as much time working outside of class as they do in the classroom. So, it would be reasonable to spend four hours writing a lab report for a two-hour weekly laboratory session, including the often time-consuming task of creating the figures. For a journal manuscript, the timescales are much longer. It generally takes me one or two years to complete a project and then a month or so of focused time on the writing itself. Accordingly, an undergraduate student might work with a research mentor for two years before putting together a paper, the very writing of which might take place full time over the student's final summer before graduating. Of course, there are some variations in these timescales from field to field. Speak openly with your research mentor about your expectations and theirs.

Publication is often a primary goal of a scientist, and authoring a peer-reviewed paper as an undergraduate student is a substantial accomplishment. A master's degree program will likely expect an additional paper, and a doctoral program will typically expect three, though the expectations for research and publication outputs vary among academic fields and subfields. When we embark upon a scientific career, the writing skills we first encounter in laboratory courses and subsequently hone through authoring manuscripts in collaboration with our research mentors and doctoral and postdoctoral advisors will eventually lay the foundation for our independent career.

## Reference

[1] J. A. Wheeler, *Am. J. Phys.* 67, 94 (1999).

# Our title should be an original and descriptive statement about our results

The next line is a list of authors (you and your teammates): M. Howard<sup>1</sup>, S. Howard<sup>1</sup>, L. Fine<sup>1</sup>, and C. Howard<sup>2</sup>

*Then provide a list of your majors or the departments in which you are doing research:*

<sup>1</sup> *Department of Physics, Farmingdale State College, Farmingdale, NY 11735, USA*

<sup>2</sup> *Department of Chemistry, Farmingdale State College, Farmingdale, NY 11735, USA*

This first paragraph in a laboratory report or journal article is known as an abstract. It should briefly overview our work, and it should be typed as a single column. In three to five sentences, we should briefly summarize our experiment, its results, and their implications. Sentence 1: a general description of the biological, chemical, or physical process being investigated. Sentence 2: the theory, perhaps as discussed in class, that is behind this process. Sentence 3: should begin with the words similar to “we report here” and should give a broad overview of the outcome of our experiment. Sentence 4: should give some details of the results of the measurements we performed. Sentence 5: should tie our results back to sentence 1 or sentence 2. These example sentences are only general guidelines, and many abstracts are written following a different structure. Despite its brevity, the abstract is typically the hardest part of a paper to write, and we often write it last, only after we understand all of our results and conclusions.

## Introduction

Our introduction is the first section in the body of our paper, and everything should be two column format from this point on. The introduction should discuss why the experiment is important and should be written so that someone who has is not an expert in this field will understand it. If we are writing a lab report for a class, write the introduction for someone who has never taken that course. If we are writing a paper, write for a student who is in your major but has not done research.

Write throughout in first person, active voice, and the present tense.

Three brief paragraphs is a typical good start for an introduction, with the first paragraph focusing on the importance of the biological, chemical, or physical process being investigated, the second paragraph focusing on the theory behind this process or on previous work in this specific area, and the third paragraph beginning with the words “we present here”

and giving an overview of the procedure and results.

We can think of the first paragraph expanding upon the first sentence of the abstract, the second paragraph expanding upon the second sentence, and the third paragraph expanding upon the third sentence. It is good practice to include citations in the first two paragraphs.

## Methods

Here we describe what we did in one or two brief paragraphs in sufficient detail that someone else could recreate our process. We write in first person, active voice, in the past tense. “We assembled...” “We measured...” If we are doing a lab report for class, we must not simply copy and paste from the lab manual. Please do not give a numbered list of procedural steps. We are looking for something more general here. “We measured the position of the carts with photogates and cart picket fences” is specific enough. Often, an author will describe

Citations should be endnotes and should have roughly the format shown at the end of this article [1]. If we are writing for a scientific journal, they all have their own citation styles. Be sure to check the guide for authors posted on the journal’s website or other articles published in the same journal.

the specific model of any equipment they used. This section should probably be our shortest. If it is our longest, something is very wrong with our report, and we should ask our professor or research mentor for advice before turning it in.

Often the methods section is the easiest to write, making it a great place to start. This way, we at least have some words down on paper, and the task of writing is somewhat less imposing.

## Results

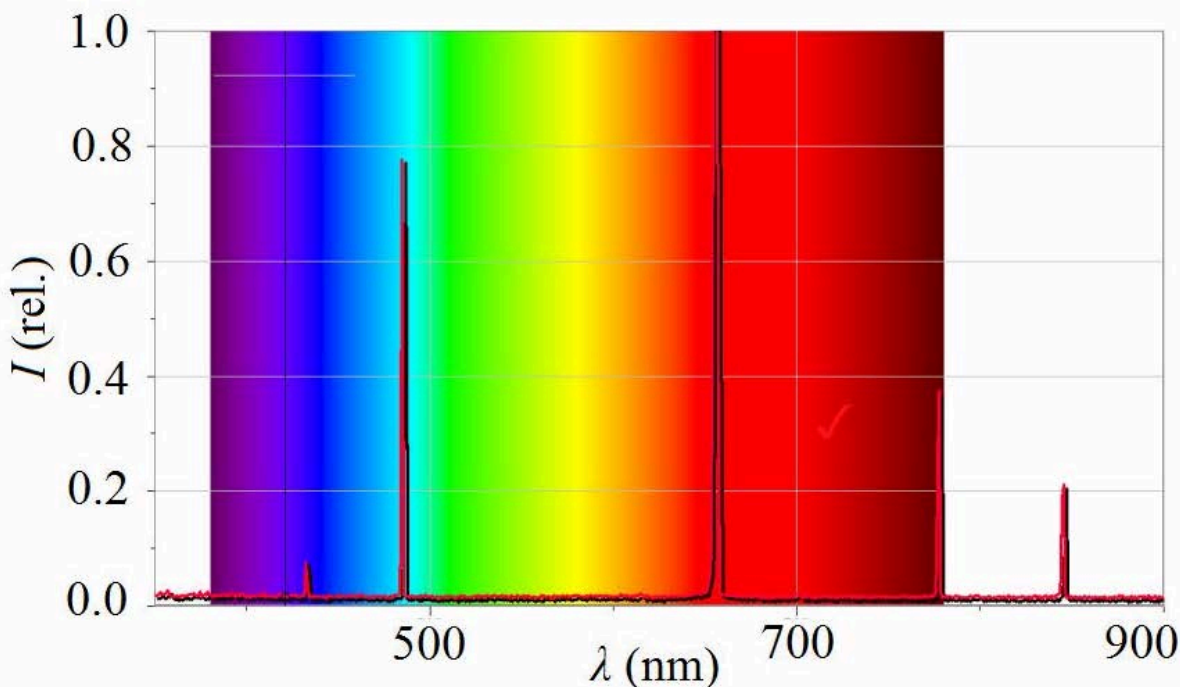
Describe each result with its own paragraph written in first person, active voice, and present tense. Attach each paragraph to a figure, and spend the paragraph describing the figure. If we are writing for a scientific journal, our manuscript will probably have between four and ten figures. If we are writing a weekly lab report, we might produce between one and three figures. In either case, ask your professor

or research mentor for advice on what they feel is appropriate.

The results section is often the best section to write second, after the methods section is complete. We begin by making the figures. We start by making just one figure, following the guidelines given in the caption on this page. We play with how the data are presented in our plotting software until their physical meaning

is most clearly presented. Now we know what the figure says — perhaps we have even learned why we did this measurement in the

first place. Once we arrive at this key understanding, we write a paragraph about this figure. Then we move on to the next figure.



*Figure 1. We caption each figure to explain it to the reader. Axes must be labeled, must have correct units, and be must large enough to be seen. We include and describe fits to the data where necessary. We explain all abbreviations and symbols. Any text or labels in the figure must be large enough to be legible. Figures can be tables or graphs and may be formatted to a single column or across two columns. I recommend producing figures and tables in another program available at your school, perhaps Microsoft EXCEL, then using the Snipping Tool to create image files, and embedding those images in the text file of your manuscript. An example caption for this figure might be “the intensity  $I$  of light emitted from a hydrogen lamp plotted in relative units as a function of the wavelength  $\lambda$  of the light. Two measurements are shown, the first indicated by a black line and the second indicated by a red line. The rainbow-colored background is a guide for the eye and corresponds to the visual spectrum.”*

We begin each paragraph in the results section with a sentence that summarizes the main point of the paragraph. We then spend the body of the paragraph hashing out the details before ending each paragraph with a sentence that summarizes again the key result and also transitions to the next paragraph. The overarching theme for describing our results in this format can be summed up as “tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and tell them what you told them.” The next paragraph

has an example. As we read, we notice how it follows this very format.

“Figure 1 shows that the emission spectrum of our hydrogen gas tube consists of four peaks in the visible range and one peak in the infrared range. The peaks correspond to wavelengths  $\lambda = 434 \pm 2$  nm,  $485 \pm 2$  nm,  $656 \pm 1$  nm,  $779 \pm 1$  nm, and  $845 \pm 2$  nm. The  $656 \pm 1$  nm peak is the most intense, in excellent agreement with the observed red color of the lamp. We explain these wavelengths as arising from discrete

electronic transitions according to the Rydberg formula of the Bohr model:  $1/\lambda = R(1/n'^2 - 1/n^2)$ . We summarize our Rydberg calculations in Table 1, which provides putative values of  $n$  and  $n'$  for each line. The first three spectral lines clearly correlate to members of

the  $n'=2$  hydrogen Balmer series, while the last two lines do not match well, suggesting that the hydrogen tube may have an impurity, the nature of which we describe in the next paragraph.”

## Conclusions

Once we complete the results section, it is often natural to write the conclusion section next, because it should flow naturally from the understanding we have just developed in building and describing our figures. Our conclusion summarizes the results of the experiment while communicating why they are important. We write in first person, active voice, present tense.

Developing a quantitative understanding of experimental uncertainty is an important goal in many introductory science courses. If we are writing our report for such a course, our conclusion should also (1) list several sources of experimental uncertainty, (2) estimate how large these sources of experimental uncertainty are, and (3) indicate whether these sources of experimental uncertainty are statistical or systematic in nature. We can find definitions of these terms in your laboratory

manual in one of the first few experiments or by talking to your professor. Generally, this construction is not present in peer-reviewed articles, though a similar discussion is common in some fields.

In my experience, the conclusion section is where a student generally misses points in their lab report, so it is likely that a professor knows to pay attention here when grading. Please be aware that mistakes we make while performing the experiment and analyzing our data are not experimental uncertainties and should not be documented along with the statistical and systematic uncertainties we discuss in the previous paragraph. If we list sources of error like “human error” or “calculation error,” we are just describing mistakes, and we are going to lose points. We must instead fix these errors rather than listing them in our report!

## Author Contributions

This section is perhaps the easiest of all and is becoming more common in peer-reviewed publications, particularly when it comes to

acknowledging the contributions of early career scientists like undergraduate students. In this section, we simply describe what every-

one did. We refer to each group member by initials, and we write in third person, active voice, and past tense. For example, “M. H. operated the LabQuest 2 for data collection, S. H. collected data by hand in the notebook and positioned the magnetic field sensor, L. F. set up the apparatus and coordinated all work by fol-

lowing the lab manual, and C. H. manipulated the carts on the track during data collection. All authors contributed equally to writing the manuscript.” Be honest here. Everyone will contribute in different ways to the final product.

## Reference

[1] T. Author and T. Co-author, *Journal Name* Volume No., Page No. (Year).





# MESSAGES FROM SCHOLARS ABOUT HISTORY AND CULTURE



# The Messengers of War

*Article Excerpt with Reflection*

**GEORGE FERNANDEZ**

*Originally Published in Illustration Magazine, Volume Sixteen, Issue Number Sixty-Two, 2018*

## 1915

The English would rule the seas effectively blockading Germany whose retort was unrestricted submarine warfare on any merchant ship in the area. Around the British Isles the Germans kept their word by sending numerous ships with passengers and crews to the ocean floor, without a flinch.

On the afternoon of April 28, 1915, *Castles in the Air*, a castle atop the roof on New York's Forty-Forth Street Theater and home to Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Castle, was the scene of a fashionable tea dance. The Castles' were more than glad to demonstrate their latest dance moves to help raise funds for their favorite charity the Blue Cross; an organization establishing hospitals to care for wounded horses in the European conflict.<sup>1</sup> Horses were being used to transport everything from soldiers to ammo and under the most horrendous of conditions. Over 8 million labored until death.

Among the patrons present were Mrs. Alfred Vanderbilt and Mrs. Charles Dana Gibson. Mrs. Vanderbilt was married to millionaire sportsman Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt who three days later would leave New York Harbor for Liverpool England aboard the *RMS Lusitania*, an English luxury passenger ship, the fastest afloat.

Vanderbilt was the primary heir to the Vanderbilt railroad empire. He and his valet Ronald Denyer were traveling first to a meeting of the International Horse Breeders Association and then, as family friend Thomas Slidell put it, "to offer a fleet of wagons and himself as a driver to the Red Cross Society, for he felt every day that he was not doing enough." Allegedly, Vanderbilt, acting on a premonition, had canceled his passage on the Titanic three years earlier. Fate struck an iceberg, sinking the unsinkable along with 1503 travelers and Vanderbilt's luggage. The

1. "Ways of Smart Society," *National Courier* 5, no. 18, 9.

morning of the sailing of the *Lusitania* Vanderbilt kissed his wife goodbye, with no premonition to speak of. They laughed off warnings by the German Embassy to avoid allied ships, posting a notice in newspapers. The opulent liner passed by Lady Liberty, then through the narrows of Staten Island and Brooklyn into the Atlantic. On May 7th the *Lusitania* was torpedoed off the coast of County Cork, Ireland. A secondary explosion would sink the ship in 18 minutes. Vanderbilt and his faithful valet would drown alongside 1198 others.<sup>2</sup>

This apparent indiscriminate action on the seas off the Celtic coast, in retrospect for many Americans, was pivotal; bringing the war home. It roused a public awakening to a very new reality and prodded President Wilson to demand an end to attacks against unarmed merchant ships. A demand with which the Germans would soon comply.

For many Americans and many artists alike emerged an openly objective clarity of duty. William A. Rogers political cartoons were familiar to innumerable Americans since the 1870's when he replaced the most famous of the Harpers Weekly artists Thomas Nast. Now with *The New York Herald*, his pen retorted the poignant despair of the disaster. The tragedy would also cause one of the first American posters of the war, John Spear's "Enlist," illustrating the heartbreaking drowning of a mother cuddling her baby as they slowly drift underwater.

Emotions were running high as the war in Europe continued to lead media headlines bridging the vast expanse of oceans that once defended our shores and there grew an ever-present prospect of hostilities with Mexico. Our preparedness to engage in war on any front was laughable. American ground forces consisted of almost 309,000 regulars while the British military numbered 4 million, the French "poilu" totaled 8.3 million, Russia had 12 million, Austria-Hungary had 7.8, and Germany had 11 million soldiers devoted to the carnage.<sup>3</sup>

While John Spear's "Enlist" poster seemed to arise by divine compulsion in reaction to the sinking of the *Lusitania*, other recruitment posters for various military branches were now obviously necessary and commissioned. The Marines would turn to the celebrated Spanish American War artist Howard Chandler Christy for their first poster of the war.

After the Spanish American War, Christy focused his career on illustrating novels and magazines. In one novel, "The Soldiers Dream," he painted a beautiful woman in the smoke of an infantryman's pipe who become popularly known as the "Christy Girl." She was equally chaste but a far more alluring modern successor to Charles Dana Gibson's "Gibson Girl," who was viewed by many as the ideal of female beauty, fashion and athleticism. She reigned as the formative feature character of *Life* magazine from the Gilded Age of the 1890's throughout the First World War.

2. "Mr. Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt," *The Lusitania Resource*, <http://www.rmsslusitania.info/people/saloon/alfred-vanderbilt/>

3. Jim Garamone, "World War I: Building the American Military," *US Army*, [https://www.army.mil/article/185229/world\\_war\\_i\\_building\\_the\\_american\\_military](https://www.army.mil/article/185229/world_war_i_building_the_american_military).

At 47 years of age, Gibson was so popular that his work even graced the shelves of the Kaiser's private library. The Kaiser so admired Gibson that during the largest annual sailing event in the world, the Keil Regatta in Germany, he invited Gibson's mother, who was visiting friends, to join him on the imperial yacht.<sup>4</sup>

For decades young women traveled from all across the country to Manhattan dreaming of being the next Gibson Girl. Nancy Palmer was a twenty-year-old beauty who had traveled by train from Poughkeepsie, New York to the Manhattan studio of Charles Dana Gibson high above Carnegie Hall. Gibson invited Nancy to model for him several days later but went on to tell her that he never used models more than two times in succession. She was greatly disappointed, but Gibson promised to arrange for her to meet Howard Chandler Christy, warning that if Christy invited her back to his home in Ohio, she would return to New York as his wife.<sup>5</sup> Three years later, in 1915, Nancy was every man's muse, being portrayed in a marine uniform in the heroically romantic recruitment poster, "If You Want to Fight." Four years later they would wed.

For many, it was all too obvious that the United States was being drawn into the war and a sense of urgency pervaded amongst ideologues, especially those with power. Henry Ford was the wealthiest automaker in the world and a mechanical genius. To keep pace with demand for his Model T his motor company introduced mass-production, which was possibly the greatest innovation of twentieth-century industrialization.<sup>6</sup>

Ford was a pacifist whose views were feverous regarding the senseless deaths of young soldiers, battle after battle, and stalemate after stalemate. He believed the war to be a product of money-lenders and Wall Street parasites.<sup>7</sup> Convinced that the belligerent nations wanted to negotiate peace, he invited distinguished pacifists to join him on a "Peace Ship" to Europe and unite with the representatives of affected nations to continuously mediate until the war was ended. In late November he met with President Wilson to discuss his proposal which Wilson rejected.<sup>8</sup>

Disappointed but determined Ford chartered the Scandinavian-American liner *Oscar* and on the bitterly cold morning of December 4, departed from Hoboken New Jersey for Norway as an enthusiastic crowd of fifteen thousand waved, sang and wished well to Ford and his party.<sup>9</sup>

President Wilson's resistance to the preparedness movement had been steadfast, but by late sum-

4. Fairfax Downey, *Portrait of an Era as Drawn by C. D. Gibson* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), 319.

5. James Phillip Head, *An Affair with Beauty—The Mystique of Howard Chandler Christy: The Magic of Youth* (Minneapolis MN: North Loop Books, 2016), 74-77.

6. Ellis, *Echoes*, 47-48.

7. Ellis, *Echoes* 61.

8. Ellis, *Echoes* 257.

9. Ellis, *Echoes* 253-262

mer of 1915 he began to waver and indicate support for a “reasonable preparedness.”<sup>10</sup> During the crossing of the “Peace Ship” there was word that President Wilson had met with Congress asking for a significant increase in military spending. Pacifists across the country felt betrayed. The ambassadors of goodwill aboard the *Oscar* were at once furiously divided. Even Bud Fisher, the creator of our nation’s first daily newspaper comic strip, the exceptionally popular, *Mutt and Jeff*, couldn’t resist using the two companions to poke fun at Ford for a solid week with his strip.<sup>11</sup>

By the time Ford arrived in Norway he was terribly ill. So much so that he abandoned his colleagues for America five days later. His expedition was a resounding failure and as journalist and historian Mark Sullivan wrote, “it deprived every other peace movement in the country of force and conviction.”

## Reflection

My article, “The Messengers of War,” brought closure to a circle of scholarship that began innocently enough in the Fall of 2014 with a WWI poster exhibition presentation I performed at Farmingdale College’s Gleeson Hall, dressed up like Uncle Sam.

From the beginning, there was no intention of publishing a 12706-word, 41-page article that was accompanied by 86 images. I never foresaw having to secure copyright approval for each and every one of those images from museums, major Library collections and other national institutional archives throughout the United States; nor had I intended on presenting at an International Conference on WWI. It all simply happened. As opportunities serendipitously presented themselves, I said yes.

My work as a consultant for the permanent collection of the Museum of American Illustration at the Society of Illustrators, allowed intimate access into a chapter of illustration history that had previously been of little interest to me.

My true interest and reputation as an Illustration scholar had been built on an

10. Kennedy, *Over Here*, 32.

11. Ellis, *Echoes*, 262-263.

innate love for the individual histories of notable artist/practitioners, especially during American Illustrations formative years or 'Golden Age'.

The aforementioned Poster exhibition started me on a 4-year journey of discovery that was to become a daily obsession due to its synchronistic relationship to the Society of Illustrators. Beginning in 1914, the Society's members would play a crucial role in contributing to the war effort and its outcome.

These Society members were the illustrative heroes I began studying as an undergraduate candidate at the School of Visual Arts in the early 1980's. I revisited the individual histories of these legendary illustrators, such as Charles Gibson, Monty Flagg, N.C. Wyeth, Harvey Dunn, and Norman Rockwell, but this time, was laser focused on their personal lives and experiences during the Great War.

I began taking notes. Countless pages of notes, and post-its swelled into a 6-inch thick binder. It was extraordinary how these artists lives intertwined and how each had their own take on shared events that I wove together, laced with socio-economic events taking place throughout the United States during the war. I love to write, and to freshly restage these events, was fun and a hell of a lot of work.

Interestingly enough, I soon began to realize that there was nothing ever written that intelligibly presented America's artistic output of World War I combining political cartoons, comics, animation, magazine cover art, and propaganda posters in a logical historical timeline connected to specific events. For example, Artists were creating posters recruiting American nurses to volunteer their services in France. I've seen and appreciated these posters for their combined artistry and messaging but never realized they were done a year or so before America declared war on Germany, at a time when J.P. Morgan's daughter was running a hospital for wounded soldiers out of a family chateau in France. J.P. Morgan was lending tens of millions of dollars to finance France during the war. After reviewing my research in total, I began to piece together a written visual inventory and timeline clearly linking the artist work to reactions to specific events at home or abroad.

The greatest writing challenge to me, overall, was reinterpreting a collage of perspectives, with each having been written by very different voices and to then seamlessly give this 12,000 word-story a single voice, my voice. The writing

process always brings me into a timeless realm of consciousness, where I would easily spend an entire day on a single paragraph. I'd like to romantically think of it as a stream of consciousness, but that stream, countless times, was a river of rapids, so, I will also admit to finding myself often frustrated with not finding the right words. I'd take a break, say a prayer, beg for clarity, and then get back at it; endlessly going back and forth between my research, my writing and a thesaurus. In the end, always intuitively seeking both chronological fluidity and harmony.

That word-story would become, "The Messengers of War," which was published in November of 2018 to coincide with the Centennial Celebration of the end of the Great War.



# The Beauty of Spirited Writing

## *Essay Excerpt with Reflection*

### **CHANNON LAWRENCE**

Below I attached a blog discussion from my MLG 300 (International Cinema) course, a class designed to educate students about community and activities that contribute to the social good, linking themes such as identity, human communication, and gender roles to establish a thematic analysis of film while also connecting to society. This discussion is based on the 2001 film *Spirited Away*.

Many elements go into the production of a film that contributes to the overall message and impact of a movie. For instance, theme is one of the most important elements of any good screenplay. It is the driving intention behind a film and allows the writer to convey a broader message about life to his or her audience. I have noticed that the movies we cherish the most are those with common themes that have affected us as viewers in one way or another.

This leads me to the movie *Spirited Away*, an animation about a young girl named Chihiro who stumbles upon an abandoned amusement park with her parents on their journey to their new home. Due to Chihiro and her family being somewhere they did not belong, she had to go on a journey of self-identity to free her parents and get back home. When I look at the class themes, I feel the two that most apply to this film are identity and human communication. Identity is a huge theme in *Spirited Away*, especially in Chihiro's quest for freedom. In the film, names play an important role in the identity of each character and their ability to escape Yubaba, the head honcho of the resort. Yubaba uses names to trap her victims at the bathhouse, and she steals Chihiro's name to make her forget about herself. However, Chihiro's love interest, Haku, warns her that if she forgets her name, she will forever be trapped in the spirit world. This resolution encouraged Chihiro to never forget herself throughout the various obstacles she encounters, and she does exactly that. As an audience, we see Chihiro find herself as a character. She was once a whiny little girl, but she later became a brave young lady.

Another theme I noticed in the film was human communication or a lack there was of it, specifically between Chihiro and her parents. From the very beginning of the film, you can see a communication barrier between Chihiro and her parents. For instance, Chihiro's father was insistent on going through the tunnel; however, Chihiro disapproved of that idea and stated it gave her the creeps. Her father responded to her remark with, "Don't be such a scaredy-cat, Chihiro. Let's just

take a look.” Her parents’ curiosity and sense of wonder led them to their downfall, as Chihiro was more aware of the life around them.

In many ways, I feel *Spirited Away* is similar to the movie *Alice in Wonderland*; both films are about young girls who get lost in strange worlds that require them to undergo journeys of self-discovery to get back home. Two women who were once fearful display bravery in the face of adversity. I think these films serve as great testaments for life, especially for college students. In many ways, our identity is formed or solidified through the adversities we overcome in life. Personally, I have learned more about myself as a person when I surpassed challenges. College is not easy. It requires a lot of time, energy, and commitment, but determination is the key to success. In the film *Spirited Away*, Chihiro never gives up. That is something I admire about her as a character. She saved herself and her family due to her willpower, something all students should have.

## Reflection

Typically, when writing a paper, I tend to read peer-reviewed articles and excerpts on a topic, then piece together all my supporting evidence into categories. I then color code and highlight points that I feel I can use to build on my own ideas. From there, I create a vague outline, in which I write down my main points for each paragraph. With that outline, I then write my essay. For this discussion post, I did something slightly different, since I was writing a film analysis, not a research paper.

First, I began by watching the movie *Spirited Away*, the assigned movie of the week for my MLG course. I then took notes on information I found interesting throughout the film, such as quotes, settings, and character interactions on a piece of paper. In my opinion, notes are the key to success in writing papers, as they help keep one’s mind at its peak performance, stimulate the brain, and help one stay focused on the question at hand. For instance, while watching the film, I jotted down notes about Chihiro’s relationship with her parents. Though they had a traditional family dynamic, they lacked a true bond. Of course, Chihiro’s parents loved her, but they often shut her down and never listened to any of her concerns. I also noticed that the film was rich in culture; the animators created a lot of traditional Japanese settings, which invoked a sense of magic and sym-

bolism. The viewer could almost feel the characters' sense of amusement as they were truly captivated by the mystery scenery they wandered around.

Furthermore, I noticed that the author used film elements, such as close-ups, editing, and composition, to aid in the overall communication of the film as a story. *Spirited Away* is simply an animation, the illusion of movement. Though inanimate objects appeared like they were moving, they were not. Yet despite all that, it displayed so much depth. For example, there were so many scenes that showed the manifestation of human fear through the lens of Chihiro's eyes. These were the types of things I jotted in my notepad, because I knew before typing my final body of work these were all topics, I wanted to elaborate more on in my blog post, as these were all things that crossed my mind watching the film. After creating my outline for this project, I did a broad search of the movie to learn more about when *Spirited Away* was first released, its director, plot, and main characters. I could not just discuss the film at face value. I also wanted to understand the era it was released in and the impact it had on its general audience. Hence, upon coming to a fair understanding of the film in its entirety, I then begin to work on typing my discussion post.

Thus, after reviewing my notes on the film, I read the blog prompt a second time and reorganized my notes into categories, in this case, thematic analysis, film element, and connections. I then placed character quotes that correlated with themes of the class under thematic analysis, and textbooks quotes along with their pages under film elements. Lastly, I brainstormed ways the film and its main points related to students and society. A good thing to remember is that notes do not have to be perfect. For me, my notes serve as a guide for what I want to write officially on paper, so my draft is my vision.

With this in mind, underneath each category, I broke my discussion up into bullet points, of short sentences I wanted to convert into body paragraphs. Some might wonder how I transitioned my draft into a blog post. Well, I first began by typing my introduction. Typically when writing an introductory statement, I start off with a general topic then go more specific. In this prompt, I decided to start by discussing theme itself, which led me to my first body paragraph on the theme of identity, along with a brief film synopsis. That first body paragraph then led to my second body paragraph on human communication as an alternative theme, as it also stood out to me while watching the film. After building on those two

main points, I wanted to create a connection, so I correlated *Spirited Away* to *Alice in Wonderland* to express the journey of self and self-determination most college students encounter.

Last, while typing my post, my main intention was to make it understandable to all viewers, so I was very careful about my word choice. I wanted my readers to understand the various elements that impact a movie's overall message, especially theme, the main idea of my post. After all, theme is the driving intention behind a film that allows writers to convey a broader message to their audience. I wanted my readers to feel as if I was having a casual conversation with them. I say all this because I feel it is very important for writers to be aware of their audience. If there is not a clear understanding of one's audience, a clear message cannot be delivered. Hence, for this assignment, I was aware that my audience was fellow college students, so my goal was for my paper to be entertaining yet informal.

Overall, after reading this manuscript, I hope writers of all ages and skill levels take away the importance of organization, planning, delivery, and intention in paper writing, as those are the key elements for any great response regardless of the course. In order to organize a response, one must first plan how to deliver the message to properly grasp the attention of the audience and convey a grander idea. Just as it is important to know what to say, it is equally important to know how to say it. However, never forget that writing is supposed to be fun. Do not let it intimidate you. It is a form of expression and communication, but remember to always keep the task of the assignment in mind. Happy writing, everyone!

# The Art of Being Green: Mimesis and the Environment in Book II of The Faerie Queene

*Excerpt from a Graduate Seminar Essay with Reflection*

**JASON LOTZ**

Today's fears of global environmental disaster, climate change, dwindling resources and most recently an impotent economy that seems utterly ungrounded in any *natural* worth, make environmentalism a necessary, if not easy, lesson to learn. While incipient industrialism and the boon of technology found us intemperate in our lust for progress, this present anxiety promotes and encourages a more urgent deference to nature's gifts. "A Harder lesson," according to Spenser's opening lines of Book II (The Book of Temperance), Canto 6; "to learne Continance / In iouyous pleasure, then in grievous paine." Plainly, the "joyous pleasure" of modern advances in science and technology proved too much of a good thing when, in the opinion of a growing number of dissatisfied people, the incontinent pursuit of life, liberty and happiness returned an over-heated, over-polluted and over-burdened global ecology. While Spenser's *Faerie Queene* precedes the concept of *going green*, his allegory of temperance challenges the modern ideology that poses economic welfare as the enemy of environmental conscientiousness.

Environmentalism today, at least in the public consciousness, rather than being progressive, often yearns nostalgically for a lost Eden, a by-gone symbiosis between humans and their environment—a simpler time, untouched by the intemperate mechanical rape of Mother Earth. For some, that Eden represents a time before artificial sweeteners, before polyester, before plastics—a time when man and everything manmade did not substitute, maim, or otherwise oppose nature but instead communed with nature and allowed nature to be more itself. Others look forward to a time when the indulgences of the past (and present) can be overcome by the advances of more ecologically sensitive technology, i.e., renewable energy, paper alternatives, refillable water bottles, electric cars, etc. The resistance to either movement is not only due to the lack of belief or solution, but it is the condition of modern society. Civilization itself is the resistance to the whims and changes of the environment, the natural cycles of nature.

Civilization is our statement of permanence: indoor plumbing, canned food, skyscrapers, levees, Viagra, fame, religion, literature. Insofar as society recognizes that its permanence is bound up with the environment, we respond with civilized advancements like reforestation and recycling.

Still, however, the modern priority remains the status quo; and economic success is status—the ability to stand when others have to hunt and gather. What lies between today and a safer, greener world is this modern Tower of Babel, which we have been building higher and wider since the rebirth of classical learning and the rise of nations. Spenser provides us not a rulebook for proper interaction with nature, but rather a fossil, or an ice core, in which we can see the evidence of elemental cracks in the relationship between nascent modernism and the natural environment—the beginning of society’s reckless flight from nature.

Whether our prodigal society can return to Mother earth—or whether our Tower can be integrated into the environment—in time to regain a mutually beneficial relationship depends somewhat on our ability to stem the consequences of our industrial and technological *progress*. Some would argue we already have the means—more important is the will, the reestablishment of a moral order, the cultural discovery of moral obligation to the environment—a re-familiarization with a responsible environmental consciousness. Studying works like the *Faerie Queene* allows us to trace our cultural apathy toward and ignorance of our physical surroundings. In the Book of Temperance, Spenser diagnoses the problem of modernity and highlights, way before its time, the anxiety of a post-modern world. In this sense, Spenser’s work is perhaps more relevant today, as we begin to lose faith in modernity, than it was in the four centuries following its publication.

Spenser’s depiction of temperance does not in itself claim any particularly environmental ground; Guyon is not immediately the *green* champion, and the most we can expect from either a literal or allegorical reading of the Book of Temperance is that a temperate knight must be temperate in all things—in governing the passions as well as in managing natural resources. However, there seems to be an underlying concern—throughout the *Faerie Queene*, but especially in the Book of Temperance—to describe, if not define, the apparent opposition of art and nature, i.e., imitation.

As C. S. Lewis explains, art is often conceived in the *Faerie Queene* as the false decoration, imitation or otherwise perversion of *true* nature. In Canto vi, the description of the Phaedria’s island of mirth and pleasure seems to fit this idea as Spenser is careful to qualify the natural appearance of the island: “As *if* it had by Natures cunning hand, / Bene choycely picked out from all the rest” (2.6.11) [emphasis mine]. Phaedria’s island provides a vain imitation of natural delight; it is literally too good to be natural and too unnatural to be good. As the opening stanza warns us, temperance must be shown in all things, good and bad: “For sweetnesse doth allure the weaker sence / So strongly, that uneathes it can refraine / From that, which feeble nature covets faine.” Though pleasure is life-affirming, and thus suited to nature, too much of it constitutes a vicious danger, capable of stripping one’s wit (cf. Cymochles in 6.13).

The difficulty with accepting Lewis’s judgment of art, or even simply artifice, arises because one recognizes that Spenser himself is an artist, that the *Faerie Queene* is not only art, but contains numerous examples of ecphrasis and even a reference to the author’s own literary ego, Colin

Clout. Furthermore, this apparent sabotage of the author's own work cannot be merely glossed by a cursory distinction between good and bad quality of art. Spenser's language in canto vi nearly parallels Philip Sidney's in the *Defense of Poesy*, but whereas Sidney celebrates the "delight" of poetry for its ability to accommodate teaching, Spenser denigrates it, focusing on its capacity to mislead. Rather than teach, delight saps Cymochles of all care and fills him "With false delights" and "pleasures vayn" (6.14). Phaedria's "charm", far from the virtue-affirming delight that Sidney claims, leaves Cymochles defenseless, unconscious, and slothful. Everything about Phaedria's island and her *Idle Lake* moves the active knight to passivity and apathy—all under the guise of Nature (6.15-16).

It would seem, from a Platonic perspective, that Spenser remains suspicious of art simply on the basis that it is not the real—that it is the imitation—that it is an unnatural lie. But never in canto six does Spenser refer pejoratively to the imitative character of Phaedria's delights. "As if", for the critics who support Lewis's theory, carries almost too much of the burden of proof. Nowhere does Spenser pointedly say that Phaedria's "false" delights are any less delightful than those of nature; his issue with Phaedria's false delights, especially if we are to take the first stanza as the structuring and revealing introduction to the episode, is not one of kind, or nature, but one of degree. What matters is not the art of nature, or the nature of art, but rather to what extent and to what end that art—or that nature—is pursued.

Thus, Spenser demonstrates the same opinion as Sidney, who argues that poetry should not be judged because some poets and some readers have taken delight too far and abused its power—"But what, shall the abuse of a thing make the right use odious?" (236). Rather, poetry should be used with temperance, not to escape the everyday pains of life, but as the fair and timely interacting with both pleasure and toil. Unlike the flowers, that according to Phaedria rely passively on Mother Nature (6.16), our relationship with nature should not be too easy or too pleasant. Temperance involves effort, work, activity; and in Book II of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser describes the efforts of Guyon, knight of Temperance, to live in this world. Granted, this world for Guyon is an allegorical one, a moral landscape of metaphorical virtues and vices: Guyon's adventures are not in the Amazon rainforest confronting loggers or on the seas waving signs at whale hunters. And neither does Spenser offer anything like advice to save the planet; he is interested rather in the world. However, Spenser's world is the world we make—the ideas, governments, and identities that we, in our interactions with nature, mold and model. Guyon, the knight of temperance learns and displays responsibility in the world of change: Book Two of *The Faerie Queene* is Spenser's 'how to live in the world.'

I wonder if our failure with environmentalism to date is that we are trying to save the planet when we should be trying to save the world. [...]

## Reflection

Some people will say the way to avoid writer's block is through preparation; if you write what you know, you will always know what to write. Clever. Except that in academic writing, we often use writing as a means to know. An essay, by its original definition, is a trial. By writing (and this includes all stages of a writing process—prewriting, drafting, revising), we organize observations and data into coherent patterns, allowing us to move from vague notions of how things work to clear and specific arguments and theories. On the path from not knowing to knowing, there are bound to be some apparent obstacles. Writing is that path. So how do we navigate those troubled waters?

I wrote the essay excerpted here for a graduate seminar on Edmund Spenser and a Literature and Law conference hosted by John Jay University. Both of those audiences determined how and what I was going to write; on the one hand, I was writing to my professor and classmates as part of our collaborative study of *The Faerie Queene*, and on the other, I was writing to an audience of scholars interested in the intersections of literature and law but who probably had little to no knowledge of Spenser's poetry. Such duality of audience is common to interdisciplinary studies like comparative literature; it's kind of the whole point: take two seemingly unrelated things, throw them in a room together, and see what happens.

In this case, those two unrelated things were Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and environmental policy. Spenser's pastoral poetry might be better suited to a "get-back-to-nature" advocacy, but in Book II of *Faerie Queene*, I found some sympathetic vibrations. My thoughts drifted toward the contest between art and nature and what that has to do with world-making (or worlds falling apart). Guyon, the knight of temperance, has to destroy a garden near the end of the book, and gardens lead logically into a discussion of art and nature and so to a pairing of temperance and environmental policy. So far so good—that's the SparkNotes version; the whole story is far messier.

All my life I have believed that writing brings things to life. I still do. But now I know also that writing is murder. Anyone who tells you otherwise is tricking



you into getting your homework done or has never written anything that didn't fit on a Post-it note. I can think of no other socially acceptable activity more violent than taking a sparkling intuition, reducing it to a thesis, and cramming it into an essay; a surgeon sawing through a human breastbone to transplant a heart perpetrates less violence than an author revising a first draft.

See, what I love about comparative literature is also what thwarts my writing process. It's like going on a road trip with two of your best friends who have not met each other; it might be a disaster of conflicting personalities and controversial politics, but it will certainly also draw out aspects of your friends you could not previously see. This is what I love about comparative studies—the associations, analogies, resonances sparking into a constellation of curiosities, each one revealing a new perspective of an old text, each text becoming the Rosetta Stone for the next series of interpretations. It's also what I hate about writing.

To write an essay, you have to move from the many to the one; you have to let go of all the wonders of discovery and focus on a single purpose. Thrift and focus are essential to academic writing, but in my experience, finding your essay's Zen-like single purpose rarely comes from a "keep it simple" starting point. For me, thrift comes only by hacking away at the excesses of a prodigal brain. At the beginning of a writing project, I am a dog visiting Petco gleefully exploring all the new smells. Literally everything is interesting to me at this stage; my mind, in brainstorming mode, is like Whitman in *Leaves of Grass*— "I contain multitudes." I relish these expansive, curious moments.

Then the cutting comes.

It feels like a dressing-down scene from *The Devil Wears Prada*. It feels like Lear must have felt when he showed up to Regan's with his entourage of 100 men, only to be told he was an old man and couldn't keep any of them. It feels like the last seat on the last lifeboat in the last moments of the *Titanic*. Somehow you have to go from that feeling of loss and abandonment to writing confidently about the one last idea you chose to keep. Somehow you have to not think about the ghosts of all those other aborted ideas, which all end up in your head personified as that ancient Templar knight in *The Last Crusade*, telling you that you've chosen poorly, that you are an impostor, that no one will ever love you, that this essay will lead to your rapid and complete aging and decay.

Maybe I'm given to an Eeyoresque hyperbole, but like a dreamer, I'm not the only one. Writer's block is real for most of us. And usually, if we manage to get through it, we're so harrowed by the experience, we can't bear to investigate it. So, we don't figure out what causes it or how to manage when it reoccurs. And it will. I'm not going to offer any foolproof remedies; I don't have any—none that work without a lot of endurance and effort on your part, which is a bit of stone-soup recipe. The best advice I can give is this: learn to accept reality. Do it without bargaining, without hedging that romantic vision of an ideal writing process. Write with an attitude of adventure and curiosity. True curiosity is as content with wandering into a dead end as it is with discovering a field of flowers.

A cliché applies here: *trust the process*. But make sure that process is one that you've developed through experience—or through experiments. We learn best through a combination of successes and failures not simply because we know what works and what doesn't work, but because we know we've survived both. People like to say that madness is doing the same thing over and over expecting different results, and if you've ever tried to play golf, you probably know: 'tis common, this madness. But there is another kind of madness—a smug and arrogant sort—that comes from doing the same thing over and over expecting the same results. What learning can there be if we can predict the outcomes of every *essay*?

If, like me, you need the exuberance and idealism of the brainstorming phase to keep moving forward, chances are your writing process is going to falter. If you need your writing task to progress upwards and onwards according to your best laid plans, you're probably going to give up.

Before my final thesis for this paper ultimately found its *one thing* by framing temperance as care for nature, I wandered far and wide through a network of possibilities. I wanted to write about *King Lear* and how Spenser's version of an old king and his three daughters, which he situates within the allegory of temperance, helps us see Shakespeare's play as a consideration of personal government. I wanted to write about delight—the word being key to Spenser's repudiation of the false Bower of Bliss and Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesy*, in which the courtier argues the purpose of poetry is “to teach and delight.” I wanted to write about Plato banning poets from the ideal society and relate it to Guyon's destruction of Acrasia's garden. I wanted to write about Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and how the changeable cycles of nature imply the need for temperance. Each of these associ-

ations seemed precious to me, but as the saying goes, less is more; I had to prune. I had to sacrifice foliage for fruit.

Such sacrifices can play havoc with a writer's confidence; it is too easy to waste energy looking back wistfully at what might have been. Those aborted ideas occur in moments of epiphany; letting them go bruises the places of hope and inspiration and leaves one feeling stuck. It's like that classic chocolate experiment where, depending on your group, you are asked to choose either one of six or one of 30 chocolates and then rate your satisfaction: it's hard not to think about those 29 left behind.<sup>1</sup>

Eventually—hopefully—you'll find a deeper joy in the precision of your single idea, but in my experience, that doesn't happen without struggle, regret, and doubt. The trick is to get through the disillusionment inherent in moving from many ideas to just one. And the trick to breaking down the wall of writer's blocks is that there is no trick—not that I know of anyway—which is why it is so crucial to have and know your process. Mine involves writing a *zero draft*, which means getting all my baby ideas on paper. Sometimes that means I write in circles like a vulture flying over a dead antelope; it can be tedious and feel out of control, but because I know it is only a step in the process, I know I don't have to be an eagle diving instantly towards my prey.

You cannot always trust your feelings to be buoyant and confident, and so you must develop a process that carries you through the times of doubt. Trusting the process develops resilience. That's why the process works—not because it avoids stress but because it frames real labor. Writing is work. And because it is work, it allows you to develop the mental muscles and the emotional fortitude necessary for doing that work again and again.

I'd be remiss if I ended an essay like this without disclaiming my negativity. I am not exaggerating about the depression that invariably hits me after the initial brainstorm, but I do love writing. That's the whole riddle—how to integrate those two realities. I suspect others experience a similar disillusionment when they write and, like me, wish they could avoid that discomfort. But acknowledging this

1. A study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* in 2000 found that too many choices (involving jam, chocolate, and college essays) inhibited participant motivation, performance, and satisfaction. For the full analysis, see Iyengar and Lepper (2000).

feeling of failure is the dark and loamy soil of hope. For those who hit that pit of despair and think the pain means “I can’t write” or “I’m doing this wrong,” I’m here to tell you no, you’re not. If it hurts, you’re probably on the right path. Writing takes effort, and sometimes that effort feels like torture.

Even when it feels like being strapped to The Machine and Count Rugen is telling you “I’ve just sucked one year of your life away,” you must learn to cope. Not all of us have a Miracle Max to make us a chocolate-coated pill to bring us back to life. So what do we do when we feel paralyzed by our fear of getting it all wrong? It’s simple: have fun storming the castle!

(Also, if you haven’t seen *The Princess Bride*, I can’t help you.)

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# Una Vida Aislada: The Theme of Isolation in *The House on Mango Street*

## *Essay Excerpt with Reflection*

**LEILA MARTINEZ**

In *The House on Mango Street* by Mexican-American author Sandra Cisneros, the protagonist, Esperanza, describes her life experiences within the Latin neighborhood (or *barrio*) of Mango Street. This coming-of-age novel told by a series of vignettes narrated by the main character not only revolves around Esperanza, but also the people who reside in Mango Street. A common theme that surfaces in the novel is isolation. Esperanza and her fellow neighbors all experience the feeling of isolation in different ways.

It is common for young people to have awkward stages in their lives when they feel detached from themselves and society. Esperanza, the “...girl who didn’t want to belong” (Cisneros 109), constantly feels outcasted throughout the book because of her inability to be content with her identity. She also feels a strong disconnect towards her community of Mango Street. To begin, Esperanza longs for a true friend who understands her and satisfies her desire for companionship. In the chapter “Boys & Girls,” Esperanza says “Someday I will have a best friend all my own. One I can tell my secrets to. One who will understand my jokes without my having to explain them. Until then I am a red balloon, a balloon tied to an anchor” (Cisneros 9). Esperanza associates her free spirit with the red balloon, and the anchor with her feeling of unexplained entrapment and loneliness within herself and her place in Mango Street. Although Esperanza does become friends with Lucy and Rachel later on in the book, they do not achieve the level of closeness Esperanza fantasizes about. In “Laughter,” Esperanza recalls a time when she made a remark about how a line of houses on the street reminded her of the ones built in Mexico, saying, “Look at the house, I said, it looks like Mexico. Rachel and Lucy look at me like I’m crazy, but before they can let out a laugh, Nenny says: Yes, that’s Mexico alright. That’s what I was thinking exactly” (Cisneros 18). Lucy and Rachel don’t see the resemblance, and they were about to laugh at what Esperanza said out of awkwardness or to ridicule her. However, Esperanza’s sister, Nenny, noticed the similarities as well.

The concepts of sexuality and male attention are foreign topics for Esperanza in the novel. She has an innocent view on romance, and is not seen as a romantic interest for the neighborhood

boys. This alienates Esperanza in several ways. Firstly, she cannot relate with the neighborhood girls who are more promiscuous (like her friend Sally). Esperanza has a childish outlook on sexuality and the male gender. In “Red Clowns,” after Esperanza’s sexual assault incident at the carnival, she confronts Sally by saying “Sally, you lied. It wasn’t what you said at all. What he did. Where he touched me. I didn’t want it, Sally. The way they said it, the way it’s supposed to be, all the storybooks and movies, why did you lie to me?” (Cisneros 99). Not only does this show the innocence and naivety Esperanza had before her assault occurred, but also highlights how differently Esperanza and Sally view sex: Sally enjoys it while Esperanza fears it.

In “Boys and Girls,” Esperanza says, “The boys and girls live in separate worlds. The boys in their universe and we in ours” (Cisneros 8). This remark “posits the theme of gender difference” (Olivares), and shows how inexperienced and detached Esperanza is from boys. In “The Monkey Garden,” Esperanza tries to grab the attention of Sally, who was flirting with a group of neighborhood boys. She tells Esperanza to “Play with the kids if you want...I’m staying here” (Cisneros 96). Sally continues to laugh and converse with the boys; their flirtatious banter being described by Esperanza as “A joke I didn’t get” (Cisneros 96). When Sally disappears with the neighborhood boys behind a pickup truck to retrieve her house keys through kisses, Esperanza thought that Sally “needed to be saved” (Cisneros 97), and she found “three big sticks and a brick” (Cisneros 97) to intimidate the boys with. [...]

## Reflection

This paper was a final assignment for an American literature course. The essay assignment was to choose one work of literature from a list of classics, and write a six- to seven-page paper on what the selected literature reveals about life, human beings, and/or their relationships. The instructor who assigned this paper noted that the essay question was designed to be open-ended on purpose, to encourage diverse writing topics. The instructor required that all writers find four to six scholarly journals to use as an outside source for this essay. Besides the journals, the book that is selected for this assignment is the only source that can provide textual evidence.

The classic literature that I chose to write about for this assignment was Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*. I read this book for the first time when I

was twelve years old. I saw myself in the main character, Esperanza. She was a Latin-American girl who felt out of touch with her heritage and identified more with the American aspect of her identity as opposed to her Mexican ethnicity. Growing up as someone who didn't have parents who prioritized speaking Spanish, or any *abuelos* to learn it for, I was extremely disconnected from my Hispanic identity. I was never able to know what my relatives were gossiping about at the kitchen table, have a connection with any of my relatives in the Dominican Republic, or genuinely enjoy a *bachata* song's lyrics and not just the rhythm. I clung onto the American culture, which I knew best. I selected this book not only because of the bittersweet and nostalgic childhood memories that came from it, but also because it is a short read. Being a little over 100 pages, I knew this book would be appropriate for an assignment with a closely approaching deadline. The briefness of the book is very deceiving, for the amount of substance each individual chapter encapsulates provides a multitude of interpretations unique to each reader.

Reading this book again after several years, there were many themes I could have chosen. There are the themes of sexuality and femininity, the emphasis of male dominance in minority cultures, the loss of innocence, the myth of the American Dream, and the desire for personal autonomy. However, I needed to choose something that could be spread across six to seven pages, as the assignment requires. I chose the theme of isolation, as both Esperanza and several of the other characters in the book experience this sensation. In the book, there is a juxtaposition between Esperanza and the residents of Mango Street. While Esperanza feels isolated due to her cluelessness about how she interprets her identity sexually, ethnically, and emotionally, the residents of Mango Street feel isolated because of spousal abuse, immigration, and familial confinement. I was able to write seven pages in total, because of my ability to connect five different characters to the theme of isolation and foreignness. I structured this essay by first talking about Esperanza and how she relates to the theme, and then about the other characters and their relation to the theme.

There was a specific method I followed in order to find appropriate scholarly journals to use for this final paper. I used the official library website of my college to find reliable databases like ProQuest and Gale Literature Criticism. I would open each journal that was suggested, and search for keywords like "identity,"

“outcast,” and “foreign.” I used those words since they pertain to the theme that I planned on writing about for my essay. If I notice those words or anything similar highlighted frequently in the text, I would read the selected journal more carefully to determine if it fits the narrative I want to push for this assignment. The same strategy was applied for certain side characters, like “Mamacita,” “Gerardo,” “Marin,” and “Rafaela.” These were the characters that I wanted to connect to Esperanza and the sensation of foreignness, so I needed in-depth analyses of them to help construct my notes.

I felt very overwhelmed prior to writing this essay, since there was so much evidence that was applicable to the theme of isolation. The lengthy page count on top of the other finals I had to complete for separate classes made me realize I had to do some planning. To help utilize my time strategically and organize my thoughts, I created a large flow chart that is separated by the different characters in the book. Esperanza had the largest section, while the minor characters did not have sections that were as detailed since I only had one chapter of specific information about them to go by. The flow chart consisted of multiple boxes and lines. These were used to display and connect textual evidence and personal interpretations of each character. The personal interpretations were then perfected to become thoughtful literary explanations that were included in the essay. For instance, Esperanza’s flowchart started off with her name. Then another box connected to a statement that summarized how Esperanza fit into the theme of isolation. Next, I made three larger boxes titled “Friendships,” “Sexuality,” and “Ethnicity.” These are the reasons why Esperanza feels the sensation of isolation and detachment in *The House on Mango Street*. In each of these labeled boxes, I copied and pasted evidence from the scholarly journals that were relevant to each category, along with a parenthetical citation of the authors’ last name and the page number of the journal. I did the same thing for the book by reading each chapter and extracting evidence that could pertain to the three topics, including parenthetical citations for each as well.

Creating this flow chart was an essential step to writing this final paper. Taking the time to plan what I was going to include in this essay not only made writing the paper a lot quicker, but it helped calm my feelings of being overwhelmed and anxious. I also believe that choosing a book that I genuinely like made the essay



more enjoyable to write. I received an “A” on the paper, which validated all the hard work I have done to create an essay that I am wholeheartedly proud of.

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# The Advantages of Quick Writing Bursts

*Excerpts with Reflection*

**TIMOTHY NICHOLSON**

*Excerpts from “Intimate Decolonization: Strategies for Reconceptualizing and Teaching the End of European Empires,” World History Connected, 15, 3, 2018.*

In recalling her time as a student in India in the late 1960s, Adeline Akoth Opondo shared the experience of her classmate and friend, stating: “Mariam got pregnant and the man was very happy; little did he know that the family would never approve of their union. Before long the lady [Miriam] started getting threats from the family to a point where she was told to abort or else be thrown to jail or deported from the country....The family wanted to know why their son could sleep with and decided to impregnate an inferior species...” Scattered throughout East Africa are small numbers of families, like those of Opondo, consisting mostly of African men and non-African women, now in their 70s, and mixed-race offspring, now in their 40s or 50s, who are physical reminders of East Africa’s contact with the outside world during the waning years of colonial rule and the first years of independence. As students in the 1950s and 1960s, African men and women travelled in increasing numbers to diverse areas such as India, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States in search of a university education before returning as nation-builders of their nascent states. These experiences provide important case studies that contemporary students can relate to and obtain a different understanding of the decolorizing world than offered by traditional, politically focused narratives.

The desire for access to higher education can personalize the topic of decolonization, as African students studying abroad possessed similar goals to college students today (the hope for better employment, higher standard of living and middle-class status) that a university degree promised in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Thus, paying secondary school fees and fighting for a scholarship were seen as important investments for the individual, family and community. Also providing some relatability to contemporary students is the idea of how personal connections are needed; East African students quickly discovered that the ability to attend university abroad required ties to the wider British world. Help came in the form of teachers or, frequently, missionaries, who often went against colonial regulations to help students travel abroad. In addition to serving as the primary connection between local communities and the outside world, teachers helped disseminate information regarding new educational and scholarship opportuni-

ties. Finally, examinations of rising nationalist politicians raise important and relevant classroom questions regarding the politicization of education (that also can be further connected to the development of nationalist narratives) and the funding of education. Kenyan leaders such as Tom Mboya, Oginga Odinga and later Jomo Kenyatta worked to expand their political base and foster their international connections through the provision of international scholarships. In Tanzania, local politicians did largely the same, although much more of their effort went to helping students reach secondary school and developing local institutions. For those lacking these connections, the students established their own transnational networks—writing to any politician or group at the local, national and international level that might provide some assistance. Thus, East African students epitomize the transnational mobility of colonized or formerly colonized populations as they circumvented colonial and postcolonial travel regulations and forged new connections that pushed global integration.

The memories from Opondo, who graduated in the early 1970s, demonstrate the potential dangers of transnational intimate encounters, as well as the insight that oral histories can provide. After learning of scholarship opportunities from a newspaper advertisement she read at work, Opondo applied for a scholarship with the hope of attending Makerere University in Uganda, as she did not want to be away from her family and community for four years. After failing to secure entrance to Makerere, Opondo accepted an Indian government scholarship offer to study economics at Punjab University, becoming a member of the class of 1973. While abroad, she started dating and fell in love with an Indian man, with whom she discussed marriage and other long-term plans. However, this multi-month relationship, which went against the desires of her boyfriend's family, also resulted in an unplanned pregnancy. Learning from the experience of her friend mentioned at the start of this article, Opondo vowed to keep the child—although done in secret, refusing to tell her boyfriend; thus, the racial transgression was never made public. By quickly escaping India, Opondo escaped any larger social condemnations but it was at a high cost to herself and her daughter, a process reflective of the student experiences. Students conducting oral histories of postcolonial migrants and regarding such intimate encounters can realize the poignancy of these experiences and feelings of marginalization that the written sources often fail to convey.

African students remember a general level of distrust and unacceptance that Indians made clear. The mostly male population of African students abroad were seen by Indians as sexual threats and remember being associated with jungles, primitive and savage behavior and mental inferiority. In affirming this perception of Indian views, one former student recalled that “an African man befriending an Indian lady was an abomination.” The threat of violence also worked to prevent African and Indian students from dating. On one occasion, an African student, Naimasiah, was approached by a group of Indian students who threatened “to rough him up” if he continued seeing his Indian girlfriend. Abortions also occurred, as in at least one instance, a student

believed that terminating her pregnancy was the only action available to ensure her own safety, which also ensured that racial boundaries were maintained. Housing-related issues worked to reinforce the Afro-Indian divide by limiting the interaction between the two groups. African students were housed in different dormitories or houses than Indian students, and access to shared space within the home was limited due to fears regarding miscegenation. As Indian students returned to their family home from time at school, their parents worked to reassert their authority over wayward youths who, in the minds of parents, had gone astray while at school. Overall, the life stories conveyed by the interviews demonstrate the tension between official narratives of toleration and welcome and the lived experience of students who constantly fought the racism they faced. Consequently, the African students quickly realized that Afro-Asian solidarity existed only at the rhetorical level; in actuality, Indians worked to maintain, guard and constantly reinforce a distance between themselves and Africans, both inside the university campus and outside of it.

While some Indians either denied or did not remember any anti-African discrimination, other oral histories provide a more nuanced view. For example, one former Indian student, Rai Bahadur, remembered: “We had good relations with Africans. We never experienced such moments. But yes there were some acts of misbehavior from Africans but I would not categorize it as a part of discrimination.”<sup>1</sup> In another oral history, Kashi Nath Singh highlights the levels of discrimination mentioned by East Africans: “Some of them [the African students] were addicted to drugs, but overall they were good and friendly towards Indians...During our time we Indians and Africans have been through injustice and exploitations in those days before, we [Africans and Indians] were linked through mutual empathy like freedom from domination and discrimination.” Here Singh is echoing views that are seemingly overshadowed by the colonial experience and the shared animosity directed towards the British Empire. If students encounter similar responses, additional questions can be raised about convergences of memories and the impact of present day coverage of Africans (as alleged drug dealers) on their subjects’ memories.

Schools existed as places of contestation over societal rules regarding relationships as students challenged traditional views by establishing their own dating, sexual and marriage partners, something that could be further taken advantage of while abroad. Returning home married to a foreigner was generally accepted by East African societies. The offspring of such unions were accepted at the local level but experienced alienation as their respective nation-states increasingly were defined by Africanness. With regard to their careers, the majority of African students enjoyed success upon their return home and became leaders in government, medicine, and business. Quickly moving into the elite of their respective countries, they helped develop their nation-states, demonstrating the importance of transnational connections in the process of nation-building. The new connections forged by African students provide an alternative view of

1. Rai Bahadur, interview with author, 14 January 2018.

the last 50 years, as encounters were restricted by the imperial legacy and complicated by the Cold War. This article has worked to raise new questions regarding the continuation of an imperial racialized ideology and how it was embedded in postcolonial institutions, while demonstrating important transnational linkages and blurring the colonial/postcolonial divide.

## Reflection

Just before the birth of my daughter, I sent out a paper proposal for a special issue of a field-leading academic journal focused on world history, in response to a call for papers on a topic loosely connected to my research. Although I fully expected that the proposal would be rejected, I endeavored to link my research to the theme of the special issue and explain the overall importance of my proposed paper topic. Much to my surprise, the proposed paper was warmly welcomed. My daughter was born soon afterward—at which point I needed to write the paper. I was initially overwhelmed with nervousness and trepidation. I would have to develop and write a paper from my research while also caring for my daughter in our household of two working parents. As this was my first publication in an established journal, I recognized the importance of the project and the need for careful writing but quickly realized that finding time to complete the paper would be difficult.

My experience is far from unique; students and academics alike are often intimidated by the challenge of writing significant papers on entirely new material, while also juggling our everyday lives—work, family obligations, hundreds of minor interruptions, and, in my case, exhaustion after being up late nights with a baby. However, the process of writing a well-received article in the midst of a major life change was an important learning experience for me; it helped me become a better writer and taught me important lessons about the writing process.

My main writing strategy was to force myself to work in short, focused, and intense bursts of writing, at least once and ideally several times a day. This new goal ran counter to my time-tested strategy of avoiding the project for as long as possible and then, at the last minute, writing continuously for as many hours as

possible until I was overwhelmed with fatigue. This process forced me to start writing long before the due date—a process that most students want to try but to which few adhere. My new strategy also forced me to develop a much more detailed outline than usual. In the past, I have shunned outlines; I rarely used them and considered them a waste of time. However, to focus my energy and make sure that every minute of writing time counted, I needed to begin each writing session with a clear sense of the direction in which I was headed, the point of the paragraph I was writing, and the connections I needed to make with other paragraphs and the larger paper. I didn't have time to waste reminding myself of what I already had written.

Once I completed the outline, I would write in 15- to 30-minute increments—the length of a short nap, a *Sesame Street* segment, or a feeding. I attempted to write as early as possible, when my energy and motivation were at their height, but often my writing time was confined to just after my daughter went to bed. With my outline at hand, I would tackle one paragraph at a time. In each writing session, I hoped to finish just a single paragraph, providing it with sufficient evidence, examples, and analysis before my time ran out. To my surprise, these small bursts of focused writing worked well. I approached the paper with greater focus and clarity, without my mind wandering due to boredom and without breaks to check emails or sports scores.

Thus, the paper was written slowly but productively—one paragraph at a time, sometimes even just one paragraph per day. By focusing on one particular example, I was better able to develop my thoughts on a single source and grapple with my understanding of it—thus, the material was better explained and incorporated into the overall paper.

I ended my sessions by starting the next paragraph, so that the hardest part—the opening sentence—was complete, and I knew exactly the purpose and direction of the paragraph before I started the next session. I would often quickly jot down a few notes or even a single key word to jog my memory for the next time I was able to write. Having the opening sentence (or at least a few words) in front of me saved me time, frustration, and confusion when I went back to the paper hours or even a day later.

This strategy allowed my overall energy and general interest of the paper to

remain high. Due to the quick nature of my writing sessions I remained more engaged with the project, did not suffer from any project fatigue and writing the paper remained enjoyable. Without the burden of fatigue or the need to escape from the project, I often would find myself thinking about the paper later in the day and developing new ideas in my head. As a result, I would look forward to writing down the ideas percolating in my head that developed since the previous writing session.

The guest editor supervising the special issue employed a similar strategy, which helped us work well together. The editor had a vested interest in the success of these papers; she had chosen their topics carefully and was writing an introductory piece to connect the articles together. She then requested frequent and detailed progress reports and worked closely with the authors as we completed specific sections of our articles. Between my strategy of writing one paragraph per writing session and the editor's advice to divide our articles into particular sections, I made quick and efficient progress on my article while also consistently maintaining quality in both writing and argument.

During the revision process, I kept up my strategy of working in small increments and slowly incorporated feedback. Successful revision requires a great deal of concentration in order to make difficult changes; sticking with small but focused revising increments allowed me to make progress every day and address criticism without succumbing to anger. Thus, I avoided revision fatigue, which made the reworking the paper much more effective and tolerable. I also was giving myself time to think about the changes that were needed in a much more focused manner.

The strategy I adopted of small but sustained and productive bursts of writing can be applied to almost any writing assignment. At first, it might feel unnatural, at least for those, like me, who tend to avoid writing for as long as possible and then work for hours. However, many mentally exhausting papers and assignments can be more productively targeted through many short, intense writing sessions over a longer period of time. This approach might help students working on a writing assignment near its deadline, especially as students tend to leave assignments to just before the due date. Short, intense writing sessions in which writers compose a paragraph, take a break, and then return to the project to develop another paragraph might be a more effective strategy than one longer but unfocused session.



Even though writing in this manner went against my usual habits, it proved an effective and successful approach to writing and provides lessons to help others.



# Another Possible Source of Hawthorne's Hester Prynne

*Reflection with Cited Excerpts*

**LAURIE ROZAKIS**

Every writing task presents its own challenges, but to me, the first and most important consideration is determining and appealing to an audience. After all, if we are writing for others rather than for our own diversion, our goal is to craft a document that someone wants to read, either for information or for entertainment.

Appealing to an audience—and the ultimate success of any document—starts with the topic, which ideally should be something that presents new information to the audience or refracts the information in a fresh way. The topic of the excerpt from the scholarly paper here was sparked by pure happenstance, a casual walk that I took through a graveyard in the King's Chapel Burial Ground in Boston, Massachusetts. I was simply taking a shortcut through the graveyard on the way to Filene's, a now-defunct department store justly famous for its bargain basement.

Gingerly picking my way through the soggy ground that cool October morning, I started reading some of the headstones and was struck by the age of the inscriptions. Later did some research on the burial area and learned that it dated back to the early 17th century. I read about some of the notable people who had been interred there and was transfixed by the headstone for "Elizabeth Pain." As a scholar of 19th century American literature, I was struck by the fact that the headstone bore an inscription that seemed to echo the headstone Hawthorne created for the fictional Hester Prynne's grave, Hester being the central female character in Hawthorne's most well-known book, *The Scarlet Letter*. Since I was fascinated by this find, I knew I had found a topic that would be of equal interest to my audience—other Hawthorne scholars—but I had to be sure that another scholar hadn't found it before me.

It took me five years to read all the literature on the topic to make sure that another scholar had not written on the topic, draft the manuscript, edit, and revise. I also returned several times to the Burial Ground for inspiration and to decide how to frame my findings. Since scholarship requires meticulous attention to detail, I wanted to be extremely sure that I had my facts right before I approached my audience: literary journals that focused on Hawthorne studies.

The second consideration in writing is style, which includes such elements as tone, diction

(words), sentences, punctuation, allusions, figures of speech. Before deciding on a style, I carefully analyzed my audience: obviously, as fellow professors, they were well-read in the field, scholarly, and thoughtful. They would be expecting a staid, serious, scholarly tone; elevated diction with multi-syllabic words; long compound-complex sentences, semicolons and colons rather than mere commas, erudite allusions, and so on. How could I make my article more appealing to this audience? I decided to try something radical and depart somewhat from the accepted style: I would make the article lighter and more humorous than my audience would expect. My goal was to make my article enjoyable reading and thus help it stand out from the crowd. Since humor is a delicate art, I decided to keep my touch very subtle. To hook my readers, I established this tone from the very start:

So ends Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, and so begins the search for Hester Prynne's grave. Seventeenth-century Boston town officials, meticulous about keeping accurate records, nevertheless failed to record the death—or life, for that matter—of Hester Prynne, adulteress, seamstress, and ministering angel. The town officials must have been too busy surveying chimneys, keeping pigs off the streets, keeping count of the “...many Miscarriages [that] are committed by Saylers ...immoderate drinking, and other vain expences,” setting laws to curtail “...the wicked practices of many persons, who do prophane Gods Holy Sabbaths,” and granting widows permission to keep houses of “publique entertainment for the selling of Coffee, Chuchalitto & sydar by retayle.”

The humorous tone, established by the details of the minor issues that concerned the magistrates, especially the pigs and unruly behavior of sailors, draws in readers more used to bone-dry academic prose. I included quotes from the research to establish my bona fides as someone who had dug in the mines and so was qualified to write on this topic.

The third element of successful writing is following the conventions of the genre. Each document has its own special conventions, such as format. For instance, the format of a résumé differs from the format of a movie script. Readers expect documents that have an accepted format to follow it. Since I was deviating from the conventional tone of a scholarly article, I knew that I had to hew very closely to the format of a literary essay, and so I did. “Another Possible Source of Hawthorne's Hester Prynne” follows the conventions of literary scholarship: text of fewer than five lines that I took from other sources is enclosed in quotation marks and integrated into the text, outside text of more than five lines is inset and single spaced, errors in quotes or missing words are included in brackets. I used internal documentation, as per MLA guidelines. Paragraphs are indented five spaces. The publisher chose the font; I would have used the standard Times New Roman 12.

The last element is correctness. I edited ruthlessly, cutting unnecessary words, sentences, and paragraphs. I spent a lot of time on the opening, because if I didn't grab my readers at the start,

they would be unlikely to continue reading. Here is how I edited the beginning of this essay. Notice that I cut an entire paragraph and was ruthless with unnecessary modifiers.

~~The example here is literary scholarship and the format is an essay. My purpose was to provide information to a very specific audience: scholars of Nathaniel Hawthorne, especially those with an interest in Hawthorne's best-known work, *The Scarlet Letter*. Since this novel is so familiar, I had to find a fresh angle, something that had not been chewed over by previous scholars. Otherwise, no one would be interested in what I had to say, no matter how well I said it.~~

Every writing task presents its own ~~special~~ challenges, but to me, the first and most important consideration is ~~always~~ determining and appealing to an audience. After all, if we are writing for others rather than for our own ~~amusement or~~ diversion, our ~~primary~~ ~~task~~ goal is to craft a document that someone wants to read, either for information or for entertainment.

Appealing to an audience—and the ultimate success of any document—~~must~~ starts with the topic, which ~~ideally~~ should be ~~something that~~ presents new information to the audience or refracts the information in a fresh way. The topic ~~below~~ of the excerpt from the scholarly paper here was sparked by pure happenstance, a casual walk that I took through a graveyard in the King's Chapel Burial Ground in Boston, Massachusetts. I was simply taking a shortcut through the graveyard on the way to Filene's, a now-defunct department store justly famous for its bargain basement.

Finally, I proofread the essay. Then I set it aside for a week and proofread it again. I repeated this process several times to make sure I had not made any careless errors. I paid special attention to text in large print and quotes, as I tend to assume that I must have keyboarded them correctly. Often I had not.

This seems like an arduous process because it is, but like any skill, writing gets easier the more you do it. And it gets to be fun, too. I promise.



# A Brief Survey of US Accounting

*Article Excerpt with Reflection*

**AIDA SY AND ANTHONY TINKER**

## **1. Background**

From the 1400s to 1600s, European nations developed bookkeeping and accountancy to help run their companies efficiently, control vital trade, track money extracted from their colonies, and collect taxation to finance wars. This era has come to be called the *mercantilist period* or simply *mercantilism*. Bodin, Colbert, Mun, Misselden, Malynes, Child, Stuart, and Serra were the companies' top managers and lawmakers during this era (Smith, 1776; Heckscher, 1935; Keynes, 1936; Schumpeter, 1954; Britannica, 2022). Thus, America was still a British colony when bookkeeping arrived on our shores.

## **2. Role of Accounting in the Development of US Railroads**

The development of railroads was vital to the growth of the US economy, as companies needed an effective transportation infrastructure to bring workers and supplies of raw materials to factories (Van Oss, 1893; Sobel, 1968). The US railroad system was financed through stocks, bonds, and government funding – another link to accounting. (Van Oss, 1893; Sobel, 1968).



Wall Street in the 1800s, Downtown Manhattan, NYC

### 3. Early Financial Statements and the Recognition of the Accounting Profession in the US

“Financial accounting” is defined as the sales and purchases of a company. Roberts (2020) and Capozzoli and Teed (2016) investigated the role of accounting during and after the Civil War. Goldsmith (1982) studied the history of the US balance sheet. Today, the Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), established by the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB), provides the accounting standards with their definitions and concepts. When accountants set up accounting policy for a company, they follow GAAP’s rules.

Growth is essential for the survival of all market economies, as market forces compel firms to invest in new levels of cost saving and more productive technologies. Accounting information aids economic growth. How? Investors make investments according to a *Price: Earning Ratio* (the P: E ratio): price (share or stock price) is what you pay; earnings are what you get in return.



Accounting studies focus on measuring “earnings potential” and its quality. Accountants use the “past earnings record” (a summary of transaction) to estimate future “earnings potential.”

Here are four standard financial statements:

- The *balance sheet* (snapshot at a point in time)
- The *income statement* (a periodic summary of transactions, usually a year’s worth)
- The *cash flow statement* (a periodic summary of transactions, usually a year’s worth)
- The *statement of retained earnings* (a periodic summary of transactions, usually a year’s worth)

Let’s focus on the *past earnings record*. Accounting transactions are composed of exchanges: buying transactions (recorded as a firm’s expenses) and selling transactions (recorded as firm’s sales revenues). Written as a formula:

$$\text{REVENUES} - \text{EXPENSES} = \text{PROFIT (EARNINGS)}$$

This is the “E” in the P: E ratio that investors use in buying securities, aiding economic growth, and averting social unrest.

The methods that accountants use to measure, calculate, and report buying and selling transactions are so important that specific institutions are empowered to set regulations for calculating and reporting transactions. These institutions include the Securities and Exchange Commission (1933-34 Acts), the Public Corporate Accounting Oversight Board (2002 SOX legislation), and the Financial Accounting Standards Board.

These regulatory institutions emerged because those who produce the transactions records (management) sometimes manipulated the reported information to their own benefit. Insider (management) stockholders’ gain at the expense of outsider shareholders created a crisis of confidence in the investment and growth process. The most noteworthy examples of such fraud include the Savings & Loans crisis (\$400 billion), Tyco (\$60 million), Enron (\$4 billion), WorldCom (\$12 billion), Xerox (\$10 million), Vivendi (\$12 billion), and Pamalot (\$20+ billion).

The so-called “Big Eight” big accounting firms—Arthur Andersen; Arthur Young; Coopers & Lybrand; Deloitte Haskins & Sells; Ernst & Whitney; Peat, Marwick, Mitchell; Price Waterhouse; and Touche Ross—developed in the 1980s. Due to mergers and alliances, the Big Eight firms became the Big Four.

The continuation of the development of accounting in the US is evidenced by the appearance of cost accounting (see Charles T. Horngren’s, *Cost Accounting*). Alfred Sloan and General Motors

were able to compete with Henry Ford in the 1920s in part by using advanced cost accounting techniques.

## 4. The Securities Exchange Commission, SEC, and the Importance des Regulations

The American accounting profession has created several organizations since the Great Depression that sets standards for its members. New tools were needed and have been created.

### Reflection

#### On the Difficulty of Doing Research in a Real-World Discipline like Accounting

For this article, we researched the development of US accounting system. Most readers are familiar with accounting as a discipline more than as a practice. When we talk of our research to colleagues outside the business school, we are surprised by their lack of knowledge of accounting research. Unlike other disciplines such as philosophy, economics, English, or physics, accounting has no established theories. As a result, researchers in accounting have to build a framework and borrow theories from other disciplines. Our main difficulty in writing this article was having to build a theory by borrowing from a discipline. We spent many months searching. Finally, we concluded that the best approach to explain the development of US accounting was to use an historical approach.

Another challenge we faced was how to present so many accounting facts to a general reader, one who has little or no background in accounting research. One of our goals was to convey the importance of regulations, as the US financial market is one of the most regulated institutions in the world. This is important

because it makes it the most secure place to invest, resulting in its ranking as the number one financial market in the world.

Finally, another difficulty we experienced was limiting the number of accounting and economic facts since America was founded. In revising the paper, we removed some parts that were in the earlier draft, as we needed more time to do additional research. This explains why the paper is short. In fact, we encourage future researchers to write more papers on our topic.

## How to Attract the Reader's Interest

We will have no problem convincing investors to read our paper. However, as our goal was to reach a larger audience, we needed to adjust our content. We aimed for general readers because we believe that accounting is a part of America's creation, for accounting is business. In fact, accounting is called "the language of business." As the American Accounting Association put it during its conference in 2013, accounting is "Connecting People." Therefore, we believe that accounting should be investigated by a large audience.

## The Sources We Used

We read US economic facts, corporations archives, and the SEC website regarding regulations of the financial markets. We also read US Congress publications on business and accounting laws passed under various American presidents and did a literature review about the topic. This part of our research was time consuming. We next selected the material germane to our thesis.

## Limitations and Further Research

As we said early in this reflection, the topic is so large that we had difficulty limiting our paper. We strongly encourage scholars to continue to write on US

accounting history. We also encourage collaboration between different disciplines. There is precedence for this, as we were certainly not the first to write about the history of US accounting. The work of Littleton, Previts, Merino, Zeff, and others began US accounting research.

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# Writing in Criminal Justice: The Process

## *Book Excerpt with Reflection*

**LANINA COOKE**

*Excerpt from: Cooke, LaNina N. (2015). Structure Matters: Predicting Juvenile Justice System Behavior. LBF Scholarly Publishing, El Paso.*

This book examines the role of ecological structures in the juvenile justice system. From a sociological standpoint, we know that individuals relate to community structures, and that these structures contribute greatly to shared community sentiments. The research reported here considers these factors in an analysis of juvenile justice system behavior. The research is theoretically based, and represents a macro-level analysis addressing the predictive value of the presence of religious establishments, of public housing units, and of retail liquor stores on juvenile justice system assessments of risk, on prosecutorial decisions, and on residential sanctioning. This examination, in comparison to prior relevant analyses, is unique in that it pertains to the actions of juvenile justice system agents as opposed to involving the agents of delinquent activity. Quantitatively, this research offers substantial new insight into the influence of local ecological factors on juvenile justice system outcomes.

There is a plethora of research on juvenile justice, and much of that research focuses upon particular key decision points present throughout the system. Much of this research focuses on the demographic background of offenders rather than examining structural components of the local environments in which juvenile offenders reside (Graham, 2004; Harris, 2007, 2008; Holley, 2006; M. Leiber, Johnson, J., Fox, K. & Lacks, R., 2007; Macdonald, 2003; Meeker, 1992; Rodriguez, 2007; Schulenberg, 2003; Vidal, 2007; Webb, 2006; Wordes, 1994). These structural elements affect both those who live in the communities in which these structures are present, and those who work in supervision occupations and render judgments on the actions of system involved youth. Deeper understanding of how these structures affect the juvenile justice process is called for, especially at this time of growing concern regarding extraordinary rates of racial and ethnic disparity in juvenile justice system involvement.

According to Sampson and Laub (1993), “there are only a handful of quantitative studies that focus on structural level variations with the community or juvenile court as a unit of analysis.” The variables used in previous structural ecological research range from marriage rates (Bossard,

1938) to recidivism (D. Mears, Wang, X., Hay, C., & Bales, W., 2008), with the usual focus of attention being on agents of deviant activity rather than on those who are entrusted with enforcing laws and public policies and deciding the prospects of individuals. When prior studies have involved analyzing aggregates, such as juvenile justice case management processes, they have been carried out in relation to specific individualized structures rather than generalized characteristics. Consequently, the impact of the local social ecology on juvenile justice agents has been largely ignored.

Socioeconomic status is almost always used in the analysis of communities, especially in research considering juvenile crime. In this instance, researchers typically view socioeconomic status in reference to theories that seek to explain why juveniles offend and why particular areas tend to be crime-prone; few studies, in contrast, look at the ecological factors affecting offender risk assessment, prosecutorial discretion, or sanction type imposed upon a finding of culpability. In the case of this research, the latter question is addressed directly reflecting the assumption that environmental structures, as opposed to offender socioeconomic status, affect justice decisions substantially.

The American juvenile justice system is highly heterogeneous, with marked variance across states and each state system operating as a separate judicial, prosecutorial, and law enforcement collaborative entity. This system, in contrast to that in existence for adults, is based on longstanding principles of rehabilitation and decriminalization (Butts, 2001; Frazier, 1999; Kapchik, 2003; Platt, 1977; VanVleet, 1999). Because of the assumed lack of maturity, neurological development still underway, and inability to appreciate the ultimate consequences of their actions, juveniles are thought to be susceptible to reform and redirection toward law-abiding lifestyles. Although rehabilitation remains a key construct in the juvenile justice system, this rehabilitative leaning has given way to a contemporary societal consensus that stresses the importance of public safety. Public safety, which is often thought to be achieved through incapacitation and deterrence, is usually understood as a function of the adult system, with adults seen as the main threats to public order. As a means of promoting public safety, the methods of punishment have been shifted to apply to the juvenile system.

As a means of making the juvenile system bear a closer resemblance to that of the adult system, policy shifts began in 1984 and continued through 1994, with noteworthy legislative changes occurring in nearly all of the states (90%). The modifications reflected the promotion of harsher sanctions, the decreasing of age limits for adult sanctions, the increase of juvenile transfers to the adult system, and the use of mandatory minimums and often punitive sentencing guidelines (Butts, 2001; Fass, 2002; Feld, 2003; Frazier, 1999; D. Mears, 2001; D. Mears, Hay, C., Gertz, M., & Mancini, C., 2007; Rios, 2008; Steiner, 2006; Trépanier, 1999; VanVleet, 1999). In addition to the prioritization of the adult system, policy shifts began in 1984 and continued through 1994,



with noteworthy legislative changes occurring in nearly all of the states (90%). The modifications reflected the promotion of harsher sanctions, the decreasing of age limits for adult sanctions, the increase of juvenile transfers to the adult system, and the use of mandatory minimums and often punitive sentencing guidelines (Butts, 2001; Fass, 2002; Feld, 2003; Frazier, 1999; D. Mears, 2001; D. Mears, Hay, C., Gertz, M., & Mancini, C., 2007; Rios, 2008; Steiner, 2006; Trépanier, 1999; VanVleet, 1999). In addition to the prioritization of public safety over rehabilitation, much of this shift was likely politically-motivated, with lawmakers appealing to the public's fear of crime, demands for punishment for delinquency and lawbreaking, and a growing feeling that rehabilitation does not prevent crime (Trépanier, 1999). It has been posited that get-tough policies have been actively extended to the juvenile system because of the extensive range of discretion allowed in the work of juvenile court officials. Taken in combination, these developments have given rise to a situation in which the importance of rehabilitation has been reduced and punitive sanctions used enhanced (Harris, 2007; Meeker, 1992).

While the overall delinquency rate in the U.S. has fallen since 1999, that rate is still up 37% in comparison with 1991. Specifically, Florida, Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and California ranked highest in juvenile violent crime arrests in 2003 and in that same year for every 100,000 juveniles 307 were in custody, with states such as Florida, California, and Indiana being well above the national average. In 2002, nationally 1.6 million delinquency cases were handled, compared to 1.1 million in 1985. Total residential placements of juvenile offenders increased between 1991 and 1999 by 41%, and while a 10% decline was registered between 1999 and 2003, juvenile placements overall were still up 31% as of 2003 (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2006).

The juvenile system was intended to sanction youth with individualized justice (Feld, 1999), but previous research has suggested that demographic, mental health, and other group characteristics play a role in the allocation of justice during arrest, disposition, and other decision points (Graham, 2004; Harris, 2007; Holley, 2006; M. Leiber, Johnson, J., Fox, K. & Lacks, R., 2007; Macdonald, 2003; Meeker, 1992; Rodriguez, 2007; Schulenberg, 2003; Vidal, 2007; Webb, 2006; Wordes, 1994). This disproportion is in contrast to the juvenile justice system's original focus. Considering the upward flow of juveniles entering the system and the focus on public safety, fairness in all phases of the juvenile justice process is paramount. It must be ensured that risk assessments are based on actual likelihood of future offending, and that prosecutions and sanctioning decisions are reflective at least somewhat of a rehabilitative purpose. Risk assessments, prosecutorial decisions, and court sanctions must be in line with fostering positive reengagement and rehabilitation.

Most juvenile justice serving agencies and related social service resource agencies are aware of the systematic flaws persisting within the U.S. justice system. In fact, previous research con-

cerning demographic indicators, particularly race and ethnicity, has led to marked changes in its practices. In 1994, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention mandated that grant-funded programs were to investigate the existence of disproportionate minority confinement, and if it were found to be present, these programs were to demonstrate effective measures to decrease it. This direction was updated in 2002 to include the development of specific plans to intervene, evaluate, and monitor the rates of confinement in agencies with documented racial and ethnic disparities. While these actions have been impactful, still more needs to be done to address issues of disproportionate minority contact within the juvenile justice system, not only from a demographic perspective but also on an ecological level. Previous research defends the need for this area of research, noting that the continued absence of analysis on the impact of ecological factors leads to miscalculations in crime trends, patterns, and juvenile justice system judgments. “To understand crime and violence in this country at all, you have to disaggregate it” (Sherman, 2006).

## Reflection

### Expectations from the Field

Criminal justice is one of the areas in which people, many with no experience in the field, tend to have strong opinions. In many ways it feels very polarizing, with people representing a particular side even when reality says otherwise. In writing, it is my job to present readers with the background knowledge of law, policy, theory, and evidence-based material so that they can take on informed opinions. These areas can be summarized as the facts, the assumptions and the outcomes. Since criminal justice is a social science, there’s a bit of contextualizing to do.

I have been writing in the field both academically and professionally for quite a while, and it has always begun with the legal and policy background. These things are documented, have a set timeline, and frame the writing. When I write, I spend a lot of time creating a picture of the foundation, since the rest of the writing grows from this center. I scour journal articles, books, and anything else that can set the stage. The work referenced in this writing was on the role of environment in determining risk assessment and adjudication. The focus was on ecological

structures as a function of juvenile justice system behavior. Sounds engaging and fun, right? Superficially it is not, but the contextual background makes it interesting (at least I think so) and affords readers the opportunity to think about criminal justice processes more in depth.

In the mentioned work, I wrote about the laws and policy that frame the juvenile justice system and housing and urban development. This provided the framework of the paper and “tells” the reader that while criminal justice is socially oriented, the foundations are rooted in something perceptible. Once I get the reader comfortable with the overall subject, I throw in a little (or a lot) of theory and previous research. I have found that some readers are not huge fans of theory and reduce it to filler information. The legal and policy background make the theory and research more “palatable.” My goal is not to trick the reader, but to give the him or her information in manageable, logical doses. If the work that I am doing involves the execution of research or the evaluation of policy or a program, I insert it here. This outcome ties it all together and is sort of like the main event. It is the part that I enjoy the most and what the reader wants to read. It is the culmination of sorts.

## Purpose and Impact

Regardless of the document, the framework is the same. In academic works it is obvious. What is less obvious is that it appears in other areas that are more professional. I have written for local government, which is outcome driven. Does the program work? What are the stats? What is the cost-benefit? The outcomes mean nothing if there is no context by way of factual and theoretical content. I have also written opinion pieces. In most cases blog and editorial readers are not too interested in ecological theories or methods. I usually pare down the research-speak and make my work more outcome-heavy. In sum, it is important to know your audience. Who you are writing for is just as important as what you say. I always try to stay relatable and put myself in the position of the reader, with the hope that they will find my work interesting and informative.

## The Writing Experience

In my writing, the format is overall straightforward, but the process is quite long and tedious, partly because I want it to represent me well and I want it to reach the reader as I intend. It begins as a giant ramble of random things, sentences, and ideas. This document that you are reading began as a hodgepodge of stuff. After I brainstorm, I write a loose outline and then free write within each sub-heading, often shifting my thoughts around. I am a jotter. In my work on juvenile justice system behavior, the literature foundation included the background of the juvenile justice system, theory, ecological structures, and decision making. In each area, I jotted points (and random sentences) of the ideas that I wanted to include. After this, I advance-searched for journal articles and books based on the main themes of my outline. I am not a fan of the electronic copy. I much rather prefer to print out the articles and use zillions of pieces of paper. Although this is terrible for the environment, this is the only way that I can function. I do, however, scan the article before printing, which helps a bit. After I print, I highlight, make notes and number the sections that I will include in my paper. Each mark is coordinated with the outline. From here, I start writing in a really casual way. In every pass through of reading my document, I add more, asking myself questions as I write. Someone in my early academic career told me to try to limit the amount of reader confusion by questioning and answering myself. For this work in particular, I combed through dozens of times, asking questions, adding definitions, terms, and previous research, writing all over the document with words, arrows, and letter markings. This part is actually fun for me. It signifies that I am making progress, and it motivates me to keep pushing. This is where I start to be satisfied with my work. I find myself saying, “Damn, this sounds good.” I go through this process until I cannot do it anymore. I press submit and it is out there in the universe.

I have always been very deliberate in my writing, reviewing it over and over again until I have reached the brink. It typically takes me numerous turns in the editing cycle to finally be done. Since I see myself reflected through my work, I am very particular about intent, clarity and direction. This goes back to the purpose of my writing and knowing my audience. Writing a research paper feels different than

writing a policy paper or assessment report. Writing for people in the field often leads to me being a lot more particular in that I think the reader will have a higher expectation and will be judgmental and critical. Writing for people outside of the field is a lot more comfortable and casual, where I feel less anxious and, in turn, more open. The editing process, however, is the same.

In writing, I have to feel the groove. I have had college professors who have helped me become more detailed in my writing. In undergrad, I had an English professor who taught me to write using the “Ted Koppel” method. In my memory of his words, a news story is like an upside-down pyramid that works to grow the story, the paper, the research. At the end my writing reflects this. Graduate school taught me how to compartmentalize my work, draw from other disciplines, and edit. My research methods professor assigned a paper on documenting the homeless population by understanding how to count the number of fish. This, above anything else, taught me how to organize my work and to think outside the box.

## Time and Effort

When writing my dissertation, I took a while to come up with the perfect topic. Criminal justice is such a vast field with so many possibilities. While my area is policy, there are so many impact areas, from policing to reentry and everything in between. In addition, wrapped up in criminal justice policy are the other social sciences and their connected theories. This makes for difficulty in selecting a topic. After teetering between topics for over a year, a peer commented, “there is no perfect topic, so stop looking.” These eight words completely changed my outlook. From then on, the front-end work became easy. It was a matter of settling on a population of interest and thinking hard on it. In my thought process, I drew from my teaching background in sociology (at the time I was an adjunct in the Sociology department) and my interest in place and environment. I blended these together and settled on the general topic of the impact of place on criminal justice decisions.

This piece started as my dissertation. A few years later, a publisher approached me to turn it into a book. The research was done. All I had to do was change the tense, add a lot more literature, and make it less academic and more reader-

friendly. Sounds easy, but in reality, it was tedious and involved a lot of reframing and library searches. I had to change the delivery. As a dissertation, it had to be wordy and “extra.” As a book it had to be casually smart, without all the fancy, statistical talk. The whole process took over a year. I was also working and juggling family, so writing was like a bonus job.

Once it was done, I never looked at it again, until now. In re-reading it, there are parts that I would have worded differently. There is always an edit to make, an article to add, a theory to elaborate on. There is no perfect, which isn't a bad thing. Social science evolves, grows and has a voice, just as your writing will.

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