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# Reuniting Old Allies: A Case for Creative Composition

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*Eastern Illinois University*

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Reuniting Old Allies

A Case for Creative Composition

(TITLE)

BY

Stephen M. Jefferies

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
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### **Abstract**

Since the split between creative writing and composition that largely occurred in the late 1920s, the two departments have wrestled with boundaries that have defined and challenged both courses. Despite the occasionally contentious relationship between creative writing and composition/rhetoric scholars, the two disciplines have served as strong allies in the past. “Reuniting Old Allies” argues that returning to such an alliance could provide a fruitful, blended approach to writing.

This thesis traces the history of this schism from Aristotle to the modern English department, attempting to reconcile the two departments with a middle-ground approach called *critical-creative composition* that emphasizes the strong rhetorical strategies already present within creative writing, as well as the inherently creative nature of composition. It analyzes the textual, rhetorical, and creative strategies of each genre and demonstrates where such strategies could be implemented in a critical-creative curriculum, as well as a pedagogical outline to guide those interested in such implementation. This map includes an explication of overarching pedagogical strategies and goals, practical classroom exercises, theoretical backing for those exercises, and sample assignments.

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## Chapter 1

### *Creative Writing, Composition, and Craft*

English composition is a creature of constant change, evolving and growing to meet the demands of an ever-shifting student culture. Though these required writing courses were originally conceived as temporary remedial measures for Harvard students in the late 1800s, they have since blossomed into one of the most prevalent general education requirements for post-secondary academics (Rose 342). Composition has evolved into a discipline with a staggering amount of scholarship, theory, and pedagogical approaches. In fact, one of the few things that has remained concrete is this very need to remain flexible and observant – a sentiment found even as far back as 1900: “The teacher who keeps close watch upon the progress of the pupils will always be the best judge of the kind of instruction and the method of class-room procedure best adapted to a particular set of pupils [sic]” (Scott, Denney v). While composition instruction has changed significantly over the past century, Scott & Denney’s contention still echoes throughout the pedagogies of socially-minded modern-day scholars such as Mike Rose, Doug Hesse, Shannon Carter, and many others.

This thesis strives to continue along a similar vein, defining and explicating a blended approach called *critical-creative composition* that borrows from expressivist, critical, social theory, and basic writing pedagogy, emphasizing the use of creative writing to ease the transition from familiar discourse to the academic conventions expected of college writers. It argues for a pedagogical middle-ground in which creativity and composition can coexist without sacrificing the practical academic elements that students will need for future classes. In this thesis, I build upon the work of creative writers and composition scholars and present a unified approach that emphasizes creativity, imagination, student agency, and critical thinking.

Many of these scholars, including Wendy Bishop and Kimberly Andrews, argue for a shift in attitude and convention that has been gaining more steam in recent years, one that served to spark the idea for *critical-creative composition*: the re-blurring of boundaries between creative writing and composition.

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1 This particular quote can be found in the introduction to *Elementary English Composition*, a teaching manual published in 1900 by Fred Newton Scott and Joseph Denney.

The past two decades of composition scholarship have brought with it a resurgence of the creative, the expressive, and the personal. We see the emergence of books like Tim Mayers's *(Re)Writing Craft: Composition, Creative Writing, and the Future of English Studies* that explicitly argue for a blending of the disciplines, and essays such as Michael Spooner's *Too Many Books*, which creatively critiques the overly-academic through its clever use of formatting and between-the-lines argumentation. Both express a concern with the oft over-guarded borders between the two disciplines – a boundary that critical-creative composition hopes to blur for the sake of both disciplines.

### *Creative Writing and Composition: A Brief History*

The heart of such a discussion starts much further in the past, tracing evolutionary lines that date back to Aristotle. His differentiation of performance into *poetics* – “imitat[ing] and represent[ing] various objects through the medium of color and form” through “rhythm, language, or 'harmony” (*Poetics* par. 3) – and *rhetoric* – “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (*Rhetoric* par. 10) – formed the basis from which these disciplines would later draw. Poetics, with its emphasis on “the medium, the objects, and the manner” of “artistic imitation”, focused on entertainment and aesthetics (Par 11). Rhetoric, with its focus on *pathos*, *ethos*, and *logos* instead served as a vehicle for argumentation and logical demonstration, “since we are most fully persuaded when we consider a thing to have been demonstrated” (par 5). While rhetoric in this original Aristotelean sense was relegated to public speaking, Aristotle's argumentative trinity became the core of academic (and perhaps even commercial) persuasion throughout its centuries of evolution. Of the five codified into stages used for the composition of a speech, invention, organization, and style survived the years, while memory and delivery largely faded in the transition of rhetoric from speech to writing.

It was the medieval university that first introduced the elements of writing as a part of scholastic endeavors in way of the “trivium” – a study of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic that prepared students for historical, legal, and religious argumentation. This evolved further during the Renaissance years, following the recovery of several major works of Cicero and Quintilian. During the sixteenth century, rhetoricians like Leonard Cox, Richard Sherry, and Thomas Puttenham published rhetorical texts in more colloquial



language, “sometimes linking their practice explicitly with poetic,” though Erasmus, with his *Copia*, was largely considered the “master of stylistic rhetoric” at the time, later emphasizing more practical writing, such as letters (“A Brief History” par. 8).

Rhetoric made its way to America from the University of Edinburgh in the late 18th century, following in the wake of rhetoricians fighting against “rhetoric as the study of the dress of thought rather than the study of thought itself” (par 9). They argued that “the study of correct and persuasive style produced not only competent public speakers but virtuous people” – an appeal to both logic and morality that fit the goal of America's universities at the time: training clergy, lawyers, and politicians (par. 10). In 1785, Yale adopted Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres* as a standard textbook, with Harvard following suit three years later, and this book would serve as the primary text until the late 19th century. Alexander Bain and his *English Composition and Rhetoric: A Manual* were also rather influential at the time, arguing that “persuasive discourse is organized by associating ideas in a way that produces the desired emotion in the audience” (par 14). It was Bain's work that led to the development of the familiar array of academic essays: narrative, descriptive, expository, and argumentative.

Shortly after the Civil War, journalists writing for the American popular press, influenced in part by politicians as well as popular opinion, began putting pressure on academia to shift its pedagogical focus from the exclusive studies of Greek and Latin to English, arguing that “training in their native language” was necessary to “comport themselves in the new business world of America” (Martin 35). Harvard was the first to acquiesce, albeit only just. In 1865 they instituted a basic proficiency exam wherein students would read aloud to a board of examiners. In 1872, they added that students be “reasonably proficient in spelling, punctuation, and handwriting” (36). By 1885, this emphasis on English had sparked a secondary effect. Now that administrators were paying closer attention to it, they were beginning to notice what was deemed a disturbing dearth of literary proficiency, one severe enough to warrant a prototype for freshman composition dubbed English A. Despite its implementation as a “temporary remedial measure that could be dispensed with after necessary reforms had been carried out in the schools,” this return to rhetoric did little to “fix” the issues (Connors 261). By the turn of the century, many other prestigious institutions had

followed in Harvard's footsteps, cementing the required composition course as a post-secondary staple. Creative writing, on the other hand, was largely left in the background – though certainly not ignored.

The Ohio State University historian D.G. Myers points to this same tumultuous time in English department history as one of the major turning points in the composition/creative writing split. According to Myers, up until the 1920's, creative writing and composition were actually already both part of the writing classroom (37). As the study of literature became more prominent (and academically prestigious), a “constructivist belief that the ideal end of the study of literature is the making of literature,” began steering these programs more towards what modern scholars might recognize as a literary studies course than basic composition (36). As Mayers<sup>2</sup> points out in *(Re)Writing Craft*, “the assimilation of contemporary literature into the university coincided with the assimilation of creative writing into the university” (41). It was largely the growing pressure from primary educators and Harvard administration to emphasize rhetorical and grammatical “correctness” that began pushing the two apart. This pressure and the following split were perhaps among the first large-scale shifts in academia that would later seed the notions that *rhetoric* and *poetics* were, perhaps, irreconcilable. The members of the early 1920's Harvard administration certainly thought so, and so the courses began to develop along their own separate paths.

While composition classes began springing up as a requirement in universities nationwide, creative writing eventually became bogged down with issues of sustainability. It had become an “elephant machine” as Myers put it -- one that reproduces into unsustainable perpetuity, creating MFA positions that teach students to become teachers of more students who are themselves likely to become teachers at what he argued was a problematic rate, skewing supply to far outweigh demand. Composition had solidified itself as an institutional centerpiece, while creative writing fought to remain institutionally relevant, exacerbating once again the departmental differences between the two. Despite this struggle, creative writing flourished as an institution, though in doing so it dug itself a niche that firmly grounded the divide. The Iowa Writer's Workshop, for example, is largely acknowledged as one of the most successful creative writing programs in the nation, but as an institution dedicated solely to creative writing, it stands as an artifact of this split.

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2 Tim Mayers, not to be confused with D.G. Myers.

*Creative Writing and Composition Today*

While modern creative writing programs like the Iowa Writer's Workshop are not likely in any danger, this institutionalized separation has left effects that are still visible within current scholarship. In “A House Divided: On the Future of Creative Writing,” Kimberly Andrews discusses the difficulty that she faced when straddling the line between compositionist and creative writer, pointing to “the institutional myth that creative writers simply do not function as [composition] scholars<sup>3</sup>” (246). This myth is exacerbated by what Mayers calls the “institutional-conventional wisdom” held by some creative writers, which situates their writing process uncomfortably close to the Muse<sup>4</sup>, claiming it is only available in its “truest” sense to those somehow predisposed to creativity (14). This obfuscating rhetorical mystique is perhaps best encapsulated by Ron McFarland’s frequently-cited comment on creative writing: “I once ascertained five essentials of a serious writer: desire, drive, talent, vision, and craft. ... [O]f the essentials, only craft can be taught” (34). While the advocacy of such an extreme approach is becoming less prolific over time based on the increasing number of scholars advocating a creative writing / composition alliance, several writers and scholars still write on the struggle of identifying across these institutional boundaries.

In her *College Composition and Communication* article “Places to Stand,” Wendy Bishop points to the perceived clash between rhetorical scholars and critics who happen to write as part of their job (teacher-writers) and creative writers who happen to teach as part of theirs (writer-teachers), catalyzed by “Current-Market-Forces [...] that [urge] compositionists into rapid professionalism, creating the perceived (and often actual) need to appear ever-more scholarly, historical, and theoretical” (12). While this schism is certainly not as bold in every institution, suggestions such as Burton Hatlen’s -- that writer-teachers should “give up the pretense that they are serious critics” -- were enough to push Bishop to speak on the matter (13).

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3 In this instance, Andrews uses “scholar” to refer specifically to critics and scholars functioning within composition and rhetoric, as opposed to a literary scholar – a brand of scholarship that many creative writers *do* embrace with little resistance.

4 This is not to downplay the spontaneous inspiration that is so often a part of creative writing, but rather a specific reference to the elitist, over-simplified distinction sometimes made “true” creative writers and

Further, Bishop points out how expressivism has in the past been used as a straw man by its opposition through overly-reductive emphasis on Elbow and Murray's early arguments to set up a contrast through which their more contemporary, theory-heavy pedagogies seems more sophisticated (10). Doug Hesse believes that this problematic oversimplification plays a large factor in the difficulty creative writing has with being taken seriously: "If expressivism is bad for its romantic naiveté, creative writing, narrowly cast as the celebration of romanticism, is surely all the more suspect" (Hesse 39). Writers like Lester Faigley and James Berlin decry emotive, self-reflective approaches to collegiate writing as an "untheorized and ideologically debased form of neo-Platonism, [...] a false and otherworldly epistemology of the self" (Burnham 28). Creative writing, seen as a self-contained construct that "suffers from its own aesthetic attribute," focuses on imagination and linguistic play rather than solid fact or argumentation, consigning it as unsuitable for serious academic endeavors in the eyes of such critics (Harris 175). This supposition that creative writing is somehow academically inferior is not only damaging to the relationship between creative writing and composition on an institutional level, but it also fails to recognize potentially useful parallels between the mental processes involved in creative writing and those used in more traditional, argumentative assignments.

Even though this conflict has gained more attention recently, few scholarly articles address the nexus of creative writing and composition beyond "the study of literature in composition courses insofar as that study is focused on literary techniques applicable to the writing of compositions" (Bell 1). Much of the research that *has* been done falls into two camps: ways in which creative writing classes can benefit from comp/rhet research (backed by writers such as Patrick Bizzaro and George Kalamaras), and ways in which composition classes can borrow *conceptual* and *stylistic* strategies found in creative writing, such as a close examination of the rhetorical overlap between poems and academic composition, often in relation to style, rhythm, and deliberate manipulation of syntax. However, serious pedagogical examination of direct creative discourse and the impact that the creative process can have on students' ability to explore what Christopher Burnham calls the "instrumental relation between composing and meaning-making," remains fairly rare – at least insofar as the attention it garners within large-scale conferences such as College Composition and Communication (CCCC) (24).

Hesse makes note of this “relative absence of theoretical/pedagogical writing about creative writing, especially by writers themselves” in his recent article “The Place of Creative Writing in Composition Studies” (Hesse 36). Hesse goes on to note that “[i]n its sixty-year history, CCC has published about 284 articles, reviews, and reports with ‘creative writing’ appearing in the body of the text, with another 66 or so mentioning “imaginative writing” (35). However, “[n]early all of these have been passing references, often in conjunction with the ever-venerable debate about literature’s place in the composition course or broader considerations of the nature of the English major or department. Substantial articles with creative writing as a major focus are considerably fewer. A generous count shows around 20” (35). This tendency for traditional English departments to sometimes favor literary interpretation over elements of craft and rhetoric is indicative of what Mayers believes is an imbalance between the various sub-disciplines within English<sup>5</sup>. He argues that creative writing, composition, and literature should be viewed as co-existing disciplines, “each of which is bureaucratically, economically, and institutionally inscribed within particular departments ... and occasionally overlaps with one or more of the others” (7). Though this divide may not be as wide as it was several years ago, there still remains “a highly problematic split in English studies” (Andrews 243). While there are certainly practical, necessary differences between a creative writing workshops and a conventional composition course, bringing these old allies back together once again could serve as the first step towards a fruitful reconciliation.

### *Reuniting Old Allies*

Several scholars have already proposed several differing ideas as to how, specifically, we might collectively bridge the gap between creative writing and composition. Hesse, for example, believes that the disciplines have evolved along different enough lines as to remain distinct paths within English, though he says they “would do better by keeping more open borders, if not sharing a departmental house then at least by being friendly neighbors with fenceless backyards” (43). Bishop agrees: “I argue for cooperation and

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5 Mayers argues rather extensively against what he believes is the “domination” of literary studies within English departments in his book *(Re)Writing Craft*, though the details of this argument are mostly tied to the his notions of “craft criticism” in ways that begin to veer outside the scope of this thesis.

belief—that those in composition and creative writing who care... pool their knowledge, develop new pedagogies, create new possibilities...” (269). They assert that by maintaining the current boundaries (institutional, psychological and otherwise) while opening up the possibility of interdisciplinary writing between the borders, both fields develop separately while still informing one another.

Others, like Valerie Martinez, suggest a middle-ground approach that, while still concerning itself with issues like meta-cognition and the use of poetry, keeps the two disciplines divided. For her, the problem lies not with the distinction between the subjects, but the differences with which the disciplines are perceived – and, further still, the ways in which the institution defines and determines “discipline” in the first place. This remains a unifying theme throughout these calls for unity: a serious consideration of creative writing as a true academic discipline -- one that Bizzaro addresses emphatically in “Research and Reflection in English Studies: The Special Case of Creative Writing.” This is made more difficult, he argues, by his supposition that “discipline” is not quite as concrete a concept as some might believe. In fact, the article examines the concept of academic discipline in just as much depth as his specific writings on creative writing’s institutional future as a “serious” academic discipline. This separation also prevents creative writing from being devoured by the larger “literary studies” programs, allowing it to remain independent (305).

Mayers takes the most extreme approach, holding to a strong belief that the separation is harmful to both branches of writing. He hopes that combining creative writing and composition will empower student to produce strong discourse and the study the elements of that discourse in departments “dominated” by literary studies. This emphasizes the production of text, focusing on the study of student writing (in one fashion or the other) rather than the observation and analysis of preexisting artifacts (167). He advocates creative writers writing critical prose that explicates and examines the rhetorical decisions of their craft as one such method of bridging the gap, hearkening back to “craft criticism” with a metacognitive approach that embraces creative writing as its own discipline but still addresses the process in ways much like those utilized in composition courses (rather than a more traditional literary approach). Mayers argues that such an approach fosters an environment through which creative writing and composition could unite under the banner of “writing studies” (114). He urges for a practical, all-

encompassing approach that is willing to alter the way composition is structured, arguing that “the greatest danger in theoretical reform proposals... is not that they will radically transform English studies, but that they *cannot* transform English studies, except in fleeting and illusory ways” (129). Without such structural changes, he claims there can be no lasting impact (129). In this thesis I posit critical-creative pedagogy as an attempt to answer Mayers’s call to move beyond the theoretical and work towards shaping not just an assignment or two but the entire classroom experience, starting with his work on craft criticism and expanding outward from there.

### *Critical-Creative Composition*

At its heart, critical-creative composition bears many similarities to expressivism, largely because expressivism’s strong emphasis on the classroom environment, the actual process of writing, and the exploratory nature of drafts are all excellent at dispelling writing myths to students whose previous exposure to writing in high school was likely less personal and more product-oriented. Often times, students enter college having been taught with dogmatic, often-counterproductive writing structures like the five-paragraph essay. The manner in which secondary schools often approach writing teaches them that writing is a strict discipline, a means of expressing ideas through heavily formulated and regulated channels that will be judged just as much for their adherence to formulas as to content. This kind of mindset can prevent students from truly inventing even before they’ve begun putting words down on the paper. They are not looking to create new knowledge; they are simply looking for the “best” way to package it for their instructor.

While those of us more intimately connected to writing know that writing is, as Donald Murray puts it, “language in action,” it will be the English composition courses that either dispel or reinforce novice preconceptions (4). According to Murray, the best way to defeat these harmful, overly-rigid notions of writing is to adopt a student-focused curriculum that “plac[es] the opportunity for discovery in your student’s hands” (5). While the writing is critical, it is equally important to remember not to marginalize *the writer*. Ira Shor points to “teacher-student alienation as the first problem of pedagogy” (xx). Though the two camps these scholars represent -- expressivism and critical pedagogy -- don’t necessarily see eye to

eye, both understand the importance of involving instructors and students with an *active* development of classroom discourse. Especially among writers who are just starting to learn how to translate their thoughts into structured text, writing should become “not a question of correct or incorrect, of etiquette or custom,” but an opportunity to explore ideas in text (Murray 4). Critical-creative composition focuses on maximizing this opportunity, emphasizing students as they begin to grapple with the idea of gathering, formulating, and inventing new ideas. The exploratory nature of creative writing, as well as the necessity of *revising* (often many times) makes it an excellent tool for this end, especially when students are asked to write about the process from a meta-linguistic perspective.

From a structural point of view, the emphasis on meta-cognition is what makes critical-creative composition useful and transferable. It goes out of its way to combine the two disciplines together into a singular approach. Practically, this means that all of the creative writing is connected with critical craft reflection of some nature. Whether it is a short story followed by an essay regarding a student’s rhetorical strategies for reflecting elements of character or a cluster of small poems followed by a critical examination of the power inherent in sensory language, there is always something playing with both imaginative and critical thinking. It strives to maximize the flexibility of the many instructors who are well-versed in both creative writing and critical thinking, opening up new flexible venues that make the whole process more engaging and (hopefully) enjoyable for the students and instructors alike.

While there is nothing inherently wrong with creative writing or composition as separate entities, this pairing that allows students to “situate the writing of poetry and fiction, and the teaching of poetry and fiction writing, within institutional, political, social, and economical contexts” (Mayers 34). Critical-creative composition does not necessarily *avoid* the standard composition formats, voices, and techniques, but the hyphenation of the phrase is meant to reflect a deliberate persistent pairing. Just as creative writing comes with a critical response, a more standard critical essay would still allow opportunities for “creation” within the parameters of the assignment, whether that means researching a more imaginative topic or literally *creating* some of the parameters of their own assignment.

To ensure that these creative liberties remain practically and rhetorically valuable, critical-creative composition uses explicit, student-crafted statements of purpose that define *what* the student would like to



write about, as well as *why* and *how*. These decisions are then worked into a small pre-essay writing assignment in which the students must justify their choices, forcing them to think from a meta-cognitive perspective, and giving the instructor an idea of what to look for during the evaluation process. Before the writing process for their official assignment has even begun, they are using rhetoric to persuade – an idea very much akin to Jody Shipka's Statement of Goals and Choices (SoGC). Her students are given freedom to choose what they write, but they are required to compose a document outlining their rhetorical goals and decisions for each assignment. Interestingly enough, the SoGC weighs *more* heavily on their grade than the essay itself, drawing more attention to the process and rhetorical approach than the final product. This serves a two-fold purpose: it empowers the students by giving them more control over what they write and focuses not on the final artifact, but on assessing rhetorical strategies best suited to achieve a goal set before them. By asking them to articulate exactly *what* decisions they made and *how* those choices affect their text, they are developing a transferable strategy rather than regurgitating rules and formula or striving for an arbitrary amount of content.

As Flower and Hayes argue in “A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing,” the process of writing “is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing” (275). Even though theorists like Patricia Bizzell believe any systematic search for one singular, clear-cut writing process to be a futile gesture, making students aware that there *is* a process (and helping them discover it through reflections and revisions) further distances them from the damaging myths so often perceived in freshman writing courses. This focus on meta-cognition makes them more flexible as writers – a noteworthy goal for any writing course. There is no way a single course can prepare students for every single writing situation they will encounter, but it *can* give them practice in different genres, help them discover writing process that work, and reinforce rhetorical, reflective mindsets.

It is for this very reason that critical-creative composition places a heavy emphasis on reflection and revision, not only because it serves to strengthen writing in general, but because the reflexive nature of writing about writing puts students in a place where they are thinking about rhetorical terms in larger strokes, putting them a few steps closer to understanding one of the most difficult processes within writing: revision. Nancy Sommers gives us evidence of the importance of revision as a re-imagining in her article

“Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers.” She points out the following in regards to student writers: “The predominant concern in these [writers] ... is vocabulary. The students understand the revision process as a rewording activity” (381). Notice how different this process is compared to that undertaken by professional writers: “The experienced writers describe their primary objective when revising as finding the form or shape of their argument” (384). A student focusing on lexical issues stands nearly no chance of coming up with a true revision, and a professional writer looking for the core of his argument won’t be bothered by vocabulary. No amount of free-writing or “free revision” will bring a student to a truly re-imagined work if he does not have some direction as to where to start.

An explicit emphasis on revision also gives students the freedom to make mistakes in their first drafts. This is not to say that grammar and syntax errors are ignored, but de-emphasizing them in original drafts frees students from some of their common anxieties, allowing them to focus on higher-order concerns. Joseph Williams makes an excellent observation in “The Phenomenology of Error,” in which he paints a very interesting picture of our technical expectations: “[I]f we read any kind of text the way we read freshman essays, we will find many of the same kind of errors we routinely expect to find and therefore do find” (159). He points out the existence of several different categories of errors, some clearly more noticeable than others. De-emphasizing grammar and other non-critical “technical” issues in the initial drafts, then emphasizing them in revision, reinforces the reflective, multi-faceted nature of writing.

The overall goal of a combined pedagogy such as this one is to actively engage students with the text as much as possible, constantly drawing attention to the factors that play into all writing, such as tone, voice, and style. Engaging writers is exceptionally important, as is encouraging genuine invention. There is a certain exploratory element to writing, to be sure, and while constraining young writers to a set of rules and regulations can be problematic, giving them practical instruction and fostering rhetorical understanding is critical to developing a final product that is engaged, informed, and relevant.

## Chapter 2

### *The Rhetoric of Creative Writing*

As an approach to first-year writing, it is important that critical-creative pedagogy remain as practical as it is creative. As students participate in creative exercises, they still must learn the importance of style, tone, syntax, grammar, and coherence in ways that will allow them to succeed in future courses. Critical-creative pedagogy is not an exultation of the supremacy of creative writing, but rather an embrace of “a richer view of writing that articulates the values of a creative, productive art, ‘practical’ in much wider terms than would be imagined” (Hesse 44-45). This brings us to the central argument of the pedagogy: that creative writing *is*, in fact, practical and useful for the composition course, containing within it inherent parallels to the rhetorical strategies, devices, and approaches necessary for academic writing. This chapter serves to further detail this argument, examining where these rhetorical elements appear as well as how they might best be utilized in the classroom. It pushes deeper into the basic argument established in Chapter 1, examining creative writing as not just a useful tool in and of its own right, but also as a vehicle for enhancing the overall comprehension of reading, writing, and rhetoric.

Critical-creative composition plays with Nancy Welch’s notion “that composition scholarship does indeed set scenes, create characters, and narrate conflicts” (118). Both utilize *pathos*, *logos*, and *ethos* to convince readers, be it that a particular character’s actions are believable or that a student’s particular angle on a topic has been well-researched. In order to portray characters, settings, and events effectively, creative writers often undergo feverish research and revision. All writing, creative or not, utilizes style, tone, and voice for specific rhetorical aims. Though the parallels might not be so effective as to be immediately and automatically transferable, the conscious focus on linguistic awareness gives critical-creative composition the potential to tackle such issues of transferability.

Moving forward, it is important to identify specific parameters for this exploration, as both the myriad nuances of the creative writing genres and the study of rhetoric within composition are far too large to consider in their entirety for the purposes of this thesis. It will examine the specific interplay between creative writing and the elements deemed necessary for student success. While certain details may vary from university to university insofar as writing portfolios, credit hours, or other such administrative

variables, most universities have departmental statements of purpose that outline the overall goals for the students of their programs – goals that often revolve around elements of critical rhetoric in one form or the other. For the purpose of this thesis, I will be using Eastern Illinois University's recently revised Reading & Writing Goals<sup>6</sup>, which draw from the cross-curricular scholarship of Janet Emig, Robert Jones, Joseph Comprone, or C.H. Knoblauch, to name a few.

EIU graduates write critically and evaluate varied sources by:

- Creating documents appropriate for specific audiences, purposes, genres, disciplines, and professions
- Crafting cogent and defensible applications, analyses, evaluations, and arguments about problems, ideas, and issues
- Producing documents that are well-organized, focused, and cohesive
- Using appropriate vocabulary, mechanics, grammar, diction, and sentence structure
- Understanding, questioning, analyzing, and synthesizing complex textual, numeric, and graphical sources
- Evaluating evidence, issues, ideas, and problems from multiple perspectives
- Collecting and employing source materials ethically and understanding their strengths and limitations

While not every university may base its goals on the same exact scholars, these listed elements nonetheless reflect a strong central core for a pedagogical approach. These central concepts will drive the

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6 The full handout is freely available on EIU's website:  
<<http://www.eiu.edu/learninggoals/revisedgoals.php>>.

basis for this chapter's examination and provide a united direction for critical-creative composition exercises and assignments detailed in chapter 3.

Each creative writing genre is associated with numerous sub-genres, each subtly different from its neighbor. Instead of explicitly listing every genre and sub-genre, this approach will focus on the larger-scale elements of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and drama exploring how each genre could serve to emphasize the given rhetorical points. This way, instructors who are familiar with multiple genres can utilize the connections between them, while instructors with a more narrow focus are still able to take advantage of the creative-rhetorical interplay without feeling marginalized<sup>7</sup>. While certain genres might have particular strengths, none are excluded or privileged. The most important element, after all, is not which genre you utilize, but instead that students are made aware of the reasoning and rhetoric behind their decisions. Lastly, Chapter 3 will detail the implementations of these rhetorical overlaps that separate critical-creative composition from a composition course that just happens to utilize creative writing, both to provide a unified approach for those who seek to utilize critical-creative composition, and also to prevent it from being misappropriated as an excuse to transform composition courses into creative writing workshops.

*Poetry: The Life Within Language*

Marvin Bell is perhaps one of the first to publish an article in *College Composition and Communication* about poetry in the creative writing classroom, though his 1964 article pre-dates the creative writing / composition discussion<sup>8</sup> by a good margin. The article's approach is rather telling, as Bell quickly adopts a cautious tone, regularly reminding readers that he is "only advocating the study of literature in composition courses insofar as that study is focused on literary techniques applicable to the

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7 The debate between generalist and specialist teaching within composition extends beyond the scope of this thesis. The decision to develop critical-creative composition in a flexible, open manner is driven by the simple practicality of allowing teachers to utilize what expertise they already have.

8 Regarding the specific discussion as to whether or not English departments should consider allying the two departments, that is. In fact, Bell's article explicitly states that he believes the two should remain separate aside from the poetic exception.

writing of compositions” (1). He postulates that “poetry is not, despite certain definitions and credos which imply so, a spontaneous out-pouring of language,” and that poetry “incorporate[s] techniques which are possible or necessary to effective compositions” (1). Much like any other composition writing, he argues, poems “may be narrative, expository, critical or argumentative” (1-2).

While Bell is quick to qualify the various poems that he would consider “valuable” for the composition course, Valerie Martinez goes so far as to call poetry “a missing link in an incomplete chain of teaching strategies” (35). Though perhaps a tad overzealous in her insistence that the absence of poetry is a devastating void, her exploration of the possibilities therein are nonetheless intriguing. She points to the development of language and the exploration of linguistic metacognition as the basis for her argument, citing William Strong’s assertion that “it is possible to make the case that less-successful writers are constrained not so much by deficits of vocabulary or intelligence as by syntactic shackles, a lack of phrase-manipulating skill. [...] Successful writers, by contrast, become increasingly adept at manipulating sentence parts to achieve their rhetorical aims” (qtd in Martinez, 46). Patrick Bizzaro, in his *College Composition and Communication* review “Should I Write This Essay or Finish a Poem?” further champions this creative exploration, arguing that the underlying creative spark so often mistaken as a natural-born “gift” is not only something that can be nurtured in students, but one that “has its roots in imagination, intuition, even instinct” (293). Wendy Bishop draws particular attention to the importance of imagination, as in her words, “language games construct human experience” (12). By stepping outside the standard conventional approach to voice, syntax, and structure, students are allowed to focus instead on “sensitivity to language, sound, and sentence rhythm” (Crockett 94).

This linguistic freedom often belies the complexity of the subtle elements at play within the language itself. All of the poetic elements work in concert with one another to produce a unique impression that gives students “a metalinguistic awareness of the innovative” (Martinez 43). While Martinez’s statement seems to valorize poetry somewhat by assuming that only creative writing can be “innovative,” her larger point regarding poetry’s emphasis on vivid concision still rings true. The powerful, yet playful imagery condensed within poetry forces students to stop and unpack the meaning of each word, each pause, and each phrase both in literal and figurative terms, “spark[ing] new associations and ideas in concise

form,” encouraging readers to not only build vocabulary, but expand the ways in which they can use their current lexicon (49). It is perhaps because of this emphasis on colorful language and external stylistic factors that poetry is sometimes deemed too expressive for use in the composition classroom by critics such as Gary Olson, who claim the composition classroom should accomplish “much more than teaching students to ‘express themselves’” (qtd in Hesse 39). Nancy Welsh pushes back against such arguments in her essay “No Apology”: “[T]his is what a rhetorical education is all about: learning to critically examine and creatively respond to all the rhetorical strategies (including those of image-making, dream-weaving, and storytelling) that writers (including writers of expository prose) daily rely upon” (118).

Martinez illustrates this “critical examination” and “creative response” within her own classroom using an excerpt from Charles Simic’s “Stone”:

Go inside a stone

That would be my way

Let somebody else become a dove

Or gnash with a tiger’s tooth.

I am happy to be a stone.

From the outside the stone is a riddle:

No one knows how to answer it.

Yet within, it must be cool and quiet

Even though a cow steps on it full weight,

Even though a child throws it in a river;

The stone sinks, slow, unperturbed

To the river bottom

Where the fishes come to knock on it

And listen ... (qtd in Martinez, 45)

Even though the “evidence” is not necessarily drawn from a secondary source, the main premise -- that being “inside a stone” is superior to these other states of existence -- is still supported by the progression of creative argument and metaphor. Simic’s first stanza immediately contextualizes the transformative metaphor and sets his position within it, following with a linguistically creative, yet undeniably persuasive “body”. Martinez suggests framing essay theses in the form of “argument poems” to practice such concision, while still allowing room to “expand creatively on their conclusions” (45). This also forces the student to pay extra close attention to the relationship between complexity and concision -- two attributes that are almost always positively correlated.

Others, like Bob Perelman, take this notion of poetic rhetoric more literally, using the format of the poem itself as part of a very direct, meta-linguistic argument that directly combines the traditional rhetorical triangle with poetic form:

“The Marginalization of Poetry”: the words

themselves display the *lingua franca*

of the academic disciplines and, conversely,

the abject object status of poetry:



it's hard to think of any

poem where the word "marginalization" occurs.

It is being used here, but

this may or may not be

a poem: the couplets of six-

word lines don't establish an audible

rhythm; perhaps they aren't, to use

the Calvinist mercantile metaphor, "earning" their

right to exist in their present

form – is this a line break

or am I simply chopping up

ineradicable prose? But to defend this

(poem) from its own attack, I'll

say that both the flush left

and irregular right margins constantly loom

as significant events, often interrupting what

I thought I was about to

write and making me write something

else entirely. Even though I'm going

back and rewriting, the problem still

reappears every six words. So this,

and every poem, is a marginal

work in a quite literal sense (qtd in Mayers 124-25)

Perelman's work is especially interesting because it butts up against the notion that poetry is incompatible with the "hard" elements of composition, such as research, citation, and implementation of secondary sources (as often utilized in conventional research assignments) – a notion likely derived from poetry's disinterest in "proving" itself in the academic sense. In fact, Mayers points out the opposite is often true, at least within creative writing workshops: "[A] poet cannot simply 'get away' with something like a flat, declarative, or abstract statement. Such a statement must be 'earned' by skillful use of particular techniques" (172). Still, even though a poem does not cite its sources like a conventional academic assignment, poems like "The Marginalization of Poetry" have no trouble bringing in outside influences (in his case, the reference to the Calvinist mercantile metaphor) to enhance their argument, be it explicit or

implied. Making note of this discrepancy could serve as a springboard regarding the different *kinds* of secondary support – the difference between enhancing a poem through *pathos* or *ethos* as compared with one that explicitly brings in the more hard-and-fast *logos*.

Critical-creative composition shares Martinez’s explicit goal of “encouraging students to become conscious of their learning processes and aware of their manipulation of language, numbers, concepts” (Martinez, 33), and the reading and writing of poetry could certainly strike the requisite balance between practical and engaging, allowing students freedom to experiment with form, syntax, and style while still engaging critical, practical elements of rhetoric through meta-cognitive self-reflection.

*Non-Fiction: The Argument of Style*

Of all the creative writing forms that already influence the composition course, creative non-fiction is in many cases the one that is least contested, likely due to the perception that “non-fiction” equates with “purely factual,” making it substantially less threatening in terms of style, syntax, and voice. In many cases, such approaches are relegated to the ever-popular personal narrative -- a syntactically straightforward, conventionally acceptable merger of personal and academic. In *Style as Argument*, Chris Anderson takes the notion of utilizing creative non-fiction within composition a step further than the standard belletristic essay, arguing “that nonfiction prose is one of the principal rhetorical genres of the age” (1). While his emphasis lies solely on nonfiction, his larger point remains valid for creative writing of all kinds: “We are never able to look completely past the words on the page to the people and events they evoke; we are always aware of the words themselves, of their rhythms and their textures. Our experience in reading contemporary nonfiction is an experience of style” (1).

Critical-creative pedagogy serves to push that experience to the forefront by examining creative writing phenomenon as functions of academic argument, recognizing the truth of the epigraph that appears at the beginning of Anderson’s first chapter: “Form always makes one tacit statement – it says: I am a definite *form* of existence, I choose to have character and quality, I choose to be recognizable, I am – everything considered – the best that could be done under the circumstances, and so superior to a blob” (1).

It places the author within a unique nexus of responsibility and creativity. The expectation of “truth” -- or at least a certain kind of creative truth<sup>9</sup> -- give us a notion of not just the characters in the essay, but also the constructed “character of the rhetor. Each must build, from clues in the text, not only an evoked meaning but also an evoked writer, a personality that lies beyond the text and through the arguments he uses, the criteria he demonstrates, and the claims he asserts, projects a character that the reader will admire to a lesser or greater extent” (qtd in Bishop, 10). While the poet can be important to a poem, the focus is most often on the language itself. In some instances, poems explicitly try to separate the language from the author in an “attempt to express tentativeness, ambiguity, and incoherence” (Bell 2). Non-fiction, however, by its nature as a vehicle of *a* truth (even if it is a particular interpretation of truth for a particular person) is integrally associated with the writer -- a sentiment echoed by Phillip Lopate, arguably one of the most influential contemporary nonfiction essay writers.

In both his introduction to *The Art of the Personal Essay* and his interview on *Poets & Writers*, Lopate maintains a consistent view on creative non-fiction, which he prefers to call “literary fiction,”<sup>10</sup> that revolves around the notion that the best nonfiction essays “cling to an old-fashioned, humanistic idea that each person is an individual, each individual has a kind of self, and that self is cohesive” (An Interview par 61). To this end, Lopate argues for an approach that emphasizes the individuality, quirks, and oddities of the writer that are more concerned with examining a “complex portrait of a human being” (“The Art” xxix) than it is with the conventional notions of scene and dialogue (par. 12). Like Anderson, Lopate is interested in how nonfiction gives us a portrait of “the rhythm by which the essayist receives, digests, and spits out the world” (xxvii). This portrait is embodied in a persona that reflects as many insights into the author as it does the narrative situation: “[P]ersona issues from an awareness of natural traits, of behavior. You

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9 This is not to say that all nonfiction *must* present completely factual truth in the literal sense (as some nonfiction certainly favors a fanciful or deliberately untruthful approach), but rather to suggest that the element of *a* truth, or at least a specific angle on truthfulness (which may, stylistically, be deliberate exaggeration or deception) is important in some regard. Even when purposefully subverted, this subversion plays upon the very expectations of truth within the genre, creating a very deliberate style and tone.

10 He prefers this term not to valorize literature or disparage creativity, but emphasize the historical and literary tradition of personal essays. In his interview, Lopate says using the term creative non-fiction is “like patting yourself on the back and saying, ‘My nonfiction is creative.’ Let the reader be the judge of that” (par 7).

construct a character out of what you know to be your propensities, your limitations, your inclinations, your habits, and you play with it” (par 65). This character, according to Lopate, serves as a central part of the personal essay and is no less worth of study or emulation as a function of the work's overall argument.

This notion functions alongside Anderson's argument that all “dramatic presentations of contemporary prose tacitly argue for values and attempt to persuade us to adopt those values” (Anderson 2). It is this approach that Mayers champions in *(Re)Writing Craft*, one that addresses writing as not just a piece of literature, but as a work of writing constructed by a person within and interacting with a specific set of cultural expectations, constraints, and pressures. While reading *A Song of Ice and Fire* might introduce us to George R.R. Martin's propensity to slaughter beloved characters, we learn little about the man behind the keyboard. Conversely, when we approach Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, we're treated to a “psychedelic, jumbled, nonlinear” spectacle that tells us just as much about Wolfe's pseudo-religious pontifications as the story itself (11). Readers are given insight into writing culture, history, and social pressures, though these elements are almost always contained within subtext. This makes them perfect for critical thinking exercises, where students either write about the subtextual clues contained within the readings or write reflective essays upon the ways in which these same factors influence their own non-fiction essays and narratives. Similarly, Lopate argues that this kind of personal non-fiction is “uniquely appropriate to the present era” due to its “suitability for experimental method and self-reflective process” (1). He argues that the unique insights into both the narrative context and the questions such authors seek to explore are “one of the most useful instruments with which outsiders can reach the dominant culture quickly and forcefully and testify to the precise ambiguities of their situation as individuals and group members” (li).

Jeffery Maxson combines this approach with existing scholarship on linguistic outsiders to create a fascinating, self-aware approach for his own students. As with poetry, the emphasis on student voice is best utilized by complicating that voice and examining how the overall text is influenced. In “‘Government of da Peeps, for da Peeps, and by da Peeps’: Revisiting the Contact Zone,” Jeffrey Maxson introduces the notion of deliberately abandoning academic conventions of voice in favor of the various colloquial discourses of which students are already familiar. While Maxson's article focuses on struggling writers

who fight linguistic discrepancies between the home and the academy (most notably Black Vernacular English [BVE]), his discussion of introductory writing as a “contact zone” wherein students “write (or talk) themselves through unfriendly language environments by combinations of assimilation and resistance” is applicable for any first-year writing course -- doubly so for one emphasizing creative writing (25). The quote for which Maxson’s article was named comes from one such example of “creative misuse,” wherein students were instructed to re-write a chunk of dense, academic prose in “the variety of slang most familiar to them,” then reflect upon the translation exercise and address the pros and cons of the two styles (27). His second assignment follows along the same vein of voice awareness and manipulation, but flips the details completely around. Students are instructed to write parodies of the academic voice, blowing out the language as much as possible with overly-technical language and impenetrable English, “presented in an elevated style unsuited to the subject matter” (33). Both of these examples demonstrate interesting ways in which student voice and direction can be complicated, bringing a breath of fresh air to what might otherwise become a stale assignment format.

The rhetorical strengths of non-fiction don’t end with author, voice, and persona, however. Creative writer and scholar Michael Spooner demonstrates how creative non-fiction can be as structurally dynamic as poetry in terms of using visual elements to manipulate the interpretation of meaning. His essay “Too Many Books” occupies an intriguing middle-ground between poetry, creative non-fiction, and academia, opting for a non-traditional layout that consists largely of previously published excerpts on the topic of tenure and forced publication that become more and more jumbled as the article moves on, eventually progressing to the point of unreadability. The jumbled text, clashing fonts, and cluttered, cramped excerpts all fighting for your attention (and all failing due to this struggle) all reflect his disdain for the publish-or-perish endemic. Spooner opts away from a traditional presentation, offering us very little in his own words. However, when it *is* present, it nearly always accompanies a jab at the expense of these publishing conventions, such as a parenthetical notation that states “That was me. That was the author of this text. I’m saying that” (55). Instead of transition devices and secondary sources nested within a polished essay, we’re treated to a garish wall of quotations, their clashing fonts and unequal spacing serving the exact *opposite* notion as a transition -- to push the text apart and make us aware of all the disparate elements crammed onto the page. Without speaking a single word, we understand Spooner’s critique of the

publish-or-perish mantra as a counterproductive system churning out articles largely relegated to providing the requisite number of outside voices to prove that you are capable of reading *other* papers churned out in much the same fashion.

Spooner and Maxson's attention to linguistic creativity makes their writing styles a fruitful tool for transition from the poetic to the narrative (for those who would be so inclined to include both), and it allows students to continue the kinds of discussions that a unit in poetry would have established, or begin one if it has yet to be addressed. Using Anderson's concept of stylistic argumentation combined with Spooner's creative use of both voice and layout, students can be eased into the topics of voice by experimenting with voices of their own, reflecting upon how their word choice, style, and rhythm influences the way the piece might be read. Lopate's theories on persona and narration can add an additional layer of complexity to those questions, challenging students to critique unfamiliar elements of writing (as suggested by Pratt) as a way to, in Lopate's words, "interrogate their ignorance" (xxvii). This not only combines the approaches of Spooner, Anderson, and Lopate, but further resonates with Maxon's notions of assimilation and resistance. More importantly, by emphasizing the rhetorical creativity found within pieces like that presented by Spooner and Maxon, and examining narrative voice and persona through Lopate's lens of self-interrogation, students are given the opportunity to approach creative non-fiction in many ways that divert from strictly belletristic narratives about summer vacation.

#### *Fiction: The Construction of Creative Argument*

The writing of fiction is perhaps one of those more difficult elements to tackle if for no other reason than the massive scope of varying sub-genres, each with their own unique conventions, expectations, and stylistic forms. From the overtly imaginative to the strictly realistic, many works of fiction share a singular element at their core: argument. While not all fiction is intended to be persuasive in the strictly rhetorical sense, it *does* establish an argument through narration, style, character, dialogue, and setting. Fiction writing at its core is a collaboration of interwoven arguments that function on both a conscious and unconscious level. As the reader interacts with the world, he discovers the norms, conventions, and expectations that, when presented properly, push forward the suspension of disbelief so

crucial to creative writing. As the characters, settings, themes, and style all grow and interact within this imaginary context, they either build or deteriorate the credibility of the fiction as a whole. In this way, the core of fiction is in some regards a flexible *ethos* that the reader will continually reevaluate as the story progresses and the interactions (or context) evolve. Fiction revolves around a particular way of understanding the world (or *another* world, as the case may be), asking the reader to accept a series of arguments that establish the basis for the textual experience. From a meta-cognitive standpoint, this detailed attention to argument on multiple interconnected levels makes fiction quite valuable for critical-creative composition.

Of the commonly espoused snippets of creative writing wisdom found in student workshops, perhaps none has become more prolific than Wayne Booth's mantra "show, don't tell" from *Rhetoric of Fiction* – a piece of advice that not only serves to sharpen the evocative details of a piece, but one that also reflects the argumentative nature of fiction, especially when we examine Booth's defense of this particular approach: "Whatever our ideas may be about the natural way to tell a story, artifice is unmistakably present whenever the author tells us what no one in so-called real life could possibly know. In life we never know anyone but ourselves by thoroughly reliable internal signs" (3). In the following pages, Booth leads us through the Biblical story of Job, illustrating how the presentation of Job as "perfect and upright" and the exultation that "In all this Job sinned not" is, from the neutral omniscient voice, rather difficult to appreciate from a storytelling standpoint, largely because the judgments of value and character have been made for us, without allowing us to observe, consider, and vicariously experience – in other words, the argument has already been determined, leaving the reader largely dissatisfied.

Even the narrative style itself serves to persuade, creating an implicit argument as a background from which we will begin examining future textual elements. Consider the following scene premise: A character walks into the New York Stock Exchange to liquidate their stockholder options. If this story were to begin in the first person and make liberal use of Southern dialect and slang, the reader would immediately develop a different set of assumptions than if the same story were approached with a more neutral lexicon, or even one *very* specific to the activities of Wall Street. Wood remarks specifically upon this phenomenon of narration as implicit argument, pointing to how the effects of style, voice, and narration



immediately serve to establish an understanding of character: “So-called omniscience is almost impossible. As soon as someone tells a story about a character, narrative seems to want to bend itself around that character, wants to merge with that character, to take on his or her way of thinking and speaking. A novelist’s omniscience soon enough becomes a kind of secret sharing” (7). In some instances, this “bending” becoming powerful enough to overtake the the author’s voice entirely – a phenomenon he calls “authorial irony” (22). He points to the opening lines of Chekhov’s “Rothschild’s Fiddle” to demonstrate: “The town was small, worse than a village, and in it lived almost none but old people who died so rarely it was even annoying. And in the hospital and jail there was very little demand for coffins. In short, business was bad” (22). Before we’ve even been introduced to the protagonist, we are given inclinations to both his vocation and disposition, plunged into the “midst of the coffin-maker’s mind, for whom longevity is an economic nuisance” (23).

The ever-popular unreliable narrator relies even more heavily upon the persuasive function of narrative within fiction, counting on the subtleties of this argumentation to provide the requisite hints to the reader at the appropriate times: “We know that the narrator is being unreliable because the author is alerting us, through reliable manipulation, to that narrator’s unpredictability. A process of authorial flagging is going on; the novel teaches us how to read its narrator” (5). This “flagging” drives forward the dramatic irony that argues for a particular interpretation of character – in this case, proving that their interpretation of events can not necessarily be trusted.

Details, too, are “flagged” in a similar manner. While authors certainly use specific detail to allude to larger themes, arguments, and characterizations (a prominently displayed Bible, the stink of liquor on a priest, a cache of hidden makeup amidst a convent), Wood argues that even the smaller, supposedly unimportant details can add to the “truthfulness” of fiction:

“There is a conventional modern fondness for quiet but ‘telling’ detail: ‘The detective noticed that Carla’s hairband was surprisingly dirty.’ If there is such a thing as a telling detail, then there must be such a thing as an untelling detail, no? A better distinction might be between what I would call ‘off-duty’ and ‘on-duty’ detail; the off-duty detail is part of the standing army of life, as it were – it is always ready to be activated.” (80)

These “off-duty” details serve to enhance the periphery of the world, fleshing it out in a way that appeals to our appreciation of the random, the mundane, the chaotic. While most fiction strives to keep the symbolism and thematic elements cohesive, Wood argues that “fiction builds into itself a lot of surplus detail just as life is full of surplus detail” (81). This implicit appeal to our own mundane reality strengthens the suspension of disbelief.

According to Wood, one of the greatest challenges of establishing an effective argument for fiction lies with the creation of believable character. Characters often serve as a catalysts for the evolution of these arguments, as they are the living artifacts of the author's language that move through and interact within setting and plot, and as such are touted as the “heart of fiction” by writers such as Dufresne (169). Wood writes that “[t]here is nothing harder than the creation of fictional character. I can tell it from the number of apprentice novels I read that begin with descriptions of photographs” (95). As the chapter continues, Wood laments how the “unpracticed novelist [cleaves] to the static, because it is much easier to describe than the mobile: it is getting these people out of the aspic of arrest and mobilized in a scene that is hard” (96). Such tentative beginnings, he says, are indications that a writer may be “clinging to a handrail and is afraid to push out” (96). This is exceptionally problematic, as the ways in which a writer chooses to establish, construct, examine, and reflect upon the characters in his work will resonate throughout the entire piece. Arguments, like characters, are not interesting when they sit on their own. As John Dufresne writes in *The Lie That Tells A Truth*, “[n]o character exists in a vacuum. A character is fully realized only when he or she interacts in a social context” (171).

Wood echoes this sentiment, emphasizing how renowned authors use these implicit arguments to establish within their own writing a consistent expectation that drives what we as readers are willing to “believe” – expectations directly derived from the differing ways that they write, develop, and utilize the elements of fiction – as well as the dearth of such internal consistency notable in bad writing:

[N]ovels tend to fail not when the characters are not vivid or deep enough, but when the novel in question has failed to teach us to manage a specific hunger for its own characters, its own reality level. In such cases, our appetite is quickly disappointed, and surges wildly in excess of what we are provided, and we tend to blame the author for not

giving us enough -- the characters, we complain, are not alive or round or free enough.”

(Wood 120 - 21 emphasis mine)

As readers observe, their observations are constantly checked against the expectations that have been developed thus far (or, in the absence of said expectations, serve to develop them). Once an observation clashes with expectation, the reader experiences a kind of cognitive dissonance – *dissonance of disbelief*, one might call it. When this occurs, the context of the situation becomes of utmost importance. If the context is able to justify the discrepancy between observation and expectation, the dissonance is resolved, our understanding grows, our expectations are adjusted accordingly, and we continue on. However, if the context of the situation is not developed enough to allow for a reasonable explanation (or at least suggest a plausible explanation is incoming), the story's *ethos* suffers. Using such argumentative rhetoric to examine fictitious phenomenon such as character veracity serves not only to emphasize the complexity and nuance of argument (as often understood by students as a single contentious statement), but also showcases the myriad ways in which fiction utilizes argument.

Examining these characters as a function of rhetoric allows for discussion in concrete rhetorical terms, drawing attention to the various features of fiction as function of argument rather than through the ephemeral notions of creativity or inspiration. While certainly a legitimate source of ideas, inspiration is simply impossible to teach. Thinking of character in terms of argument also enables us to examine other character-related phenomenon in terms of rhetoric, *ethos*, and persuasion. Consider the phenomenon of the unbelievable character – a character whose inherent *ethos* has failed to persuade. By specifically examining how the character interacts with his surroundings, and how these interactions build or deteriorate *ethos*, students not only gain a new, deeper appreciation of character but also a deeper understanding of the nuances present within argument. This provides an interesting new take on a previously mystified element of fiction while simultaneously offering students a way to examine, interpret, and evaluate their *own* characters, as well as a new way of looking at fiction as a whole.

*Drama: The Discourse of Dialogue*

While it is salient to note that writing an entire play is simply not practical for a composition course, dialogue does open up an opportunity for students to begin learning about the complexities of discourse, both in terms of exchanged utterances, and in the larger sense of knowledge communities founded by a constant reciprocity of information, ideas, and themes. One of the primary themes of the composition classroom is the understanding of discourse communities -- the class itself, within the home, amidst the larger societies -- and the realization that writing, in terms of discourse, is more akin to a conversation than a lecture. Kay Halasek, author of *A Pedagogy of Possibility*, turns to Mikhail Bakhtin and his concept of dialogism to suggest a change in the way that composition studies approach rhetoric, “not as the *center* of English departments but as vital, viable, acknowledged *presence* in this departments,” claiming that such a redefinition creates a “site at which students (1) examine the implications of their various rhetorical proficiencies, (2) survey the discursive possibilities available to them, and (3) produce discourse from positions informed by their active and purposeful engagement with cultural (e.g. literary) texts” (xi). Halasek’s work, along with Michael Holquist’s *Bakhtin and his World*, and William Covino’s *Forms of Wondering* serve to help us examine the invaluable lessons that can be taught by dialogue, be it student to teacher, or character to character.

Of primary importance is the discursive nature of dialog, the way it feeds into itself in order to check, re-check, and respond in ways that are constantly being evaluated and adjusted. In the preface to *Forms of Wondering*, Covino calls it an “exploration of the nature and the uses of writing” (ix). It is written as a dialogue between a cast of “characters” -- each a different aspect of Covino’s attitudes and dispositions -- that welcomes students to follow as he literally talks to himself about questions that the students themselves are likely facing (such as “What’s the Value of Writing?”). In this way, Covino is “recogniz[ing] the intertextual nature of discourse and its implications for action,” inviting outsiders in by engaging issues relevant to their immediate academic, social, and textual position (7). From a dialogic perspective, Covino’s approach to textbook writing is brilliant. It is not only written in a way that itself mimics the speech patterns of a spoken conversation, but are in fact prompting a conversation about conversation by presenting it as a book intended to be read within a college classroom. As the students work through Covino’s self-dialogue, they are experiencing his real-time attempts to “write in response to

and in anticipation of the words of others,” both in terms of his own self-reflective voices *and* in terms of the students that will discuss these conversations (5).

Reading and writing dialogue in both drama and fiction with a careful attention to self-reflective conversations allow students to enter into these discursive concepts, both on a literal level (reading and writing dialogue) and on the larger, conceptual level (using reading and writing to contribute to a collective classroom knowledge and experience base). In *The Lie That Tells a Truth*, John Dufresne emphasizes the deliberate, concise, linguistically aware functions of dialog within fiction: “Dialog is not a break in the action, it’s an intensification of action. [...] It is often an attempt at deliberate evasion, at confusion, rather than communication” (197). This complicates the notion that writing must be true -- dialogue gives students the unique opportunity to read and write lies, deception, evasion -- and more importantly, to look at how it influences the overall discourse. Recognizing the social implications of dialogue and examining how one’s own voice plays into these communicative structures serves to not only forward an understanding of dialogue championed

Mayers cautions all teachers of composition -- not just those interested in creative writing applications -- “to remember -- and remind students -- that even in the most purpose-driven writing tasks, texts can seem to resist intention, pulling the writer in strange and unexpected directions” (87). In order to truly shine, however, it is important to recognize the social importance of dialogue. What is said is equally important as who said it, to whom, and where. This opens up new opportunities for students as they examine, input, re-evaluate, and receive. Facebook and other social media sites provide the perfect platform through which dialogue can be examined, not in an edited, published, novelistic form, but as a direct function of social relationships and open communication platforms.

Critical-creative composition’s metacognitive approach ties in perfectly with the natural awareness that dialogism requires. By its nature, recursive dialog requires a two-way venue of communication, a point which can be emphasized through activities that focus on the recursive element. Conversations of the self, interviews with other classmates (or themselves, in the vein of Covino), and other dialogic elements serves to further the kind of self-awareness composition seeks to instill.

*Blended Creative Discourse*

Despite the myriad rhetorical parallels between the academic and the creative, these underlying rhetorical similarities are not automatically transferred. It is important that the creative element of the discourse is approached with a deliberate, open focus on the patterns involved in both the reading and creation of creative writing. Without critical meta-cognitive reflection, critical-creative composition risks treating creative writing like “a cordoned-off area reserved for the expression of emotion, or as a break from the more ‘serious’ work of academic writing” (Mayers 136). While critical-creative composition strives to approach rhetorical goals through an engaging, dynamic lens, it is no less concerned with them than any other first-year composition course. Furthermore, since creative writing as a whole is a massive discipline, comprised of numerous conventions, rules, and exceptions of its own, it is important to illustrate exactly *how* critical-creative composition will address and utilize these explicated rhetorical strategies.

To this end, creative-writing focuses on identifying and practicing the elements that make up creative writing, specifically those that overlap with rhetorical concerns. This focus on the *elements* of creative writing rather than an explicit, in-depth study of the genre itself. This approach – called *blended discourse* for the sake of this thesis – refers to a piece of writing that is not explicitly part of the four conventional genres of creative writing (fiction, non-fiction, poetry, or drama) but still veers away from the strictly academic by utilizing one or more of the above explicated parallels. While this term will largely be used to cover hybrid assignments such as an argument poem or a paper that develops an imaginative research question within an academic context<sup>11</sup>, it also allows room for students to develop and understand the individual elements of creative writing outside the walls of genre.

One such example of this kind of blended discourse would be John McPhee's story “The Search for Marvin Gardens.” McPhee's essay certainly maintains several important elements of creative discourse – vivid imagery, a distinctive voice, a forward-moving narrative with a goal suggested both by the title and the body – but his back-and-forth, dual-track, rapidly-changing approach to moving through the text is certainly unconventional, as is his uncanny ability to use the game of Monopoly which serves as his frame

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11 For an example, see “The Time Traveller's Zombie Apocalypse Guide” in Chapter 3.

to symbolically approach very serious issues, such as the condition of the Atlantic City ghetto and jails, or how the game of Monopoly served to reflect “the business milieu” of the early 1900s:

It was Chess at the Wall Street level. “Advance token to the nearest railroad and pay owner twice the rental to which he is otherwise entitled. If Railroad is unowned, you may buy it from the Bank. Get out of Jail, free. Advance token to nearest utility. If unowned, you may buy it from Bank. If owned, throw dice and pay owner a total ten times the amount thrown. You are assessed for street repairs: \$40 per house, \$115 per hotel. Pay poor tax of \$15. Go to Jail. Go directly to Jail. Do not pass Go. Do not collect \$200.”

(16)

This is the kind of writing is ideal for critical-creative composition, because it forces both readers and writers to identify individual elements rather than relying on assumptions based from the whole. Asking students to identify which elements are utilized and where gives them practice with these elements, furthering the flexibility and awareness that we strive to teach. By asking students to create blended discourse of their own, they are demonstrating, practicing, and reflecting upon these elements for themselves. Blended discourse, then, forms the instructional basis for critical-creative writing assignments. The hybridized nature of these texts serves to push towards the kind of holistic writing assignments that Mayers might have championed, emphasizing rhetorical elements over strictly creative or strictly academic genres. This serves to keep the assignments flexible and modular, ensuring that instructors are able to design the course to match their expertise and meet the individual needs of their students.

### Chapter 3

#### *Moving Forward: Implementation, Example, and Logistics*

As enlightening as discussions on theory can be, there comes a point where the discussion must move to the logistics of the classroom. A pedagogical approach is only as good as its applicability regarding student writing. Overlaps between creative, social, and academic discourse do no good if they are not consciously addressed and implemented. Mayers calls for a change that would restructure the entire English department, implementing creative writing not as a new pedagogical approach, but by integrating creative writing and the study thereof into many (if not all) English courses. He advocates a “creative re-imagining of criteria for new hires” that emphasizes faculty with mixed backgrounds in composition and creative writing (157). He does recognize that such change will meet with stiff resistance<sup>12</sup> but argues strongly against “resign[ing] ourselves to a fatalistic view of the future [of English studies]” (165).

While Mayers presents a competent argument supporting a unified writing studies program throughout *(Re)Writing Craft*, his final culmination is perhaps too strong a position for the scope of this thesis, if for no other reason than the immense logistical difficulties and administrative complications such an overhaul would entail. However, critical-creative composition does serve as a smaller step towards that direction, favoring immediately applicable strategies over an immediate call for holistic reform. With that said, critical-creative composition is no compositional panacea. It will not single-handedly revolutionize first-year writing across the academy. In fact, there may be some composition teachers (notably those with little-to-no creative writing experience) for whom critical-creative composition is not ideal. The goal of this thesis is not to discredit those who opt *against* creative writing in the composition classroom, but instead to open up new tools for teachers and scholars like Bishop and Andrews in a way that utilizes their combined interests for the benefit of their students.

What follows in this chapter is a pedagogical map that explores how one might implement critical-creative composition into their own writing courses, based on both the previous research and my experience teaching

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12 Admittedly, much of this resistance comes just as much from departmental politics as it does the actual scholastic evolution of the composition course, but that is an issue detailed and complex enough in itself to require a much larger piece of writing.



composition as a graduate assistant<sup>13</sup>. For the most part, this chapter will focus on policies, activities, exercises, and assignments that fall specifically within the purview of critical-creative composition. Elements left out have not been ignored as much as they have been relegated to the individual preferences of the instructor<sup>14</sup>. The following sections outline the theoretical underpinnings and decision-making process behind the tenets of critical-creative composition, followed by one or more examples explicating these tenets. In this manner, those who may want to vary the specifics of an example know the process behind the decision-making, and can thus adjust to match their own teaching style, the needs of their students, or any other such variable.

### *Course Objectives*

While it's safe to assume that a group of scholars interested in critical-creative composition would share an interest in creative writing, it is very unlikely that this group would all share the same exact expertise. Critical-creative composition is not about any illusion that one specific genre of creative writing is greater than over the other, nor does this approach require that all four genres be used in the classroom during the course of a single semester. Such an approach would be spread far too thin and would likely leave students desperately grasping at rapidly-changing genre conventions just in time for them to change. Instead of asking composition teachers to become masters of all four genres, critical-creative composition emphasizes specific learning objectives to provide rhetorical guidelines with flexible details, allowing teachers to make use of the creative writing expertise they already possess. By emphasizing rhetorical goals and milestones over any one specific exercise or assignment, critical-creative composition allows for a modular approach that maximizes freedom without sacrificing practicality. For this purpose, critical-creative composition finds itself concerned with many of the same elements as any other composition course, with only a few slight adjustments. By the end of a critical-creative composition class, students should be familiar with the following:

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- 13 Not because I expect my year as a composition instructor to solidify me as a veteran of the field, but because there were some elements of critical-creative composition I was already implementing before I had a name for it. This course was one of a couple that encouraged me to study the potential connection further.
- 14 For example, how you choose to implement your attendance policy is not likely to play any direct part in how students understand the relationship between creative and academic texts.

- Rhetorical technique as it applies to both creative and academic texts, as well as the parallels between the two<sup>15</sup>
- Recognizing and explicating the rhetorical strategies utilized in both academic writing and creative writing
- The importance of tone, style, voice, and audience, and how that influences how a text might be read, understood, and interpreted
- Producing documents that are well-organized, focused, and cohesive
- Using the vocabulary, mechanics, grammar, diction, and sentence structure required by the genre in which they are writing
- Understanding, questioning, analyzing, and synthesizing complex rhetorical, creative, and academic situations
- Evaluating the *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* of a particular argument from multiple perspectives
- Effectively and correctly employing secondary materials into their work

#### *Conventional Academic Assignments*

Even though this thesis, and by extension critical-creative pedagogy, focuses quite heavily on the creative writing genres, there is no need that it could not act in concert with more traditional writing assignments. In fact, calling critical-creative composition a blended pedagogy would be a misnomer if it did not also expose students to the strictly conventional academic works that they are likely to see in the future. With that said, it seems impractical

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15 This does not demand an understanding of *all* creative genres, but rather reinforces the notion that students should be exposed to the creative *and* the academic, that no one rhetorical form should dictate the course, and that students become familiar with these explored rhetorical forms.

to try and dictate the “perfect” degree to which this exposure is implemented, opting instead to leave that decision to the instincts of the instructor. The themes, theory, and ideas that serve to make up critical-creative pedagogy's core could easily be applied at the level of single assignment (for those not quite convinced of its merit) or to inform an entire classroom curriculum. Instead of laying out exactly how the course may be structured, this chapter instead focuses on the driving forces *behind* the specific elements, techniques, and examples, leaving the question of specific implementation largely up to those who wish to use it.

### *Critical Imagination*

In her examination of various composition strategies in “No Apology: Challenging the ‘Uselessness’ of Creative Writing,” Nancy Welsh identifies a singular, resonating premise shared between the compositional approach of Julie Jung and Marguerite Helmers: “both refut[e] the statement, ‘The pursuit of craft tends to decay the presence of intelligence’” (118). While Welsh is, in this instance, using the word “craft,” it seems further tied to an underlying element reflected *in* most creative “craft” – imagination.

One of the underlying tenets of critical-creative composition is the notion that imagination and critical thinking are not mutually exclusive. While “imagination” and “imaginary” often carry whimsical, almost childish connotations, “critical thinking” carries with it a more mature, sophisticated notion. In many cases, students are using one the other, or they may be using one to *analyze* the other. Critical-creative composition strives to bring these two elements together simultaneously with a notion called “critical imagination,” a notion inspired by the work of Gianni Rodari in *The Grammar of Fantasy*. While his book is mostly relegated to working with children, the concepts that he address are surprisingly applicable to more mature audiences. Rodari had a penchant for random musings, and it was through this tendency that he developed the idea of the “fantastical hypothesis,” wherein he would deliberately begin following an absurd string of thought (such as “what if a crocodile appeared as a contestant at a TV quiz show, winner take all?”) as far as he could down its pseudo-logical chain of effect (19-20). The term “critical imagination,” is an extension of this fantastical hypothesis: imaginative linguistic play that deals with a creative premise but argues for it as fervently and logically as possible.

*Recurrent Writing Exercises*

Another element of critical-creative composition is the notion of continual exposure to the writing process in small, complete chunks. While many scholars before me have lauded the benefits of exposing students to regular, smaller writing assignments, critical-creative composition has two particular methods through which it grants this exposure, one in-class and the other out-of-class.

The in-class daily writing involves a free-writing exercise called a *scribble*, one that proved particularly popular during my time teaching as a graduate assistant. Each class began with a scribble prompt on the board, and students were given 3 – 5 minutes to free-write on the particular subject or question addressed. This question almost always involved some sort of “fantastical hypothesis,” to use Rodari’s term and gave them a daily opportunity to engage their critical imagination. They were often placed in a specific creative, imaginative context (“The zombie apocalypse has struck.<sup>16</sup>”) and then asked to make critical decisions based on that context (“What five things do you bring as you flee your home? How will they help you survive the coming horror?”). Provided the student displayed an effort to engage with the subject with some measure of depth, they were given credit<sup>17</sup>.

The second recurring writing assignment is blog<sup>18</sup> that functions as a *craft journal*. While the notion of having a journal in which students can write about their writing has been around for quite some time, critical-creative composition’s emphasis on meta-cognition makes such regular reflection especially relevant. Students are required to write in their craft journal twice per week, with each post landing somewhere between 100 – 200 words. One of these posts is creative, with a form that should align with the current in-class emphasis. The second is reflective, discussing either the process and strategies behind their previous, creative post, or responding to a text

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16 As this chapter continues, one may note a particular tendency towards zombies and zombie-related material. While such an attention to the undead is not necessary, my particular class was enamored with *The Walking Dead* and other such media, making it a particularly useful creative context.

17 Later on in the semester, I found scribbles to be an excellent substitute for attendance points. While that particular use of scribbles is not necessary for critical-creative composition, such a policy can serve to reinforce the importance of the daily free-write.

18 While the form of the journal is not as important as the function, blogs serve the purpose most efficiently. A student cannot “misplace” the internet, and the individualized, time-stamped posts make it much easier to navigate than a pile of torn-out loose leaf. Furthermore, the online forum is one with which most students are familiar, and one that accommodates rapid commenting.

that they've read during the week, regardless of whether it was a text used *in* the classroom. These posts should emphasize only *one* or *two* major points, focusing more on a single notable passage, rhetorical effect, or even difficulty the student is having, either with his own writing or with the comprehension of another text. This both emphasizes concision and prevents the student from feeling overwhelmed by any one post. It also gives the instructor insight as to how the student *thinks* their writing process is proceeding and how it actually is – two things that can quickly become misaligned.

Like scribbles, craft journals are evaluated based on completion and evidence of reflection. Instructors are encouraged to respond to these in some manner or another as it not only echoes the back-and-forth discourse that modern students are used to, but it also gives the instructor the opportunity to ask further questions and seed future entries. The important element is the regular exposure to reflective writing.

### *Statements of Purpose*

The second recurrent element is the *statement of purpose* essay. It serves as the “critical” to every “creative”. As many of these assignments, especially early on, heavily emphasize the creative, it's important to ensure that students are still exposed to the academic and rhetorical – balance must be maintained between *poetics* and *rhetoric*. Any assignment in which students are expected to write more than a page or two must be prefaced with a statement of purpose that outlines the students' rhetorical and persuasive goals. This is not a new idea by any stretch of the imagination (recall, for instance, Jody Shipka from Chapter 1), but it works exceptionally well with critical-creative composition's heavy emphasis on linguistic awareness, and also ensures that the creative elements never become so overwhelming as to negatively influence the practical rhetorical applications of any given writing task.

Though the details of each assignment objective will vary somewhat, there are a few elements of these statements of purpose that will remain constant. First, and perhaps most importantly, the statement of purpose does *not* lock a student's assignment in stone. Murray argues for the importance of “writ[ing] before writing<sup>19</sup>” (375).

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19 And on a personal note, I can very much vouch for the veracity of Murray's article – specifically his notions of rehearsal and pressure.

This statement of purpose functions as a “rehearsal” for the student. It is just as much about sparking thought into textual motion as it is a guide for the final assignment. Secondly, the statement *must* contain at least one specific rhetorical goal the writer wishes to practice or improve upon. Reflections from the craft journal can serve as a useful seed for ideas, and allowing students to “cite themselves” not only empowers the writing they’ve already done, but gives them some practice with implementing external sources<sup>20</sup>. Third, the statement of purpose should outline the student’s basic ideas for approaching the related project. If it is a research project, it should contain his initial thoughts on the topic. If it is a creative endeavor, it should speak briefly about genre and desired theme. The details need not be overwhelming – the statement of purpose largely exists to show that students have given some thought to the assignment. As far as logistics are concerned, the statement of purpose has no need to exceed 500 words, and in most cases will not even require that. If inquisitive students demand a word minimum, 250 should be adequate.

### *Revision / Editing*

Insofar as classroom policies are concerned, much of these can be left to the discretion of the individual instructor to best meet the needs of his or her students. However, there are a few that play a specific role in critical-creative composition, perhaps the most important of which is revision. While revision is important to all writing, critical-creative composition puts an *especially* heavy emphasis on it due to the focus on meta-cognition. In the critical-creative classroom, revision is not optional. It is not a curricular option students may use at their leisure to tweak a grade they are unhappy with – it is approached as an integral part of every major writing assignment. However, critical-creative composition takes a slightly different approach to revision than some other curricula, opting not to treat student revisions as a singular event that occurs at a definitive point after a student has turned in their draft, but rather by encouraging students to track the changes that they make to their drafts *as they are drafting* – a process for which the craft journal proves invaluable.

The specific nature for this guided revision once again refers back to Nancy Sommers and “Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers.” Sommers argues against the rhetoric-based revision

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20 Even though the writing from the craft journal is likely to be less polished than most quotable material, students should not feel barred from referencing their own ideas solely because they have not been polished to an immaculate shine.

strategies of Gordon Rohman's notion that the writing process “moves from pre-writing to writing to re-writing” and “James Britton's model of the writing process as a series of stages described in metaphors of linear growth , conception—incubation—production” (378). While these notions are based on the concept of rhetoric, Sommers argues that in these approaches, “revision is understood as a separate stage at the end of the process – a stage that comes after a first or second draft and one that is temporarily distinct from the prewriting and writing stages of the process” (378). Speech, she point out, leaves no room for revision, going on to further argue that these linear models encourage “a parody of writing” that encourages students to engage in rewording exercises rather than actual revision. Sommers re-defines revision for her purposes as “*a sequence of changes in a composition – changes which are initiated by cues and occur continually throughout the writing of a work*” (380, emphasis original).

In the paper, Sommers reports on an experiment that she conducted whereupon students were asked to identify the issues most necessary for revision as well as the strategies they used to address those concerns. She quickly noticed that “students place a symbolic importance on their selection and rejection of words as the determiners of success or failure for their compositions” (381). Matters of clarity and repetition are largely relegated to lexical changes, wherein she found students emphasizing how words can be changed, rearranged, or deleted to “fix” their work in an appropriate manner. Sommers argues that this particular effect is not driven by some abject refusal against revision (though that does happen occasionally), but rather that by in large they “do what they have been taught to do in a consistently narrow and predictable way” (383). Instead of looking at revision as a positive, ever-present part of the writing process, it is relegated to the proverbial border guard, giving them the thumbs-up to “stop revising when they decide that they have not violated any of the rules for revising” (383). Sommers does go on to clarify that skilled writers *did* approach revisions “as a series of different levels or cycles,” and that “[t]he same objectives and sub-processes are present in each cycle, but in different proportions,” again drawing the emphasis away from seeing revision the means by which writing passes through some lexical checkpoint (387). The results of Sommer's study and the meta-cognitive emphasis of critical-creative composition are what drive the pedagogy's approach to revision in terms of the requisite craft journal entries throughout the process, in terms of post-draft revisions made after an assignment has been evaluated, and in terms of general definition of the process, which for the purposes of this pedagogy are as follows:

**Revision**, as a method of re-seeing the holistic argument and structure of a text, should be encouraged through guided re-writing that favors the structure, strategies, organization, and support of their writing, over the mechanical correctness and lexical issues.

**Editing**, as a method of correcting mechanical and lexical errors, should be differentiated from revision. While the two are interconnected, emphasizing this difference gives their previous conceptions of “revision” a new home, as it were, allowing them to compartmentalize – and therefore better understand – the differences between the two processes.

Certainly, the two aren't mutually exclusive. Editing *is* a part of revision, as mechanical correctness and lexical decisions are all a part of the constant process of improving a piece of writing. However, this distinction could serve useful when students are asked to write about how they *revised* their paper as opposed to how they *edited* it, helping them push past the problematic preconceptions that Sommers identified.

Instructors should encourage students to continue working on and thinking about their essays, even after turning in their initial draft<sup>21</sup>. It is for this very reason that the term “initial draft” replaces “rough draft” within the classroom lexicon, and “final draft” is omitted completely. While each assignment should have a date by which the students are expected to have produced a draft that has undergone some level of considerable work – the *evaluation deadline* – this deadline does not serve to signal a date by which a particular piece of writing can no longer be considered for reevaluation. Instead, this deadline simply signifies the end of the classroom's emphasis on that particular piece of writing. While within the time frame of a given assignment, instructors are encouraged to be very open about discussing revisions – even revisions that only address a particular topic, page, or paragraph.

However, once this date has passed, the time for “free” revision is over. Any subsequent draft submitted past the assignment deadline must be justified in a student's craft journal. They must outline the specific rhetorical issues that they plan on addressing, and briefly note how this improves the overall strength of the draft – essentially, they must successfully argue for a practical plan to improve the draft – which further emphasizes the importance of (and gives more practice with) persuasive rhetoric, while simultaneously shielding instructors from a flurry of

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21 Though the majority of my students put assignments out of their mind once the deadline has passed, the regular encouragement to revisit and revise made the difference for several students who had been on the fence.



rhetorically unchanged, lexically-tweaked drafts pulling for a higher grade. While some might argue that this extra step might discourage students from revision, there are two factors to consider: first, students are going to have to write in their craft journals anyway. Allowing them to make such a plea as part of their requisite journaling eases the sensation of having to do extra work *on top of* the revisions themselves. Secondly, it provides just enough resistance to discourage those attempting to abuse an open revision policy. Thirdly, this reinforces both the rhetorical strategies that they *do* utilize in the revision, as well as the meta-cognitive approaches necessary to recognize the places where those strategies are the most effective.

### *Evaluation*

As meta-cognition and active, deliberate revision are so important, it stands to reason that the evaluation policy should somehow reflect the breakdown of assignments into not only drafts, but peripheral elements as well (such as the statement of purpose). Jody Shipka weighted her Statement of Goals and Purposes even *more* than the actual assignments herself, and while that particular breakdown is not *specifically necessary* for critical-creative composition, it is worth noting that however you plan on evaluating and grading assignments, the *process* assignments (i.e. the craft journal and the statements of purpose) should be given significant weight as to reflect the importance of such reflection. While they do not necessarily have to be as heavy as the final product, students should be aware that these exercises are crucial to the writing process and transferability of the rhetoric they are exploring. The credit they receive for doing so should reflect this importance.

This same mindset reflects on the way in which critical-creative composition encourages instructors to evaluate the creative writing done as part of these assignments. Creative writing is often perceived as more difficult to grade, but by emphasizing and evaluating their adherence to the personally stated rhetorical goals within the statements of purpose and craft journals, instructors who may be less comfortable with the subjectivity of the creative genres are given a more objective sense of how to evaluate student progress. This, in turn, gives students an objective way through which they can *expect* to be evaluated, dampening notions of “unfair” grading sometimes felt in more subjective workshop courses.

Mechanical correctness should remain an important factor of evaluation as well. Even though the emphasis is critical-creative composition is not the perfection of mechanics, the simple fact remains that critical-creative composition *is* a composition pedagogy, and as such it functions to improve student writing. While the details of correctness are certainly not the *most* important thing, deemphasizing it too much would be a disservice to the students. Therefore, drawing from Joseph William's observations in "The Phenomenology of Error," critical-creative composition draws a line between the elements of grammar and syntax which directly influence meaning – dubbed "critical grammar" – and errors that are more an institutionalized faux pas than a breach of meaning, such as splitting infinitives, ending sentences with prepositions, or matters of personal style. If an instructor feels that explicit discussions on grammar or syntax are absolutely necessary for a particular student or class, these discussions should be limited to critical grammar. Elements of "stylistic grammar" can certainly be addressed in individual conferences, replies to craft journals, or other less central venues, but unless there is a very specific rhetorical reasoning behind it, such discussions should shy away from the center stage.

#### *Assignment Templates: Paired and Blended*

For the most part, critical-creative composition uses two basic kinds of assignment: *paired* and *blended*. Paired assignments involve the juxtaposition and interplay of two separate texts – most often a piece of creative writing and a subsequent reflective essay – that largely follow standard genre conventions but display a measure of critical interrogation with one other. Paired assignments are more suitable for a straightforward examination of a particular genre or emphasis on a singular element of the writing process. They allow students to explore creativity in what some might call its purest form – exploring poetry by writing poems or fiction by writing fiction. The paired assignment is also useful because even if a student is unfamiliar with the particular creative genre they wish to attempt, the separation between the two smaller essays gives them some level of compartmentalization, allowing them to fall back on the reflective essay if they encounter serious problems with the creative.

Blended assignments combine disparate elements of creative and academic convention into a single piece of blended discourse. As with a scribble, they seek to emphasize and stimulate creative imagination, exercising both critical thinking and creative exploration. Even though a blended assignment is largely portrayed and executed in the conventional academic format, the more imaginative the subject matter, the better. This hybrid of creative and

academic writing involves combining research (or other “critical” conventions) and some element of fiction or imagination related to the critical topic at hand. Blended discourse, then, can be extremely useful if there is a particular academic convention that must be practiced, as it gives them some manner of creative play. However, the interconnected nature between the creative and the academic make it a more complicated endeavor than a paired assignment, so it may be wise to preface such an assignment with an excerpt and discussion of such imaginative, blended discourse.

*Example Blended Discourse Assignments*

While theory and policy are all well and good, the heart of any pedagogy is the implementation of that theory into a practical, tangible experience. The final section of this chapter will outline several example activities and assignments, as well as briefly address the logic behind each. This section will largely focus on the assignments and activities unique to critical-creative composition, most notably the blended discourse assignments. While it would be possible to be listing some of the many ways that one could pair up a creative writing reading selection and a follow-up writing assignment within that same genre, topped off by a brief reflective essay, the individual tastes, expertise, and preferences regarding creative writing are so impossibly varied that such a list would almost inevitably be consigned to the back of an instructor's mind. Blended discourse, however, is a very specific approach that critical-creative composition hopes to exploit, and such can provide more meaningful, specific examples.

*Fiction: The Time Traveler's Zombie Apocalypse Guide*<sup>22</sup>

While this particular assignment need not necessarily revolve around the walking dead, taking the earlier-mentioned notion of “critical imagination” and applying it to a research paper gives students the change to practice the very practical, very necessary skill of research as well as the critical application of that research. However, modern student culture seems quite enamored with these shambling monstrosities, and appealing to current student culture certainly doesn't hurt. This specific assignment asks an imaginative, light-hearted research question that

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22 See APPENDIX A for a handout of this particular assignment.

*requires* the student to think in a fictitious, imaginative way in order to find an appropriate answer. However, equally important is the necessity for that question to rely on accurate, effective research. In this particular case, the question is as follows: What would be the result of a zombie apocalypse outbreak in a past historical era, either in our country or another? How would that culture's infrastructure, medicine, transportation, communication, etc. play into this demise/survival? Be as specific (and, if you like, graphic) as possible.

While such a research question is certainly not academic, strictly speaking, answering it properly nonetheless requires a very real grasp on both the infrastructure and history of the given era. Without understanding the medicinal practices, means of transportation and communication, population density, or living conditions of the time (just to name a few), one cannot hope to thoroughly explicate a believable chain of consequence. The research must be in earnest, but the final objective answers an amusing question that plays with our cultural obsession with the undead, all the while still demanding a surprising level of critical thinking, problem solving, and analysis.

The craft journal entries would be most valuable for discussing individual elements of the research, and could perhaps even be expanded to respond to each other in a dialogue as travelers or ambassadors seeking aid, assistance, and advice from other countries ... and eras, for that matter (Chalk it up to time-space distortions). The craft journal could also be used to keep track of the research as it progresses, ensuring that students are, in fact, using the time allocated for research to actually research.

*Poetry: The Poem-Essay-Poem*

This particular assignment was inspired by an exercise that Valerie Martinez underwent with her students in her article "Missing Link." In it, she asked students to write a short essay describing a location or journey that stood out in their memory, emphasizing vivid language to detail its significance. After the initial draft, the class reads "In Minako Wada's House" by Brad Leithauser and discussed the "economical yet focused use of detail and description, emphasiz[ing] her deliberate cleanliness, order, and devotion" (41). Following this, her students wrote a poem based on their initial draft, focusing on similar strategies to evoke a distilled essence of *place*. Then, using that poem as a base, they revise the original draft, remaining "conscious ... of the language of their own prose and how it can move in those directions" (41-42). Martinez found that her students produced second drafts that were often

“more descriptive and concise,” but this particular approach also addresses the issue of rhetorical transferability in a very literal way (42).

The Poem-Essay-Poem is a flexible assignment that utilizes the same basic structure as Martinez's, though an instructor could modify it with little difficulty to address an emphasis other than visual detail and place. For example, the assignment was re-designed to address evocative notions of emotion instead. Rather than a descriptive essay, such an adjustment might ask them to draft a basic summary of their particular feelings regarding any hot-button social issue<sup>23</sup> that they feel strongly about. White privilege, gay rights, gun control, Internet censorship, the Israeli conflict, the negative stereotype of the gamer – there are no shortage of such topics, and even the most reserved student will have an opinion on *something*.

Once drafted, students could be exposed to the writings of a poet like Bob Perelman, who uses the poetic form to cut to the heart of rhetoric while still remaining linguistically and textually interesting. Following, they might be asked to draft a similar kind of poem – one that interrogates their chosen issue and emphasizes both the *pathos* and the *logos*, using the poem as the basis for revising the original essay. While this keeps the structure of the assignment remains relatively unchanged, it emphasizes connections with social issues, creates writing with a strong tie to *pathos* and *ethos*.

#### *Non-Fiction: I Am History*

Students are often asked to research various historical and literary figures, usually approaching the assignments as a fairly straightforward narration of fact. Students are also often asked to write personal narratives, exploring their tastes, interests, home life, and the occasional summer vacation. Critical-creative composition brings these two assignments together, once again under the banner of “critical imagination,” asking the students to combine research with creative form. In this particular writing assignment, each student selects a famous figure. It doesn't necessarily have to be a historical or literary figure – perhaps one student wishes to research Ke\$ha for some

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23 While this serves to enhance the emotive, linguistic strengths of poetry by hearkening to something that the student can really support, there may be instances where sensitivity is required for handling such topics. In this event, it may be wise to suggest less evocative (but less volatile) topics.

unfathomable reason – provided there is enough information out there to approach this figure from the perspective of Anderson and Lopate's discussions argumentative style and persona, respectively. Much like the Zombie Apocalypse assignment, the first stage is research, plain and simple. The more they know about this particular figure's proclivities, the more accurately they will be able to implement the second phase of the assignment.

Once their research is complete, students are asked to write the kind of belletristic personal narrative to which they might be accustomed – but here's the catch: they are writing it from the perspective of this historical figure. It's no longer Tiffany's Bad Hair day ... it's Ke\$ha's Bad Hair Day – interjected into the life of Tiffany as if by the whims of a cheesy 90s comedy. How would George Washington react to Josh Anderson's vacation to Los Angeles? How would Socrates or Aristotle react to the particularly brutal streak of cyber-bullying that left Tiffany in shambles? The objective of the assignment is to use what they have researched about this historical figures to create a pseudo-logical (and hopefully amusing) interaction between *their* modern world and the understanding, personality, dialect, and preconceptions of someone far outside the context in which they lived. The emphasis is not on humor, however, though that may very well ensue. The emphasis is on the textual clues that they produce through their choices in style and narration (via Anderson) and how this serves to supplant a believable construct (read: persona) in an unfamiliar context through which they must navigate.

As with the fiction assignment, the craft journal entries would likely be used to brainstorm specific elements of their research that they find particularly useful for integrating the persona into their own narrative.

#### *Drama: The Great Debate*

Based on some of the cyclical, dialectic-focused assignments championed by William Covino in *Forms of Wondering*, The Great Debate simultaneously address the notion of “personal voice” and persuasive rhetoric by asking students to situate their personal, condensed notion of voice within the context of a larger argument, much like Covino does with his entire book. They must research and address a topic of their choosing, but this topic *must* be an issue that has two sides – or at least an *angle* of the issue that can be situated as such. For instance, no one is going to argue that dumping nuclear waste isn't bad for the environment save perhaps a Captain Planet villain,

however there are likely people that *would* argue that the environmental risk is worth the long-term benefits of nuclear power.

Once the topic has been chosen, students are asked to create a voice for each side, personified as contestants in a debate. This particular approach borrows somewhat from Lopate's view of persona (even though his work largely concerns non-fiction) and combines it with Covino's emphasis on the dialectic, which Covino argues “magnifies and emphasizes complexity” (x). The students are free to explore whichever “voice” they find most interesting, provided it adds relevance to the conversation. In fact, provided that students are actually able to provide a new, relevant voice by doing so, they might even be able to add in a few more personal, perhaps amusing, voices (Tasha the Fashion Snob vs. Tasha the Fiscally Conservative). The important element is that it carries the argument forward.

Craft journals could be used to explore the initial voices of the “self,” perhaps even becoming a reoccurring theme throughout the rest of the semester.

#### *Optional Supplemental Texts*

While no one specific composition text is inexorably related to critical-creative composition as a pedagogical approach, there are three books that *could* fit in with this approach extremely well. Instructors interested in approachable, dynamic writing *on* writing from experts in the field would do well to consider the following, each of which demonstrates engaging writing, practical advice, and useful exercise-starters:

*Acts of Revision: A Guide for Writers* by Wendy Bishop – *Revision* is not only central to critical-creative composition, is also one of the more difficult notions for students to grasp in full. Bishop's heavy emphasis on the nature of revision and the strategies to achieve it makes it an easy choice for those who wish to have a textbook companion for a critical-creative composition curriculum. Readings from her book could make excellent response topics for craft journal entries as well.

*Writing about Writing* by Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle – Based on their article “Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions,” *Writing about Writing* focuses on dynamic articles written by people such as Sherman Alexie, Malcom X, and Junot Diaz in conjunction with the teachings of Donald Murray, Mike Rose, and

Deborah Brandt to emphasize the writing techniques that students already possess to enter them into the larger conversation of discourse.

*On Writing* by Stephen King – His grounded, practical approaches on the writer's toolbox combined with a healthy respect of the Muse (without exulting it too much) provide a balanced, creative, engaging text that could easily find itself amidst a critical-creative composition pedagogy. Further, this is one of the few writing texts wherein an author as prolific and well-known as Stephen King pull back the veil and include examples of previous drafts, as well as his editorial changes and the rhetorical reasons for those changes. He demonstrates *exactly* the kind of meta-cognitive awareness that critical-creative composition embraces, and these examples could certainly serve as the basis for one or more enlightening writing exercises.

*Forms of Wondering: A Dialogue on Writing, for Writers* by William Covino approaches writing from a purely dialogic approach that gives it a particular angle untapped by any other text. Covino alternates his own internal discussion with transcripts from radio, television, and other such mediums, encouraging readers to pay close attention to the ways in which the dialogue evolves. Though it doesn't read like one, *Forms of Wondering* considers itself as a textbook of sorts, and it more than serves to establish, develop, and engage readers with the unique position that dialogue holds within both the larger epistemological issue of discourse and the very specific creative writing phenomenon. It complicates several assumptions regarding dialogue and presents challenging assignments that ask students to do the same. *Forms of Wondering* provides an excellent base for any instructor interested in creating “hybrid” texts that establish academic arguments through a creative medium.

*The Lie That Tells a Truth* by John Dufresne kicks off his book by telling students he began writing by forgetting everything he learned about it in school. Fortunately, Dufresne's scholastic experiences (the bad ones, anyway) largely fall in line with freshman myths that a course such as this would strive to dispel, such as the notion that “[r]evision was punishment for sloppy thinking” (31). Unlike the other two, it presents itself straight out as a work book, intended for those who want to *work* through it . . . not just read through it. This emphasis on *actively* engaging his audience through his writing makes Dufresne useful in two ways: not only do we have the actual activities that he presents, but his writing serves as an excellent example of exactly how one might engage an audience efficiently.



*Potential Resistance & Back-Up Plans*

As no pedagogy is perfect, it seems prudent to anticipate and address several logistical issues that may very well arise. The most pertinent addresses critical-creative composition's place within the current writing curriculum. As this blended pedagogical approach is designed to function outside of Mayers's utopian view of a holistic, combined English department, it is important to determine exactly how it would be function within the overall English curriculum.

While it is tempting to suggest that critical-creative composition could serve as a stand-in for the first-year writing course, such a proposition would realistically face several challenges. First, while the theoretical notions behind critical-creative composition might support transferable, rhetorical parallels, the possibility of resistance from an administrative standpoint is always present. Second, students for whom composition is nothing more than a first-year prerequisite might resent being subjected to a heavy emphasis on creative writing, particularly those who favor more straightforward logical thinking. While critical-creative composition *does* strive to be practical in its explorations of rhetorical parallels, a student who is sufficiently disinterested in creative writing is obviously less likely to benefit from them. While it is certainly possible to engage more logical, practical thinkers with critical-creative composition (such as approaching the poem as a linguistic logic puzzle), it is equally important to remember that the function of college writing courses *is* to improve student writing.

While the larger departmental separation between creative writing and composition is likely to persist, if for no other reason than resistance to large, sweeping departmental change and the politics of academia, there is no reason why the two departments can't ally within the confines of the composition course. While Mayers's vision of a singular writing program underneath the banner of a holistically unified English department may or may not ever become a widespread reality, this thesis strives to take a small step towards that direction. There are plenty of logistical complications to unifying the two departments into one, even within the current atmosphere of the English department, critical-creative composition serves to offer a potentially fruitful, unified approach to writing. Even if critical-creative composition were not adopted as a whole, the concepts, assignments, and theory behind it may prove useful for those who wish to push composition and creative writing just a little closer together.

Future studies might also look at other ways to complicate the boundaries between English courses within the current departmental, political, and administrative boundaries. In his "Blueprint for Change" section, Mayers

talks about the possibilities of carefully implementing fiction and/or poetry at some level into all of the courses offered within English, a notion based off of James Berlin's *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures* that grows out from and challenges the traditional structure of the literature course. Berlin's emphasis on “foregrounding the interconnectedness of the rhetorical and the aesthetic and requiring students to write in many genres, including literary ones” already lands fairly close to Mayers and his notions of craft criticism” (154). Berlin also argues that “class members should also, of course, be involved in text production,” suggesting such exercises as “imitat[ing] and parody[ing] the materials of the late eighteenth century in an attempt to understand the methods of signification called upon and their relationship to economic, social, and political constructions” (qtd in Mayers 154). While many literature courses already ask students to write *about* such literature, Mayers and Berlin suggest a course wherein the production and study of literature is combined towards a single rhetorical goal, in some ways similar to the relationship between creative writing and composition present in critical-creative composition.

A future course study could perhaps implement Mayers's and Berlin's notions into a literature course, starting on an assignment- or unit-based implementation and noting the practical strengths and complications present inherent with such an approach. Alternatively, but along similar lines, traditional literature (and the reading and potential mimicking thereof) might be implemented within courses less traditionally associated with literature, courses that are still related to the text on a political, social, or evolutionary level. Mayers, for example, suggests the possibility of implementing the plays of Shakespeare “at various points in the [English] curriculum, such as [within] courses on the discourses of politics and power, or on the history of dramatic writing, or on the historical roots of film and television writing” (155). While such changes on a large scale would face many of the same administrative and political resistances, addressing and implementing these ideas slowly might gradually lead to the development of courses that, like critical-creative pedagogy, seek to play with these notions while still able to exist within the current disciplinary boundaries.

With the number of scholars interrogating the boundaries between the English departments on the rise, now seems a fruitful time to begin addressing the possibilities for such blended approaches, even if Mayers's interdepartmental Utopia is not ultimately realized.

## APPENDIX A:

### The Time Traveler's Zombie Apocalypse Survival Guide

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A great evil lurks on the horizon. The dead have begun to rise. “Where,” you ask? That’s not quite the right question ... the right question is “when?” Somehow, a highly-infectious infectious pathogen has slipped through the cracks in space and time, threatening to doom not just humanity as we know it, but humanity as we *knew* it! As the only person who happens to be fortunate enough to possess space-time travel (you lucky dog, you), your research and expertise may be the only chance for these survival of the world as we know it.

The Time Traveler's Zombie Apocalypse guide is a light-hearted research assignment that asks you to do very serious research to answer a very silly question: What would happen if a zombie outbreak happened at [**chosen location**] during [**chosen time period**]? While this is an opportunity to play an amusing premise, you will need to effective research will be crucial to answering this question properly.

#### *Threat Analysis*

The first part of this assignment involves researching and the location, time period, and particular zombies that you will be writing about, and summarizing that research. This threat analysis shows that you understand the zombie menace, as well as the strengths and weakness of the soon-to-be infected civilization. Without a strong understanding of these two elements, it will not be possible to create a logical survival plan.

#### *Survival Plan*

The second part of this assignment involves extrapolating the logical consequences from your threat analysis and providing a survival plan for the people of that particular era. Remember, *The Walking Dead* wasn't around during the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans, so you will have to logically examine *why* your plan is the most optimal.

#### *Technical Details*

The complete Time Traveler's Zombie Apocalypse Survival Guide should be at least 1500 words long, written in a reasonably clear 12-point font (when in doubt, use Times New Roman or Garamond).

#### *Statement of Purpose*

A strong statement of purpose will briefly address the following elements in between 300 – 400 words. These need to be either e-mailed to me or posted in your craft journal with the tag “statement of purpose”.

- What location and era would you like to research, and why?
- Which cultural, geographical, or political factors do you think will be most influential risk factors? Here are some examples to get you started (though they're by no means the only ones).
  - Population density
  - Ease and speed of communication

- Social/political pressure (war, oppressive government, etc.)
- Wealth distribution
- From what source will you be basing your zombies? How does this define their capabilities?
- What do you anticipate will be the most difficult part of this assignment, and why?
- What do you believe will be the least difficult part of this assignment, and why?
- What is your personal writing goal for the assignment?

### ***Final Assignment Goals***

The best zombie survival guides will contain all of the following elements:

- A **clear explanation** of the chosen “risk factors” in the soon-to-be infected location and culture
- A **survival plan** that demonstrates “critical imagination” through logical connections between the researched “risk factors,” the identified capabilities of the zombie menace, and subsequent survival strategies.
- **Clearly-cited, reliable** secondary source material
  - Do note that the rubric through which you determine “reliable” and “unreliable” sources will likely differ between zombie research and cultural research (a potential topic for the craft journal, perhaps?).
- **Clean, concise writing** that demonstrates an understanding of critical grammar
- **Strong organization** that moves the reader from one idea to the next
- **Braaaaaaaaaains!**

### ***Important Dates***

February 3rd – Statement of purpose due

February 7th – Group conferences; “threat report” due

February 10th - Initial draft of full assignment due

February 15th – Evaluation deadline

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