

MAJOR THEORIES OF TEACHING WRITING: AN OVERVIEW

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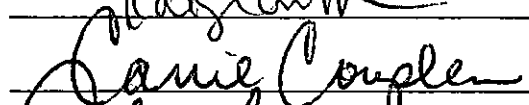
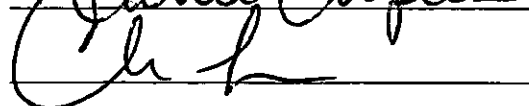
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## MAJOR THEORIES OF TEACHING WRITING: AN OVERVIEW

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This thesis explicates, in chronological order, nine major key theories that frame writing instruction and research including definitions, descriptions, and a precise summation of the writings of past and current major figures in composition studies. Because theory guides the design and implementation of effective composition instruction, it is necessary to evaluate critically the assumptions and beliefs that guide teachers' own approaches to classroom instruction. Further, there are many benefits that will be realized when educators consider and apply instructional writing strategies based on an explicitly defined theoretical lens. For each described theory, there are suggested additional readings, classroom applications and a comprehensive list of important educators and rhetoricians typically associated with each theory. There is currently no single textbook that presents a cohesive overview of the history of teaching writing from the perspective of a continuum along which theories and important authors fall. Further, while many anthologized texts contain seminal works by prominent composition theorists and rhetoricians, these texts fail to include explicit connections between the essays

presented. This thesis will include summary discussions of writing instruction models so that readers may distinguish where overlap between and among theories occurs and where theories both emerge and fade.

Presenting writing theories in a sequential manner will help educators and pre-service teachers situate themselves in terms of the theories and teaching models they employ. Awareness of historical precedents also may elicit teacher recognition regarding the theoretical basis for any assessments they use to evaluate writing activities in their own classrooms. Being able to recognize and validate the teaching construct one uses is an important component in defending and justifying the approaches, assignments, and measurements one uses to evaluate student achievement. Like other disciplines in liberal arts, teaching writing is sometimes difficult to quantify, and teachers will benefit from having a theoretical grounding that will help them make informed decisions about their own practices. Finally, this study provides theoretically linked suggestions for both research and activities for the composition classroom.

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# MAJOR THEORIES OF TEACHING WRITING: AN OVERVIEW

## Chapter 1: Introduction & Background of Problem

### Background

I teach freshman English composition at a small liberal arts college in Northwestern Ohio. Several years ago, a colleague and I were discussing how theories of writing might influence an educator's practices in the classroom. During the conversation, my colleague shared some of her course materials with me and I commented that her teaching approach appeared to be well-steeped in the current-traditional model. Given the fact that current-traditional theories have been severely criticized, especially in the last twenty years or so, my colleague vehemently denied that her teaching was rooted in this theoretical approach, claiming she rigorously followed the tenets of a process-oriented style. When I pointed out that her grading rubrics all focused solely on the final draft of a student's paper and included *only* assessments of grammar and style, she began to reassess her stance. We further discussed the ways in which the only measures she ever evaluated were those components associated with a "product" as opposed to the "process," and I commented that, despite what teachers might claim as a teaching philosophy, students will invariably follow the implications embedded in a rubric, even when such adherence contradicts the instructors' stated goal. Since her rubric reflected a current-traditional, product-based approach to teaching writing, her students would naturally respond as though that theory were the one on which her teaching was based, regardless of the negative belief she held about such an approach.

In his landmark essay, “Four Philosophies of Composition,” Richard Fulkerson calls this disconnect between a writing teacher’s theory and her practice “modal confusion” (1979, p. 347). He points out the grave errors some teachers commit when they give composition students vaguely worded assignment instructions but then judge the resulting student work from an assessment perspective not indicated in those instructions. Fulkerson provides a sobering example of the negative consequences that result from teachers’ failure to employ a theoretical underpinning that supports their assignment instructions for the students’ written end product. He presents an example of what he calls the “worst instance of modal confusion” (p. 347) by citing Holocaust scholar Lawrence Langer’s 1977 essay “The Human Use of Language: Insensitive Ears Can’t Hear Honest Prose.” Fulkerson mentions an incident described by Langer in which a Holocaust survivor submits a very personal essay only to have her teacher give the essay a D grade and comment solely on its thematic development (as cited in Fulkerson, 1979, pp. 347-348). Fulkerson uses this incident to highlight what he defines as a “conflict of evaluative mode” and he laments yet one “more mindless failure to relate the outcome valued to the means adopted” (p. 348).

Similarly, other educators have suggested that writing teachers-in-training need to be afforded composition courses that include theory and practice as an explicit and intentional component in their academic training program. Francis Christensen (1973) claims that the course in teaching composition “is probably...the most important undergraduate course the typical department can offer” (p. 163). He

continues stating, “[T]he course for teachers has to be more rigorous, more complex, at once more practical and more theoretical than any other course in composition” (p. 164). Donald Nemanich (1974) states that the composition course is essential for pre-service education and that all future writing teachers should receive a theoretical foundation by learning about writing, rhetoric, and writing methods (p. 46). Richard Gebhardt (1977) outlines four key topics that prospective writing teachers should be taught: the structure and history of the English language, rhetoric, writing theory, and teaching methods (pp. 134-137). Nonetheless, because writing teachers can come to their profession by varying routes, not all are afforded the opportunity to study theories of teaching writing in the formal setting of a college course devoted solely to these theories. Having a single volume devoted to defining and describing some of the most common writing theories could provide an alternative resource for the writing teacher who seeks to avoid the issues associated with the “modal confusion” Fulkerson described. This thesis could serve as such a resource.

At the same time I was having the discussion with my fellow composition teacher, I was teaching a course for pre-service teachers that included an examination of various theories of teaching writing. There are a number of fine anthologies of essays covering the entire history of composition theory such as *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, edited by Corbett, Myers, & Tate (2000) or *The Norton Book of Composition Studies*, edited by Miller (2009). At the time, I was using Victor Villanueva's (2003) comprehensive collection of essays, *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed), for that class. In class discussions, however, I noticed that my students



struggled to tease out the distinctive characteristics of the many rhetorical theories that described how different writers engage in the act of crafting a text. Some theories are clearly discrete, such as those based on Marxism or feminism, while others reflect varying degrees of overlap. I found myself wishing for a single text that provided a brief historical overview while also presenting clear, concise descriptions of some of the mainstream theories. Additionally, I wanted a text that discussed research topics and suggested classroom applications that reflected these various theoretical approaches. A lengthy search of the literature led to the conclusion that no such single study existed, and so I determined to attempt to create the resource I envisioned.

### **Research Question**

This thesis seeks to explicate theories of teaching writing and include definitions and descriptions of major paradigms used in teaching composition. In its 1982 “Position Statement on the Preparation and Professional Development of Teachers of Writing,” the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) argued that in order “[t]o provide instruction in writing for learners,... teachers need...some theoretical knowledge to guide classroom practice.” In 1985, the CCCC issued a further Position Statement adding that “[w]riting teachers should be familiar with the current state of our knowledge about composition...,[and] teachers should use this knowledge in their teaching.” These kinds of strongly worded recommendations sound the call for those educators whose purview includes training of future composition teachers to devote a significant portion of instruction to

enumerating, defining, and describing the theoretical models that have emerged over the course of the discipline's history.

However, one of the challenges for writing teachers, both at the secondary and collegiate levels, is that the debates concerning best practices in composition and rhetoric continue to be fragmented and even at times contentious. Twenty years after Fulkerson's 1990 article "Composition Studies in the Eighties," in which he hopefully suggests there may be a glimmer of "consensus," writing scholars and teachers are left eventually to conclude, like Fulkerson, that the discipline is less, not more, unified than it has ever been (as cited in *Composition*, 2011). One of the results of this diversity of thought is that it sometimes becomes difficult for neophyte writing teachers to tease out the characteristics of different writing theories and align these theories with assignments, teaching approaches, and assessments they use in their classrooms. All too often, beginning writing teachers are left to follow blindly the methods their own writing teachers used without understanding the rationales for doing so. In other words, most teachers teach as they were taught.

Nonetheless, there is good news for the future. Chris Gallagher (2001) writes, "The wars may have left our disciplinary house weakened and vulnerable...but not razed" (p. 781). David Gold (2012) says that these days "are the best of times" (p. 15) because of a proliferation of innovative, useful research methodologies. Gold argues that recent scholarship "challenge[s] the conclusions drawn by more general earlier histories" (p. 16). This intellectual renaissance in composition studies is largely a

result of the discipline's gaining stature as an independent entity separate from literature or speech.

In addition to its detailing composition theories, this thesis enumerates major historical figures in composition and shows the correlation between theorists and the paradigms with which they are typically associated. David Gold (2012), a historiographer of composition studies, points out that the end goal of scholarly research is not simply to uncover details about past events, figures, and movements, but rather to incorporate the details of research findings into the conversation and practices of the entire discourse community of writing teachers (p. 17). Finally, this thesis provides theoretically based suggestions for both research and writing activities for the composition classroom.

This thesis presents theories of teaching writing in chronological order. There are currently only a few resources that present a cohesive overview of the history of teaching writing from the perspective of a chronological continuum along which theories and important authors fall. Gold rightly observes that the body of literature is too vast for anyone to be able to read everything, and it is very likely that one could miss important contributions that impact the shape of scholarship on teaching writing (p. 24). While many anthologized texts contain seminal works by prominent composition theorists and rhetoricians, these texts often focus on a single theoretical approach to teaching writing and the essays included are presented as stand-alone documents. This thesis includes summary discussions of writing instruction paradigms so that readers may distinguish where overlap between and among theories

occurs and where theories both emerge and fade. Also, this thesis includes suggestions for the composition classroom as well as lists supplemental reading and further research.

It is imperative that both pre-service and practicing teachers have a clear vision of the kinds of values, philosophies, and beliefs they hold with regard to teaching composition. In his essay "Composition Theory in the Eighties," Richard Fulkerson (1990) points out that "teachers who claim to teach without any philosophy are deluding themselves" (p. 410). Every teacher is working from one value system or another and being able to identify the characteristics of that belief system, as well as articulate a personal philosophy for teaching writing, will ideally contribute to more effective teaching practices. Anne Ruggles Gere (1986) alludes to the dearth of resources for future writing teachers when she writes, "Until very recently teachers of composition at all levels have received no formal training [in composition pedagogy]." (35). This thesis can serve as a resource to help those teachers gain a better, clearer view of the major theoretical modes of teaching of writing.

Presenting writing theories in a sequential manner will help educators and pre-service teachers situate themselves in terms of the theories and teaching models they employ. At the same time, this presentation will afford teachers a chance to evaluate whether or not those approaches they currently use are still the most effective. All too often practitioners in all fields tend to model their routines and behaviors on the strategies that were in popular use when they entered their respective professions. However, scholarship about teaching writing is evolving exponentially, and some

methods that were fashionable only a few years ago have been superseded as a result of new data about how students learn. A historical presentation of these theories is necessary because it is important for teachers to recognize and understand the historical antecedents that influence their teaching practice. Because each subsequent era's social, cultural, and economic environment affects teaching practices, writing teachers should be sensitive to the characteristics of the climate under which their teaching practices have developed. This awareness should help writing teachers make explicit connections to those historical influences in ways that help their students adapt to the ever-changing world of rhetoric. It also may elicit teacher recognition regarding the theoretical basis for assessments they use to evaluate writing activities in their own classrooms. Being able to recognize and validate the teaching construct one uses is an important component in defending and justifying the approaches, assignments, and measurements one uses to evaluate student achievement.

### **Significance of Study**

This thesis offers an important contribution for the body of educators who mentor pre-service teachers in English language arts disciplines. There currently exists a dearth of resources that contain a collection of clearly explicated composition theories, provide a concise listing of unique characteristics, and simultaneously link important theorists to specific paradigms. Providing a source that helps fill that gap will support the training of writing teachers.

### **Need for the Study**

After administering an informal questionnaire and discovering that most of the English instructors he surveyed knew next to nothing about seminal figures in composition theory, Donald Stewart (1978) wrote that it was his “conviction that too many English teachers in this country are not prepared to teach composition” (p. 65). However, in order to learn about composition’s seminal figures, one has to sift through an almost infinite number of essays, articles, and texts in order to cobble together a comprehensive understanding of the field. A preliminary review of the literature has failed to reveal a singular work that presents and explicates major theories of teaching writing while also highlighting important educators and essayists who are traditionally associated with these theories. Iowa State University English professor David R. Russell states that even Arthur N. Applebee’s 1974 “towering” and “rigorously researched” study which represents the “definitive (and only) comprehensive history of writing...gives relatively little attention to composition and writing in comparison to literature and reading” (Russell, 2006). One of the goals of this thesis is to thoroughly explore the knowledge base that currently exists on the topic of theories of teaching writing. Satisfying this goal has a two-fold benefit. First, a systematic research effort is needed to ensure that the major paradigms in composition theory are accurately presented and discussed. Discussions of major theories should be concise but comprehensive. Major scholars associated with various theories should be listed so that pre-service teachers and composition instructors have a ready resource that links individual proponents with specific theoretical approaches.

Second, an exhaustive bibliography appended to this thesis will provide future researchers with a paper trail from which to conduct their own research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In his review of composition textbooks from 1960-1980, William Woods (1981) whimsically announces that “textbooks have waxed exceeding mighty...offering what some may call richness of choice and others, nauseating variety” (p. 393). Woods continues by claiming that the process for choosing a writing textbook is not always a systematic one. Some teachers may simply use the textbook with which they have grown comfortable, select one that has been recommended by a colleague, or use the one required by their department or institution. Other instructors, whose approach is more methodical, may review publisher catalogues or databases and select potential textbooks for the coverage, practicality, and degree of fit with their personal teaching style and make a choice from among those (p. 393). However, Woods argues that any textbook a teacher chooses should explicitly reflect the teacher’s preferences for pedagogy and method, and he suggests that teachers need to be cognizant of a textbook’s philosophical bent in order to choose wisely (p. 393). He categorizes composition textbooks as being either discipline-based or student-based. Woods elaborates dividing discipline-based textbooks into three subsets: language-based (that focus on grammar, syntax, and usage), rhetoric-based (that adhere to classical rhetorical models), and logic-based (that highlight “straight-thinking” ) (p. 396). He defines student-based textbooks as those that reflect expressivist thought and feature free-writing, journaling, and personal writing. What is important to Woods’ review of composition textbooks is the fact that his assessment acknowledges the explicit correlation between a writing



teacher's theory and the composition textbook the teacher selects. In order to make informed choices about the textbooks they use, writing teachers must be aware of the theories that support their own teaching approaches. It is for this reason that instructors who train pre-service teachers should present their students with clear and thorough definitions and descriptions of the major theoretical views.

There are a number of outstanding textbooks whose substance pertains to theories of teaching writing, but virtually all are anthologized collections of essays written by recognized authorities in the field. Various editors have either solicited scholarly texts from important figures in composition studies or assembled representative short texts from discipline-specific peer-reviewed journals including *English Journal*, *College English*, *Rhetoric Review*, or *College Composition and Communication*. Most of these texts present a comprehensive and historical overview of theories of teaching writing through loosely organized categories or topics, and while many of the textbooks include some of the same seminal articles that have been culled from various publications, these writings are often grouped quite differently from textbook to textbook. Editors present their rationales and biases explaining their choices, but in the end, readers are expected to distill an understanding of the unique characteristics of various writing theories from a series of individually authored works.

Berlin's (1987) *Rhetoric in Reality*, a companion work to his *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth Century American Colleges* (1984), "draws a map of the territory called English" (p. xi) but trains a lens largely on the twentieth century.

Philip Keith (1987) lauds Berlin's text as "a major event in the development of the theory and pedagogy of writing" calling it "impressive" (p. 89). Nonetheless, the reviewer adds that Berlin's explication of writing theories "should not be taken as a last word" (p. 89) because he believes Berlin tends to oversimplify in order to make his material fit neatly. Likewise, Sharon Crowley (1988) praises Berlin's work for its thoroughness, but even so, she argues that Berlin's version distorts some of the ideas he reports while simply overlooking others that do not fit his various schemata (p. 246). John Brereton (1991) states that the work reflects Berlin's "strong interest in taxonomy" and acknowledges his "subject is so rich and his knowledge is so impressive" (p. 828). Nonetheless, Brereton criticizes Berlin's for choosing to use mostly mainstream sources arguing that imposing such limitations prohibits readers from getting an accurate view of what writing really looked like during each epoch (p. 828).

Unlike most of the texts that follow here, Berlin's work represents the culmination of his own research and writing, and he documents historical developments in composition pedagogy without resorting to the more common format of assembling scholarly articles from various other authors. Regrettably, his discussion of the "major schools" is fragmented and sparse and consists of a mere twenty pages, although he does include a twenty-page discussion of "major approaches" in the last chapter. Finally, his textbook is written from an "epistemological" perspective rather than a practical one. That is to say, the esoteric quality of his work may be of great value for those whose interest is strictly

philosophical, but his book does not contain enough constructive information on which a real-world teaching method could be based.

James Murphy's (1990, 2001, 2012) three editions of *A Short History of Writing Instruction* contain seven or eight essays by twelve different writers and comprehensively cover the evolution of theories of teaching writing from antiquity to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Connors (1991) explains that, in constructing the text, Murphy has "enlisted the help of other respected cross-disciplinary scholars" (p. 48), and compliments the book, stating, "Every one of the chapters contains valuable work" (p. 48). Connors also notes that Murphy's textbook is timely since, until the time of its publication, there had been a scarcity of volumes that documented the history of composition (p. 47). The reviewer also commends Murphy's contribution as a useful and valuable tool for instructors of pre-service composition teachers. Lawrence Green (1992) says that Murphy's first edition "offer[s] an excellent first broad swipe at a huge subject" (p. 221) but criticizes the work for its flaws including problems with scope, aim, and execution. Even so, Green suggests the work should provide guides for some of the anthology's entries, namely those by James Berlin and Murphy himself. Green also urges Murphy to produce further editions that could be greatly improved by the addition of "an introductory essay for the entire collection" (p. 222) to solidify the different aims of the various contributors.

Like Green, Sue Simmons (1991) anticipates a second edition to the *Short History*, but believes the first edition should be heralded as a textbook that answers the need for such a work. She claims that "the history of writing instruction has been

too often ignored and undervalued” (p. 516). She continues stating that Murphy’s “collection fills the gap...offering...a survey of the effects of technology, politics, and cultural changes on the nature of writing instruction” (p. 516). While she does concede the fact that the work might be criticized on the basis of its appealing to two distinctly different audiences, she argues “writing teachers who want to find immediate connections between their experiences as...students,...teachers, and...histor[ians]” will find the text “provides a needed bridge” (p. 518).

In fact, some have levied criticisms against Murphy’s *Short History* because of its somewhat disjointed presentation and overreliance on secondary sources. Nonetheless, the work does collect a historiography of writing in a single volume making it a convenient and handy resource. Jeff Hutcheson (2003) defends Murphy’s work because he says the text addresses the “call to literacy in the wake of a global economy, diverse populations, and increased technology and access” (p. 113). Hutcheson acknowledges the different writing styles and formats of the authors and their contributions, but still concludes by saying the work “offer[s] much to the discussion” (p. 113). Many of the chapters in this anthology describe the writing activities and teaching approaches to writing common to each era. Although Murphy states that “a modern teacher can use in his or her classroom some specific methods employed in Roman, medieval, or American colonial schools” (2001, p. 1), his textbook does not make explicit suggestions for application of the various theories nor does he identify specific assessments related to each theoretical approach. On the other hand, Green points readers to Murphy’s “fine ‘Glossary of Key Terms’” (p.

223) as a useful resource (despite the fact that the lexicon does not provide entries for the terms *composition*, *writing*, or *instruction*).

The collection of essays, *Writing, Teaching, Learning: A Sourcebook*, by Richard Graves (1999), was published earlier under the title *Rhetoric and Composition: A Sourcebook for Teachers and Writers*. Reviews and responses to this work are mixed. Kenneth Dowst (1978) criticizes Graves' 1976 version saying the work has value, but it presents various composition approaches too haphazardly (p. 69). On the other hand, David Higgins (1977) commends the same Graves' edition as "an excellent mix of theoretical and practical essays" (p. 94). Dowst believes the text would serve as an effective foundation upon which to build a workable training curriculum for writing teachers. In her evaluation of the 1984 edition, Faery (1987) writes, "If you have time to read only a few professional books,...this should be on your list" (p. 76). In her review of Graves' work, Anne Gere (1985) rightly points out that, until only recently, those who train composition teachers have depended on a loosely defined body of scattered resources (p. 58). She explains that Graves' textbook was timely because of its obvious and deliberate orientation as a textbook for teaching composition methods (p. 61). Graves, in order to remain current and relevant, has revised and reissued his work as the discipline changes. The most recent volume features thirty-six collected works and is arranged using the following sub-headings: "Stories from the Writing Classroom"; "Fluency, Flows, and Wonder"; "Perspectives 2000"; "Attunement through Shared Experience"; and "Spiritual Sites of Composing."

Another anthologized textbook, *Composition in Four Keys*, edited by Wiley, Gleason, & Phelps (1996), includes fifty-two essays by over fifty authors. Marshall Myers (1996) praises this anthology because the work is a compilation of a wide range of composition articles that reflects the diversity among views and researchers (p. 410). Myers prefaces his commendation with a discussion of the ways writing teachers in the past typically chose teaching materials by first picking out a textbook and then assembling together an assortment of photocopied articles that hopefully provided an accurate overview of numerous representative theories and pedagogies about teaching writing (p. 408). The problem, Myers points out, is that there was no systematic way in which these articles were selected, for the varied choices were really based upon the very personal decisions of individual faculty of different teaching institutions (p. 409). Myers states that the choice of articles included in *Composition in Four Keys* shows great variety, and the cornerstone selections have been “chosen wisely” (p. 412).

The textbook is organized under five headings that pertain to four interdisciplinary subject areas: “Nature,” “Art,” “Science,” and “Politics,” with a final miscellaneous grouping entitled “Alternative Maps.” The editors recognize the difficulty in navigating the discussion about theories of teaching writing and cite Kinneavy’s “hermeneutical circle” (as cited in Wiley, Gleason, & Phelps, p. 1) wherein readers struggle to form an interpretative framework because they have not yet established a basic vocabulary for understanding the discourse. This struggle is confounded because the works with which the readers struggle are themselves the

repository for the vocabulary. Wiley, Gleason, & Phelps concede that the canon of texts on theories of teaching writing “has no obvious principle of order” and “there is no simple, knowledgeable guide to which they can appeal” (p. 1). Their solution of using an interdisciplinary approach seems as reasonable as any other but results in yet another grouping configuration of the important essays from the field. The editors confess that their text is “not a how-to book” and encourage “novice scholars to...find and create...[their own] organizing patterns to make [the] discourse intelligible” (p. 6). Finally, the index for this text is limited to authors and titles, making it less than helpful for the scholar who may be hoping to discover essays that discuss specific topics about which the researcher is interested.

*The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, collated by Corbett, Myers, & Tate (2000), is a widely used anthology and now in its fourth edition. David Roberts (1982) praised the first edition, published in 1981, as a “‘can't lose' proposition” adding that the collected essays included in the text would be an extremely useful collection for faculty who teach prospective writing teachers (p. 101). He further states many of the articles included have been recognized by the research community as important works that have shaped writing theory and would serve as an aid to writing teachers both at the high school and university levels (p. 102). Gere (1985) highlights the flexibility this text allows because the “book has a relatively open structure leaving room for an instructor to design a course in one of several ways” (p. 61). The most recent edition includes thirty-six essays by over forty authors, and the text is bisected into two broad categories: “The Contents of Teaching” and “The Teaching of

Writing.” The essays are further grouped under such subheadings as “Perspectives,” “Teachers,” “Students,” “Locations,” “Approaches,” “Assigning,” “Responding & Assessing,” “Composing & Revising,” “Audiences,” and “Style.”

While the editors claim that this book will help readers “[discover] ways to understand themselves, their students, and the course” (p. vii), the non-sequential arrangement of the essays makes tracing historical trends difficult. Further, while the chapters pertaining to assigning and assessing are relevant to this particular study, the fact that the *Handbook* essays are neither aligned nor correlated to historical periods renders them insufficient for a study that proposes to tie suggested writing assignments directly to specific and discrete historically situated writing theories. Also, the fact that the text lacks an index renders it an ineffective tool for anyone who is looking for material on a specific subject or topic. Corbett, Myers, & Tate claim that their textbook is meant “to offer new teachers a starting point” (p. vii), and the compilation does include articles from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Despite their stated intent to demonstrate how the “discipline continues to grow and age” (p. vii), the chronological aspect is more ancillary than an intentional arrangement.

Duane Roen (2002) explains that the *Guide to Composition Pedagogies* by Tate, Rupiper, & Schick (2001) is a work that refers to both practices and their corresponding major theories of teaching writing (p. vi). The *Guide* includes articles on twelve pedagogies beginning with process pedagogy because the editors see this approach as signaling a “defining moment in the discipline” (p. vii). Roen praises the *Guide* editors’ presentation of “succinct and insightful and interesting histories of the



pedagogies” and points to the work’s thorough source citation noting this content would be especially helpful for prospective teachers who are just beginning their training (p. 115). He elaborates, stating the book would be appropriate for first-year teaching assistants, but complains that the text’s narrow margins prohibit readers the opportunity for note-taking. Roen also states that, while two chapters include practical suggestions and teaching strategies, the fact that the remaining chapters neglect this element detracts somewhat from the book’s usefulness.

Like Roen, Latterell (2003), declares this work is written so that it seems to have been addressed specifically to teaching assistants and new teachers of composition (p. 502). She also notes that the essays span a variety of “pedagogies that shape current composition research” (p. 503), and she likes the personal quality of the articles. Latterell states that a major strength of the *Guide* is its breadth in that it covers a wide variety of pedagogical approaches to teaching writing (p. 503). The editors themselves point out that composition theories overlap, and there is evidence that they closely collaborated with chapter authors so that there was a degree of consistency and connectedness between chapters.

*Cross-Talk in Comp Theory* provides a thorough and intelligent assemblage of some of the most important works on the theories of teaching writing, “giving preference to essays that are most frequently cited” (p. xi). In the preface to his second edition, Victor Villanueva (2003) defends his decision to prefer certain works over others because he believes that acknowledging the choices made by other scholars and teachers in the field helps his work “remain true to the profession” (p.

xi). Using the frequency with which an article is cited as a barometer for importance and credibility helps the anthologist decide what others in the field are reading and discussing. Given the proliferation of literature in composition studies, this measurement works well as a method to discriminate between articles during the selection process.

For the third edition of *Cross-Talk*, Villanueva & Arola (2011) have assembled forty-two essays by over forty different authors and have arranged the entries under six broad categories: the “Writing Process,” “Talking in Terms of Discourse,” “Developmental Schemes,” “Writing in Society,” “On Voices,” “Continuing the Conversation,” and a new section entitled “Virtual Talk: Composing Beyond the Word.” The editors confess that “evaluation [is not] explicitly represented” and suggests that “how a teacher decides to respond, evaluate, and grade essays should be a reflection of the philosophy or theory of writing that the classroom curriculum embodies” (p. xv). In other words, while Villanueva & Arola recognize the need to make conscious decisions about choosing an appropriate theory that guides one’s teaching practice, they nonetheless view the assembled articles as a “dialectic” requiring readers to consider opposing views and then come their own conclusions (p. xv). On the other hand, those readers only beginning to recognize and label the different writing theory approaches might benefit from having a more precise description of various writing theories presented in encyclopedic style along with suggested writing assignments and a list of important proponents.

T. R. Johnson's (2008) third edition of thirty collected background readings in *Teaching Composition* "address[es] major concerns of composition theory and practice" (p. iii). Included are works from thirty-one well-known authorities in the field of teaching writing, and the textbook organizes the entries according to the following categories: "Teaching Writing," "The Writing Process," "Responding to & Evaluating," and "Institutional Politics." While the collected essays represent timely and currently relevant topics, the reader is still left with the task of sifting through the various essays in order to craft individual descriptions and definitions of the different theories of teaching writing. Additionally, while Johnson states that readers "will find very practical recommendations about teaching strategies" (p. iii-iv) and includes reflective questions, the onus to discover explicit summaries of the theories is still left with the reader. Further, the reflective questions are directed toward the composition teacher-practitioner, rather than the students themselves.

Susan Miller's (2009) edited collection of over one hundred essays, *The Norton Book of Composition Studies*, is probably the ultimate version of assembled scholarship in theories of teaching writing. Christina Ortmeier-Hooper (2011) praises this volume, saying, "Miller's contribution will no doubt shape present and future generations of composition scholars and teachers" (p. 592). The textbook, organized according to "Historical Accounts," "Theories of Composition," "Revisions & Differences," and "Worldwide Projects," is a daunting array of articles emerging from a global perspective. Especially helpful are the author's alternative organizational groupings including a section that focuses specifically on "Classroom

Practices.” Like Wiley, Gleason, & Phelps’s *Four Keys*, Miller’s edition includes a focus on “interdisciplinary thinking” because she asserts that “[c]ompositional studies simultaneously spark conversations among academic siblings” (p. xxxi). In other words, teachers from across the curriculum recognize the importance of students’ developing effective writing skills regardless of the discipline or subject. The dialogue among and between faculty and departments about strategies and approaches to teaching writing is often lively and can sometimes even become argumentative.

On the other hand, the work does have its flaws, particularly in the number of works that were omitted. Using a similar justification as Villanueva, who selected works based on the number of citations, Miller explains that her textbook is a “comprehensive survey of frequently read landmark texts [as well as] other less well-known essays that elaborate and critique those texts” (p. xxxii). Further, it was Miller’s stated intent to create a collection of articles that “survey the field’s status and progress” (p. xxxii), and she argues that she purposely omitted studies of classroom pedagogies as a means of limiting the number of selections she included in her edition. Christina Ortmeier-Hooper (2011) does concede that “[f]or graduate students and newcomers to the field, these gaps may be less noticeable” (p. 594), but she worries about how the selection choices, regarding which works were included and which were rejected, may define further scholarship.

Thomas P. Miller authored a textbook, *The Evolution of College English*, that presents a comprehensive historical overview of literacy studies “from the Puritans to the Postmoderns” (2011), but the narrative actually extends well beyond the scope of

this thesis. Further, Miller has broadened his perspective to include a study of the influence of literary texts on writing theory, arguing these elements must be included in an expanded “field of vision” (p. ix). Although the entire text is the product of a single author, missing is a narrow focus examining unique characteristics of each theoretical approach and suggestions for classroom writing assignments. The text leans more toward a philosophical and historical examination of English education than a precise explication of theories of teaching writing and strategies for teaching writing.

The most recent contribution to the field of theories of teaching writing is Clark’s (2012) *Concepts in Composition*, which is a hybrid mix of Clark’s own writings alongside articles of other notables in the field. Now in its second edition, Clark’s textbook is organized around the following topics: “Processes,” “Invention,” “Revision,” “Audience,” “Assessing,” “Genre,” “Voice & Style,” “Grammar,” “ESL,” “Diversity,” and finally, reflecting the needs of digital natives, “Multi-Media.” Roen (2004), who reviewed an earlier edition of Clark’s work, appreciates Clark’s obvious efforts to make a personal connection with her readers (p. 77). Roen further comments that a strong feature of Clark’s anthology is that “the chapter authors treat the teaching of writing as a scholarly enterprise” (p. 77). John Hedgcock (2004), who writes a thorough chapter-by-chapter review of Clark’s work, describes the book as an inclusive work that clearly establishes the link between the practices of teaching writing and the underlying theories that support them (p. 154). For this reason, Hedgcock notes that the textbook would be especially useful for inexperienced

composition teachers (p. 146). Hedgcock admits that the text's quality, breadth, and depth are sometimes uneven as a result of the disparate styles of multiple contributors, but he still believes the work successfully accomplishes its stated goals (p. 146).

The various trends in theories of teaching writing are more explicitly presented in this textbook than have been seen in most of the textbooks enumerated here; however, such discussions are limited only to the first chapter of Clark's most recent edition. The theories of teaching writing cannot be adequately explored in the thirty pages Clark devotes to them. Clark does include suggestions for "assignments, lessons, [and] projects" (p. xviii), but these are scattered throughout the book under the various headings above rather than being associated with specific theoretical approaches.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

The process of identifying an explicit methodology for research in composition studies is not comparable to the approaches typically associated with research studies in applied and social sciences. For example, in the hard sciences, the scientific method serves as the well-established format that underpins the research process. Griffin (2005) points out that “research methods [are] not widely discussed in English studies” (p. 1). She goes on to claim that many research degrees in English “do not require...a methodology section—something that is commonplace, not to say *de rigueur*, in other disciplines” (p. 2). Complicating the data collection process further is the fact that, as David Smit (2004), among others, has argued, “composition studies is not a coherent field of study, [but rather] a set of related subfields each with its own social practices, its own set of assumptions, its own research methods, and...its own pedagogical strategies” (p. 181). Nonetheless, it is desirable to settle on a formal and appropriate method that allows for a systematic and logical process for collecting and presenting data that define and describe the major theories of teaching writing. However, the nature of the textual data that make up the knowledge base for theories and approaches to teaching writing means the researcher must handle and assimilate a wide range of scholarship on the topic and recast it into a synthesized and logical format that is accessible by members of an interested discourse community. Since this kind of synthesis and summary, commonly seen in humanities, has no distinct counterpart among the customary research designs currently used in scientific

disciplines, it became apparent that a methodical approach to data collection was needed for this study.

Identifying and using research strategies and data collection methods that addressed the research design helped ensure that this study adhered to parameters of construct and content validity and guided the choices about which primary texts were either included or rejected. Choosing an appropriate methodology for a survey of writing about teaching writing becomes problematic because no single methodology directly correlates specifically to the research problem of this thesis. Further, there are limited numbers of research studies in composition that provide precedents that could guide this choice with regard to methodology, and most academic teaching and learning about research in English lack prescriptive guidelines to assist the researcher working in emerging fields of inquiry. Additionally, many academic institutions' composition and rhetoric departments intentionally avoid prescribing research methods, preferring to let scholars make those kinds of choices on their own.

While, on one hand, this latitude with regard to choosing a methodology presented the researcher with challenges, the freedom to tailor one's methodology to her particular research study also provided some flexibility. In fact, being afforded the opportunity to combine components of several research methodologies permitted the researcher the ability to craft a personalized approach that simultaneously exploited the most effective characteristics of several methods.

One such research method that proved its usefulness was the expanded literature review which has been defined as a "detailed independent work...[that]



can...focus on...theories [and] applications...and can attempt to integrate what others have done and said” (Cooper, 1998, p. 3). Harris M. Cooper (1998), who has written extensively on the literature review since the late 1980s, describes the expanded literature review as being interchangeably labeled a “*research review, integrative research review, research synthesis, and meta-analysis*” (p. 3). This type of research synthesis has clear benefits as a methodology and has been used more and more frequently as a data collection approach over the past several decades, reflecting the fact that this model is “playing an increasingly important role...and has shown a marked expansion” (Cooper, 1988, p. 104). Cooper calls this kind of overview “a new form of scholarship” that facilitates a synthesis of academic writing authored by a discrete body of experts on a given subject (2012, p. 104).

The methodology of the expanded literature review also acknowledges the idea of the “invisible college,” a phenomenon first defined by Diane Crane (1969) in her seminal article, “Social structure in a group of scientists: A test of the ‘Invisible College’ hypothesis.” Crane identifies the “invisible college” as one in which “scientists working on similar problems are usually aware of each other...[and] maintain a high level of informal communication” (p. 335). She continues by arguing that the “invisible college” network is crucial to research because

[t]he amount of material published in some fields is so large that it cannot be monitored effectively by any other means...[S]cientists develop shared definitions of their work, paradigms which interpret findings and guide new research. In other words, scientists adjust to the problems of dealing with

knowledge in their fields by forming social organizations ...based upon shared communication and shared interpretations. (Crane, 1969, p. 335)

The concept of the “invisible college” can easily be applied to the discourse community that thinks about, writes about, and talks about approaches to teaching writing. The assumption that the “invisible college” does indeed exist in composition studies, just as it does in other disciplines, provides a strong rationale for one’s using the methodology of an expanded literature review because this approach helps one to examine, evaluate, summarize, and report on documentation that most members of the community would agree are exemplary ones. Cooper & Koenka’s (2012) research findings on what they call “integrative scholarship” additionally support the rationale for the expanded literature review by pointing out that “a new form of scholarship has appeared in which researchers present an overview of previously conducted research syntheses on the same topic” (p. 446).

A goal of this thesis was to assemble a series of cohesive and comprehensive summaries drawn from the prominent composition theories with which both pre-service teachers (those preparing for careers in middle and high school language arts) and undergraduate college instructors (those beginning their teaching in the freshman composition sequence) should be most familiar. To that end, the decision to use the expanded literature review model is justified. In order to craft a detailed and precise narrative that outlined the scope and influence of the various writing theories, it was necessary to conduct an exhaustive literature review of seminal works by authoritative figures in the field of composition studies. By culling through the texts

of those who both described and shaped the theories of teaching writing, it was possible to identify the common themes that appear in various accounts. The expanded literature review addresses the needs of this kind of searching and reporting. The research methodology included first identifying and selecting primary sources and was followed by teasing out the substantive and relevant elements of representative texts through a comparison of numerous published manuscripts.

This research process also has some important similarities to content analysis. Content analysis, specifically conceptual analysis, is an appropriate data collection method for this type of thesis. Conceptual analysis can be defined as an approach that first identifies a concept for examination and then analyzes the concept by quantifying and tallying its presence in selected representative texts (Busch et al., 2005). Although a growing body of evidence regarding theories of teaching writing exists, no texts present a detailed, explicit, and unified presentation of the various theories within the boundaries of a single document. While many seminal essays include references to various writing theories, Russell comments that there remains a “relative paucity of research on the history of writing” (2006, p. 246). By combing through authoritative texts that allude to the writing theories that have been used in the United States and then recording occurrences of both implicit and explicit references to selected terms, one can document the characteristics, underlying pedagogical philosophies, and major proponents of the most prominent theories.

The research methodology used here also reflects some of the characteristics of textual analysis which Alan McKee defines as “a way for researchers to gather

information about how other human beings make sense of their world” (2010, p. 1). McKee continues adding that textual analysis “is a methodology—a data gathering process” (2012, p. 1). Textual analysis requires close reading in order to identify those subtle nuances that comprise meaning and differentiate one idea or concept from another. The researcher must carefully work through various texts looking for patterns of repetition and contrast that can be categorized as representing the distinct features of one or another school of thought. In this study, the research was based on close reading of assembled texts pertaining to theories of teaching writing and sought to illuminate these patterns and specific details that would, in turn, serve as the basis for the categorization and discussion of these major theories. While there are many splinter topics and minor theories that exist under the broad heading of writing theory, this thesis focused on nine major theories that support teaching strategies for college and secondary school composition courses.

As the anecdotal illustration in the background statement shows, many composition instructors fail to recognize the underlying theoretical schemata on which their teaching practice is built. A clearly articulated explanation and description of some major theoretical approaches, alongside research guidelines and instructional strategies, will benefit composition teachers by providing them a mechanism with which to examine how their own teaching philosophies might be reflected and aligned with an overriding theoretical construct. Content analysis served as the method for collating and presenting the summarized characteristics of the more

common approaches to teaching composition. This thesis can provide educators with a single resource that will aid them in making decisions about their teaching practices.

## Chapter 4: The Theories

### Classical (Aristotelian and Platonic) Theory

For centuries, a classical education meant that students engaged in studies designed to mold them so that they became obedient and productive citizens of the state. Given the fact that, as Lawrence Green (1992) observes, there is a “movement in modern composition to revivify aspects of classical rhetoric” (p. 222), it is important that writing teachers gain some familiarity with the tenets and practices of this early approach to teaching writing. According to James Murphy (2001), the classical curricula focused on three distinct levels of education including home training, military service, and an internship under the tutelage of a well-known orator (p. 38). This standard curriculum was the basis for the courses of study that would eventually become the seven liberal arts, divided in the Middle Ages into two parts: the *Trivium* and *Quadrivium*.

Sister Miriam Joseph (1937/2002) identifies the *Trivium* as consisting of logic, grammar, and rhetoric as “arts of language pertaining to the mind” while the *Quadrivium* consists of arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy, also called “the arts of quantity pertaining to matter” (p. 3). It should be noted that the subjects that have to do with discourse were specifically rooted in oral, not written, modes of communication. The goal for students’ training in the three pillars of logic, grammar, and rhetoric was specifically intended to develop skills necessary for public speaking, but writing was practiced as well.

Murphy (1990) states, “Writing and rhetoric go hand in hand in the Roman educational system” (p. 19). Murphy goes on to describe the systematic way in which pupils were schooled using well-established practices. School-age children, mostly boys, began their studies of rhetoric and writing using a curriculum that consisted of five groups. The first group, precept, is defined as “a set of rules that provide a definite method and system of speaking” (as cited in Murphy, 2012, p. 51)<sup>1</sup> and was based on logic and grammar (the handmaidens who facilitated rhetoric). This first teaching method, precept, was further divided into the five canons which make up the speaking process. The five canons are invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. According to Murphy (1990), the writing process followed the same trajectory with the exception of handwriting’s substituting for oral delivery (42). These same five classical canons were later mentioned by Marcus Tullius Cicero in a treatise dating from the first century B.C., and although his treatise stated an intention to provide further details, no such documentation was ever forthcoming. Nonetheless, evidence of the canon’s influences on discourse education can be followed from antiquity well into the Renaissance. The precept is followed by imitation, composition exercises, declamation, and sequencing.

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<sup>1</sup> In his third edition of *A Short History of Writing Instruction* (2012), Murphy attributes this definition to the anonymous author (Murphy offers Cornificius) of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (*The Book of Rhetoric Addressed to Herennius*) (86 BC). That work was formerly attributed to Cicero because it bears a resemblance to his *De Inventione*, however, most scholars no longer believe Cicero authored the treatise. According to the *Silva Rhetoricae* website, *Rhetorica ad Herennium* is the earliest Roman systematic rhetoric and its fourth book, containing a dictionary, was particularly influential from ancient Rome into the Renaissance.

The second group in the classical rhetorical curricula, imitation, consists of the following elements: 1) reading aloud, 2) master's analysis, 3) memorized models, 4) paraphrased models, 5) transliteration, 6) recitation, and 7) correction (Murphy, 2001, p. 77). Opportunities still exist to explore these strategies in modern classrooms as teachers and students work through texts using close reading to paraphrase, transliterate, and analyze texts. Asking students to paraphrase or summarize difficult texts in order to sort out the meanings of difficult passages is a time-honored method for helping students gain a deeper understanding of complex writing.

The third group in the classical curricula includes a series of twelve (or sometimes fourteen) preliminary exercises called *progymnasmata* designed to give students “a general introduction to rhetoric...[and] teach the basic techniques of invention, arrangement, and style that are applicable to any kind of planned discourse, oral or written” (Lanham, 2001, p. 103). Lanham explains that the *progymnasmata* are divided into three types of rhetoric: deliberative (first six exercises), judicial (next two exercises), and epideictic (last four exercises) and include the following categories:

- |                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. fable                       | 8. commonplace                            |
| 2. a tale or narrative         | 9. <i>encomium</i> (praise piece) or      |
| 3. <i>chreia</i> (an anecdote) | vituperation                              |
| 4. proverb or maxim            | 10. <i>ethopoeia</i> (characterization or |
| 5. <i>thesis</i> (theme)       | impersonation)                            |



6. deliberation (defend or attack a law)
7. confirmation & refutation
11. comparison
12. *ekphrasis* (description)

Lanham (1986) provides a detailed explanation of each of the exercises in her article “Modern Use of the *Progymnasmata* in Teaching Rhetorical Invention” and many of these activities are still popular in contemporary writing classrooms. Other classical rhetoricians also presented schema for authors’ organizing arguments such as Hermagoras’ method of dividing a topic into what he called the “seven circumstances” (who, what, when, where, why, in what way, and by what means) and this heuristic survives today in the form of the reporter’s formula.

The fourth group in classical rhetoric, declamation, consists of two categories of fictitious speeches: the political speech that argues for or against an action and the forensic or legal speech that presents a prosecution or defense of an imaginary or historical person. The fifth and last group member of classical rhetoric is sequencing, wherein classroom activities are systematically ordered in a way that both moves from simple to more complex tasks and reviews the elements of all previous lessons learned.

Opening Book I of his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle writes, “Rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic” (2011, n.p.). The practice of using dialogue and debate to uncover truth was central to the teachings of Socrates and his progeny Plato and Aristotle. According to Murphy, students “discover[ed] ideas through the use of ‘topics’ or commonplaces such as Division, Consequence, Cause, Effect, or Definition” (2001, p. 42). Also, logically arranging ideas was central and early rhetoricians taught

students to assemble their thoughts using a six-part model that consisted of an introduction (*exordium*), statement of the facts (narration), outline (division), proofs (confirmation), refutation (ready attack on opposition), and conclusion (*peroration*) (Murphy, 2001, p. 43). Many of these stages are still effective in the modern classroom because they can help students improve their writing using various pre-writing and organizational strategies. For instance, many students benefit by paying more attention to crafting an introduction that immediately engages readers and to shaping conclusions that evolve rather than summarize. Therefore, since the classical model isolates such individual components of a rhetorical document, composition students can improve their writing merely by devoting a little more time to their introductions and conclusions.

Perhaps the most significant step in the process that culminates in the oral delivery of a speech is the act of invention. Invention stands as the precursor to the contemporary “pre-writing” stage and is associated with the writer’s efforts to decide what he should say and how he should say it. The process for making these decisions includes responding to questions about the definition of terms, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, the circumstances under which the topic might occur, and testimony from others who can speak intelligently on the topic. Joseph recognizes that preliminary work will include both invention and disposition. She defines invention as “the art of finding material for reasoning or discourse, and disposition is the art of properly relating or ordering the material” (1937/2002, p. 109). It is the

omission of invention in the current-traditional approach to teaching writing that will cause the greatest criticism of that paradigm (which follows later).

In addition to the *progymnasmata*, a number of other subjects survive as a legacy of classical rhetoric, including grammar and poetry writing. By writing verse, students would learn about various types of figurative language including simile, metaphor, onomatopœia, personification, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony; and poetic devices such as rhythm, cadence, meter, scansion, assonance, consonance, alliteration and rhyme. Additionally, writing teachers using classical rhetoric might address various poetic forms to help students identify these structures for further analyses.

The classical approach to teaching writing served as the basis for many of the textbooks and teaching styles that would follow over centuries. For instance, the focus on literary devices such as metaphor and allusion will be seen in the writings of George Campbell, who argued that all speech must present knowledge in such a way that it “enlighten[s] the understanding, ...please[s] the imagination,...move[s] the passions, [and] influence[s] the will” (Campbell, 1999, n.p.). Classical theories have wavered in popularity but have never fully disappeared from writing instruction. Russell (2006) describes the decline of classical rhetoric, stating, “As composition professionalized, it looked to a time before the long winter of current-traditional rhetoric and rediscovered classical rhetoric (long studied in speech departments)” (p. 253). Despite the fact that classical theories have been greatly overshadowed by more

contemporary approaches, scattered evidences of their influences in the contemporary writing instruction remain.

### **Classical Theory: Names to Remember**

Aelius Festus Aphthonius of Antioch	Hermagoras of Temnos
Aristotle	Hermogenes of Tarsus
Augustine of Hippo	Longinus
Isocrates	Plato
Marcus Tullius Cicero	Quintus Cornificius
Dionysius of Halicarnassus	Marcus Fabius Quintilianus
Aelius Donatus	

### **Classical Theory: Classroom Applications**

A number of classical rhetorical activities exist that could be applicable to the contemporary classroom, such as exercises in varying sentences by adding, subtracting, inverting, and substituting; paraphrasing selected passages from a text; *metaphrasis* in which a student changes a passage from one genre (prose) to another (poem); or summarizing, such as in the *précis*. These kinds of activities are most effective when used in conjunction with a student's own work as he builds finesse using academic conventions with which to convey his message. This idea of privileging student voice is an important one for the modern teacher to recognize. In their essay, "A Century of Writing Instruction," Hobbs & Berlin (2001) provide an outline of writing instruction in the United States since the turn of the last century and state, "Students should engage in the process of composing, not someone else's process of composing" (p. 271). In other words, it is important to wean students from using models to the point where they become dependent on them. However, when students are afforded the opportunity to see the different ways in which their message

can be communicated, they can ideally augment their methods to help them adopt an effective tone or syntax. At the same time, the student's ideas and message can be preserved.

As students are introduced to research skills, a helpful strategy that they could use in the data gathering component is the "classical invention" template that, by a prescribed set of questions, asks students to supply general information about such categories as topic definition, comparison with related topics, relationships among and between topics, testimony of experts on their topic, and the circumstances under which their subject could exist. The exercise also tests to see what students already know about their subject and may reveal connections students may have initially missed.

Another technique that might prove useful is one that held sway during the 1970s and 1980s and was based on Kenneth Pike's linguistic methods and his tagmemic systems which explored the function and class of words. Bruce Edwards (1997) claims that "Pike argue[d] that every unit of behavior to be well described must be characterized ...[by] how it differs from everything else in its class;...its range of variability; and the range of contexts [that] can appropriately contain it" (as cited in Edwards, n.p.). Although Pike (1964) himself admits his "experience includes little direct connection with the teaching of composition" (p. 82), his article "A Linguistic Contribution to Composition" contains a number of imaginative exercises including one, correlated to Pike's first principle, in which students are asked to "[w]rite an essay describing some item...in which the total attempt is to say

what the unit is not” (p. 84). Students then revise their essay stating the characteristics the unit possesses. By initially considering a unit’s opposite qualities, students may more easily be able to write more complete and accurate descriptive texts than if they had merely described some object outright.

Another skill that can be developed through the use of classical teaching methods relates to students’ being able to recognize clues in the plot that contribute to a work’s overall meaning. When asked to analyze literature, a technique that can help students isolate and organize major points or themes in literature is to have them identify and present important plot elements (inciting moment, rising action, climax, falling action, and dénouement) in storyboard format using some form of multi-media. A number of internet applications, such as Google’s *Search Story*<sup>2</sup>, provide the visual element that some students greatly benefit from using. Another way students can personalize their understanding of literature is to create an original work using features of a poet’s work, such as the short, staccato narrative style of Ernest Hemingway or the lower case capitalization and artistically arranged words of e. e. cummings. By writing “in the style of” the poet (or poetry) under study, students will likely gain a genuine appreciation and feel for the characteristics that make the poetry unique.

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<sup>2</sup> Effective 31 December 2012, Google discontinued its popular *Search Story* application. Since *Search Story* limited users to only seven terms, I used it as a tool to get students to focus on the most important elements of a story. The program allowed users to enter seven search terms and choose from a list of search methods including maps, products, images, and blogs. Users could then select an appropriate sound track and finally publish a 30-second movie short. With just a little more time and effort, users can create a similar product using a package like Microsoft’s freeware *Photo Story*, a free version of their 30-second moviemaker at *Animoto.com*, or Google’s brand new *Story Builder*.

**Classical Theory: Supplemental Reading**

Hagaman, J. (1986, Autumn). Modern use of the *progymnasmata* in teaching rhetorical invention. *Rhetoric Review*, 5(1), 22-29.

Lanham, C. D. (2001). Writing instruction from late antiquity to the twelfth century.

In J.J. Murphy (Ed.). *A short history of writing instruction: From ancient Greece to modern America* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). (79-121). Florence, KY: Routledge.

Murphy, J. J. (2001). The key role of habit in Roman writing instruction. In J.J.

Murphy (Ed.). *A short history of writing instruction: From ancient Greece to modern America* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). (35-78). Florence, KY: Routledge.

**Current –Traditional (or Positivist) Theory**

Probably the most commonly used approach to teaching writing in secondary and undergraduate composition classes is driven by the current-traditional theory. Despite the fact that the current-traditional method has been widely criticized for its rigidity and over-emphasis on correctness, this theoretical model still holds a place of prominence in writing and composition classrooms. James Berlin has “repeatedly” expressed the view that “current-traditional has been the dominant form of college writing instruction in the twentieth century” (1987, p. 36). Further, even though some historians argue that composition teachers rejected current-traditional theories in the early 1970s, Sharon Crowley asserts that there is “no evidence that an alternative epistemology has ever succeeded in dislodging the hold of current-traditionalism on writing instruction in American colleges and universities” (1996, p. 64).

Concurrently, because writing instruction in secondary schools followed the

collegiate model in preparing students for writing at the university level, the pattern repeated itself in the lower schools. In other words, despite the fact that current-traditional theory has been called a reductive and unimaginative approach that has “gradually deteriorated into a neurotic concern for ‘correct usage’” (Corbett, 1965, p. 566), strategies supported by this theory for teaching composition and assessment of student writing seem well-entrenched in the curricula of secondary and undergraduate writing courses.

In his book *Roots for a New Rhetoric* (1959), Father Daniel Fogarty first coins the term “current-traditional” in his presentation of “three new theories” (which he labels as the “I. A. Richards Theory,” the “Kenneth Burke Theory,” and the “General Semantics Theory”). Fogarty contrasts these new theories “against the background of history and traditional rhetorical theory” (p. 27) which he later specifically identifies as “Aristotelian and current-traditional” (p. 117). Crowley herself sets the dates for current-traditional theory as 1850-1970 (Crowley, 2009, p. 333) even though she acknowledges that current-traditional thought still holds sway in current compositions classrooms.

Bordelon, Wright, and Halloran (2012) document the fact that the rise of the middle class meant colleges and university were “inundated by people who wanted an education” (p. 216). The teaching model that was instituted at Harvard College would eventually be identified as current-traditional, and it was at first only a stopgap measure to address the perceived writing deficiencies of the flood of middle-class students who flocked to America’s universities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Kitzhaber



(1990) documents the efforts of post-Civil War academia to address incoming freshman composition students' high failure rates on English entrance exams (p. 72). An effort to assess the magnitude of the problem was spearheaded by Harvard College, which conducted a research study in which three laymen compiled the "complaints...from college administrators and teachers of English" and examined a set of written entrance exams submitted in June 1892. The researchers found that only 2% of the participants in their study were able to pass a writing exam "with credit" (Kitzhaber, 1990, pp. 73-74). As a result of these findings, several prominent university English professors, most notably Adams Sherman Hill at Harvard and John F. Genung at Amherst, created English composition textbooks for their respective student bodies. What is significant is that these early American textbooks reflected a "rhetorical theory coming from abroad" (Berlin & Inkster, 1980, p. 1). Specifically, Hill's and Genung's textbooks relied heavily on the content espoused by their European counterparts: George Campbell (at Marischal College, Aberdeen, Scotland), Hugh Blair (at Edinburgh), and Richard Whately (at University of Oxford). These European composition teachers approached writing as a method for documenting what could be apprehended only through the physical senses, and they believed writing should merely be a record of evidence based on reality and derived and interpreted empirically.

By following the tenets of the Scottish Common Sense Realists, Hill and Genung, as well as other contemporary American English teachers, co-opted the positivistic philosophy inherent in the writings of these Scottish antecedents.

Specifically, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, instruction in composition studies followed the scientific method and required students to present empirical evidence and use objective thinking to substantiate their writing. According to Sir Isaac Newton, in his *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, the “[s]cientific method refers to the body of techniques for investigating phenomena, acquiring new knowledge, or correcting and integrating previous knowledge. It is based on gathering observable, empirical and measurable evidence subject to specific principles of reasoning” (as cited in Committee, 2009, n.p.). Berlin criticizes such positivist thinking, stating, “Current-Tradition Rhetoric views...truth [as] incontrovertibly established by a speaker or writer more enlightened than her audience....[and such] truth is empirically based and can only be achieved through subverting a part of the human response to experience” (Berlin, 1982, p. 777).

Writing under the current-traditional paradigm was perceived as a vehicle for describing the material world and student’s evaluations were product-based. In fact, the student’s written texts that resulted from his scientific scrutiny of observable phenomena was the single measure for determining success or failure as a writer. Composition teachers generally felt compelled to implement prescriptive stratagems in order to address the overwhelming mechanical deficiencies that freshmen students presented. In this process of realigning curricula from the previous classical rhetoric model, there was a steady move away from the modes that had served as the mainstay for Aristotelian and Platonic pedagogies. Most importantly, the stage of invention falls away from the process of composition, and writing instruction no longer points

students to the important preliminary activity of searching for and considering “valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one’s case plausible” (Murphy, 2001, p. 41).

Nonetheless, textbooks authored by the 19<sup>th</sup> century British and Scottish master rhetoric teachers begin to focus greater attention on the four remaining stages of rhetoric. For instance,

Scottish rhetorician Alexander Bain’s 1866 *English Composition and Rhetoric* foregrounded the modes of composition (Exposition, Description, Narration, and Argument) as an organizational principle for the text. Though the modes had previously been mentioned in other texts, Bain was the first to conceptualize the modes for teaching. Bain’s modes met a need in the United States for teachable writing that emphasized correctness and the ability to follow directions. (Composition, 2011, n.p.)

David R. Russell (2006) concurs, stating, “Current-traditional rhetoric emphasizes writing in modes (exposition, definition, narration, argument...); division into words, sentences, and paragraphs; mechanical correctness; [and] the reading of professional models.... It does not emphasize communication, invention (in the classical tradition), or the process of writing” (p. 252). American rhetoric and grammar teachers picked up Bain’s refrain and continued the current-traditional model, a practice that had at its very core a focus on mechanics and grammar.

A number of important criticisms have been levied against current-traditional theory, including the fact that invention has been superseded from the act of writing and the process of working through various stages of rhetorical process is eliminated.

Also, as this product-based model moves away from classical rhetorical perspectives, the primary focus becomes one of mastering mechanical correctness and “the greatest loss was the sense of social purpose for writing” (Wright & Halloran, 2001. p. 239).

Early proponents of the current-traditional approach intentionally neglected to teach the classical modes because they presumed students were incapable of acquiring writing skills that reflected talent or genius. Composition teachers discounted the potential for students to improve their writing skills, opting to “teach formulaic, unimaginative lessons and enforce rigid grammatical prescriptions” (Wright & Halloran, 2001. p. 237).

Nonetheless, while the current-traditional approach is still often described in similar ungenerous terms, it remains a presence in classrooms even today, clearly having qualities to recommend it despite the criticisms that are levied against it. Arnold (2011) argues that the current-traditional pedagogy “has become so ingrained in disciplinary rhetoric that it acts as a rhetorical trope, oftentimes signifying practices, values, and beliefs far beyond (or beside) its referent” (p. 70). While Arnold concedes that current-traditional is more a phenomenon than a “‘real’ or unified set of beliefs and practices,” she argues current-traditional pedagogy “is recognizable even when it is not named” (Arnold, 2011, p. 71).

Clearly composition teachers and scholars are divided about the efficacy of current-traditional, but because one of its pillars is the use of a model text for student writers to imitate, there are some kinds of formal writing assignments that actually lend themselves most readily to a current-traditional product-based approach. Steele

(2004) states that when faced with decisions whether to use product- or process-based instruction, teachers should know that “there is not necessarily any ‘*right*’ or ‘*best*’ way to teach writing skills” (n.p.). Likewise, the practice of exchanging student drafts can be most effectively accomplished within the current-traditional model because, when students evaluate one another’s drafts, they will likely compare their peers’ final product against a correct model.

### **Current-Traditional: Names to Remember**

Alexander Bain	John Franklin Genung	Alonzo Reed
Hugh Blair	Adams Sherman Hill	Ivor Armstrong Richards
Gertrude Buck	Brainerd Kellogg	Fred Newton Scott
George Campbell	Samuel P. Neuman	Barrett Wendell
Henry Day	Ebenezer Porter	Richard Whately

### **Current Traditional: Classroom Applications**

Because the final product weighs so heavily in the current-traditional model, teachers need to give very clear instructions to students before the writing process begins. One of the ways teachers can provide guidance regarding assessment measures is by giving students tangible, clearly defined criteria against which their final products will be evaluated. These criteria should come in both assignment instructions and a grading rubric. Opinions are widely divergent regarding the effectiveness and suitability of rubrics for writing tasks. However, espousing the positive aspects of rubrics, Michael Livingston (2012) argues that “the rubric provides a small measure of objectivity by insisting that the teacher have a basis for the final assessment” (p. 111). Many student draw comfort from the details a well-conceived rubric provides, often using such heuristics as a checklist against which

their paper can be measured, even before submitting their writing to the teacher. Maja Wilson (2007) disagrees, pointing out that “[t]he way that rubrics attempt to facilitate my responses to students—by asking me to choose from a menu of responses—troubles me, no matter how eloquent or seemingly comprehensive or conveniently tabbed that menu might be” (p. 62). She worries that teachers will be limited to providing objective feedback exclusively with subjective feedback suffering. She sees subjective comments as a powerful vehicle that opens a conversation between teacher and student. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to expect that a teacher, using a current-traditional approach, can still craft a rubric sensitive to both the objective and subjective kinds of feedback students need in order to improve their writing.

One way in which the negative criticisms of rubrics might be mediated is by having students write a short response to the instructor’s feedback they have received on their papers. Although teachers may provide both qualitative and quantitative kinds of feedback on returned papers, many students, who have come to expect the product to be the culmination of the assignment, simply ignore the teacher’s suggestions, or worse, continue making the same mistakes on subsequent writing assignments. By asking students to reflect on their efforts, many of them will be able to internalize instructor feedback and make improvements to future papers. To balance the student’s reflection between achievement and error, teachers should suggest students describe what they have done well, where they could improve, and what strategies they might use to make those improvements. This list requires

students think critically about their own writing in a way that goes beyond passive acceptance of the letter grade inked on their final paper.

Using the current-traditional focus on surface errors, students can take an opportunity to polish written work in the editing stage. Many students confuse revision and editing, believing the two activities to be synonymous. Certainly it is important to help students recognize the vast differences between a total revamp of their writing as opposed to correcting grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors. However, once writing teachers are sure students can make that distinction, giving guidance on ways to make a revised draft even more sophisticated by eliminating troublesome surface errors is still desirable. Also, students need to consider audience as well as time and place in the construction of their writing. Fogarty holds the view that “current-traditional rhetoric is essentially Aristotelian” (as cited in Gere, 1986, p. 32), which would necessitate the writer’s considering the impact of his word choice, tone, and style on his audience. Viewing current-traditional exercises through that Aristotelian lens demands writers couch their writing in a format that would elicit the desired response from readers.

The ability to ensure one’s writing reflects the conventions appropriate to the discourse community and audience for which it is intended is a skill and responsibility that students need to be able to complete themselves. Writing within a in a peer setting helps students achieve these goals because of the capacity for students to teach themselves as well as each other. In the beginning, teachers may provide students with a checklist of the kinds of later order concerns they should

consider, such as errors of punctuation, spelling, and capitalization, but eventually, students need to be weaned from such crutches so that they learn to internalize different writing conventions and scrutinize their work for surface errors. Also, writing teachers should allow students liberty to experiment with vocabulary, tone, and style in their writing.

Another current-traditional mainstay is the use of five-paragraph form. According to the *Silva Rhetoricae* website, this well-established format has its roots in classical education and comes from the second canon of rhetoric: arrangement. To reiterate, the five components of a classical speech included an introduction (*exordium*), statement of the facts (*narratio*), affirmation (*affirmatio*) consisting of division and proof, refutation (*refutio*), and conclusion (*peroratio*). Although the five-paragraph essay traditionally followed the classical pattern, eventually, it devolved into merely being an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion.

While this limiting format is not appropriate for most collegiate or professional writing, it does provide an effective organizational strategy for many high-stakes testing situations such as end-of-course essay exams and the standardized essay tests commonly required for admission to college degree programs. Having students practice in-class, on-demand writing using five-paragraph form helps students become acclimated to the stressful circumstances and writing expectations of such assessments.



**Current Traditional: Supplemental Reading**

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Gere, A. R. (1986). Teaching writing: The major theories. In A. R. Petrosky & D. Bartholomae (Eds.) *The teaching of writing: Eighty-fifth yearbook of the national society for the study of education*, (30-48). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Wright, E. A., & Halloran, S. M. (2001). From rhetoric to composition: The teaching of writing in America to 1900. In J. J. Murphy (Ed.) *A short history of writing instruction* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), (213-246). New York, NY: Routledge.

**Process Theory**

One of the earliest essays on the writing process is Day's (1947) "Writer's Magic," in which he meticulously outlines a seven-step writing process that includes 1) conception of a need, 2) preparation, 3) incubation, 4) intimation, 5) illumination, 6) verification, and 7) expression & revision. In Graham Wallas' 1926 work, *Art of Thought*, he consolidates this writing process list into only four stages: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification (as cited in Emig, 2003, p. 236). The process movement overtly began in the late 1950s as a reaction to the mounting criticisms levied against the current-traditional approach to teaching writing.

Exhaustive research studies had begun to accumulate convincing quantitative evidence showing that the conventional curricula, especially those based on teaching grammar, had little to no effect on improving the quality of student writing<sup>3</sup>. Students simply failed to transfer the skills from prescriptive lessons to their own writing. Based on these research findings, writing teachers began looking for more effective ways to engage students in literacy learning.

Bazerman et al. (2005) credit James Britton and Janet Emig as being the first to observe how students' ideas and understanding grow and clarify through the process of writing. Britton and Emig then identified this process as a fresh pedagogical approach to teaching writing (p. 57). Process theory was explicitly examined in Emig's (2003) highly influential essay "The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders," which provides an exhaustive literature review and justifies the need for research in the writing process due to the dearth of systematic and confirming research studies heretofore completed on the topic. She presents ten compelling questions as a guide for future research and goes on to identify the stages through which she observed the participants in her 1971 study move as they created written texts. The earliest descriptions of process theory initially identified three stages that writers use: prewriting, drafting, and rewriting. Proponents of the process movement describe these stages as being iterative and fluid in contrast to the

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<sup>3</sup> The connection between grammar instruction and writing ability continues to be hotly debated. Some recent studies seem to indicate that, while a clear correlation between the two has not been established or documented, the connection may be present but just difficult to quantify. The inclusion of grammar in the new Language Arts Common Core Standards seems to support the those whose view is that there is some underlying influence on writing skill.

monolithic, linear model that would have been associated with product-based current-traditional approaches. In his landmark 1972 presentation for the New England Association of Teachers of English, Donald Murray advocates assessing a student's process rather than product as a culminating, representative artifact, arguing that writing teachers should perceive the process as "discovery through language" as the writing student "uses language to reveal the truth to himself so that he can tell it to others" (2003, p. 4).

Reither describes how the practice of teaching writing evolved, stating, "The goal has been to replace a prescriptive pedagogy...with a descriptive discipline" (1985, p. 620), and he claims that "writing is itself a mode of learning and knowing" (p. 622). As greater numbers of researchers and educators sought to identify commonalities that could be associated with the writing process, the stages in that process became more well-defined. Eventually, the five stages would solidify into the components that include planning/prewriting, drafting, sharing and responding, revising and editing, and finally publishing. Murray alternatively identified five steps in the approach to writing that he called "collecting, focusing, ordering, developing, and clarifying" (as cited in Hillocks, 2006, p. 68). The collaborative aspect of writing was explored as part of the writing process and the sharing/responding stage included such activities as peer reviews and writing workshops. It should also be noted that the component called *publishing* refers to any situation in which a text is presented to another reader and can range from a single recipient such as a peer or teacher to a

larger public audience where written texts are formally presented to a public forum such as a magazine, newspaper, or journal.

In the current-traditional model, evaluations of student writing focused entirely on the students' finished paper and most of the assessments came in the form of a critique of surface errors like grammar, spelling, and sentence structure, although considerations of tone, style, and arrangement were also considered. Process approach writing teachers, however, took a more holistic approach and viewed student writing in terms of all of the activities that went into the crafting of a final paper. The portfolio assignment became increasingly important as a vehicle to present all of the student work that culminated in the final paper, and writing teachers began to examine both preliminary work, as well as edited and revised drafts, with the same degree of importance as the finished draft. Since critics of the current-traditional approach had pointed out that the classical step of invention had been too long ignored, it made sense to elevate the status of all the pre-writing work that led up to a completed product.

In fact, Murray (2003) argues that prewriting should "take about 85% of the writer's time" while rewriting "required...perhaps...14% of the time the writer spends on the project" (p. 4). These figures were ambitious estimates of the time that students should spend in preparing to write because, with more research focused on the writing process, it became evident that most students either failed to understand the importance of the prewriting stage or simply had never learned the strategies to implement it. Writing teachers began to focus their energies on helping students

develop a toolkit of invention and planning techniques that would enable them to improve as writers. For instance, Lane (1993), arguing that revision is the most important step in the writing process, describes activities specifically designed to help students develop their arguments more completely. He also describes and presents revision strategies that he claims will “promote choice and responsibility in [writing] students” (p. 4).

Moreover, the collaborative component of writing gained more recognition as students were encouraged to share writing with their peers. In his book, *A Writer Teaches Writing*, Murray (2004) urges writing teachers to promote students from the teacher-student conference scenario to a student-student conference model. He argues that this necessary second step helps to “develop a community of writers who are not only willing, but prepared to help each other” (p. 158). Iris Soven (1999) states, “One of the most popular strategies for encouraging revision is the...peer writing group” (p. 48). She suggests, though, that teachers provide students a checklist or rubric in the early stages of peer evaluation, but she warns that students need to learn to conduct peer reviews on their own as they gain mastery over the peer evaluation process.

Most importantly, writing teachers began to emphasize to their students the iterative nature of writing. Murray (2004) states, “The process is not linear, but recursive. The writer passes through the process once, or many times, emphasizing different stages during each passage” (p. 4). However, both Emig and Murray (among others) are careful to point out that the process is not a singular set of rules or

behaviors. Murray clarifies saying, “There is not one process but many. The process varies with the personality or cognitive style of the writer, the experience of the writer, and the nature of the writing task” (p. 4). Bazerman et al. (2005) summarize Arthur Appleby’s 1984 research finding that concluded that process writing “involves a variety of recursive operating subprocesses, [that] writers differ in their uses of the process, [and] the process vary depending on the nature of the writing task” (as cited in Bazerman et al., p. 58). In fact, one of the failings of the process approach to teaching writing is that it permits a product-based, current-traditional approach to masquerade as a process-based model. Emig concedes that asking writers to reflectively describe their writing processes results in accounts that are likely inaccurate and misleading (p. 230). Berlin cautions, “Everyone teaches the process of writing, but everyone does not teach the *same* process” (p. 776).

Nonetheless, Matsuda (2003) argues that those who advocate teaching writing as process believe that there is a significant payoff for following the process philosophy. These positive characteristics of the process approach include “helping students discover their own voice, recognizing that students have something important to say, allowing students to choose their own topics, providing teacher and peer feedback, encouraging revision, and using student writing as the primary text of the course” (p. 67). Coinciding with a rise in cultural studies and a focus on diversity, the nature of process writing lent itself to the kinds of opportunities many writing teachers wished to offer their students. Because the writing process is ultimately a hidden and private one, writing teachers should consider the maxim that although

students can learn to write, the process cannot necessarily be taught. Murray explains this truism by stating, “[Y]ou don’t learn a process by talking about it, but by doing it” (2003, p. 5).

### **Process Theory: Names to Remember**

Nancie Atwell	Janet Emig	Sondra Perl
James Britton	Donald Graves	Gordon Rohman
Jerome Bruner	Ken Macrorie	Harold Rosen
Anthony Burgess	Nancy Martin	Pat Schneider
Lucy Calkins	Alexander McLeod	Mina Shaughnessy
Wallace Douglass	James Moffett	Lad Tobin
Peter Elbow	Donald Murray	Vivian Zamel

### **Process Theory: Classroom Applications**

The process theory typically features some kind of portfolio that can be used as a vehicle to either present exemplary student work or include artifacts that reflect the stages through which writers move in completing a final writing project. In the portfolio model that is used to showcase student work, students work collaboratively with, not only their writing teachers, but also teachers across the curricula to select representative work, ideally the result of a variety of writing prompts. The portfolio shows an assemblage of the student’s best writing efforts. Another form of portfolio is one dedicated to a single culminating example of student writing; these portfolios almost always include evidence of student work at each stage of the writing process. For instance, typical documents include some form of pre-writing such as a brainstorm, cluster, Venn diagram; formal or informal outlines; several iterations of student drafts including revisions and edits; copies of peer edits, comments, and/or checklists; note cards or some record of salient quotations students have used to lend

credibility and support to writing arguments and claims; and sometimes actual print copies of supporting evidence gathered during the research process. The use of portfolios means that writing teachers must make decisions about assessment strategies, including whether or not to grade holistically or to grade individual components or tasks. Huot and O'Neill (2009) present a complete view of assessment techniques including strategies for grading portfolios in collected essays entitled *Assessing Writing*.

Graphic organizers are also effective tools for process writing assignments. Many free templates are readily available on the internet and teachers can locate, download, and print an appropriate graphic in minutes. Graphic organizers can be used as part of a prewriting activity to help students organize ideas prior to drafting. Students can list characteristics, events, and facts, or speculate about possible outcomes using the prompts listed in the graphic organizer's instructions.

With regard to prewriting, one of the important earmarks of the process movement is the reinstatement of the invention or prewriting stage. There are a number of prewriting strategies that help students organize their ideas such as cubing, looping, freewriting, and the use of heuristics such as the reporter's formula. The practice of cubing, a technique developed by Cowan & Cowan (1980), reflects its classical antecedents and consists of the writer's considering six questions about the topic: 1) description, 2) comparison, 3) association, 4) analysis, 5) application, and 6) arguments for or against. Looping, also attributed to Cowan, begins as a freewriting exercise on a chosen topic. The writer then selects a sentence from his



freewriting that best summarizes the writing and repeats the process using this sentence as a prompt. The cycle repeats three times so that writers have the opportunity to explore and focus their ideas through distillation.

Although invention, or prewriting, is an important component in the writing process, other stages are no less valuable. Many times, students struggle even just beginning to write. Oftentimes these same students mistakenly ascribe writer's block to having nothing to say, when in reality, they have too much data. Having failed to narrow their topic to a manageable size, they need to begin by tightening their scope about their topic. Helping student to break the writing process into manageable chunks is most desirable. Just as prewriting can be isolated, other stages can be as well. Having students create a backward calendar, in which they work backwards from a paper's due date listing activities that can easily be completed in small steps, helps students visualize more clearly the separate parts of the writing process. In fact, there are online generators that, with just a bit of information, can create a printable backward calendar for students<sup>4</sup>. Following the calendar, students can complete intermediate steps of a paper by first beginning with a research question or thesis statement; then step-by-step, gathering data, making an outline, drafting, and proofreading their papers.

One final strategy that helps students organize their ideas on paper is reverse outlining. Working in pairs, students exchange paper drafts for peer review. Students will need four or more different colored highlighter pens. Students first annotate the

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<sup>4</sup> See InfoHIO's free "Research Project Calculator" @ <http://www2.infohio.org/rpc/>

theme or topic of each paragraph in the margin. Then using a single color, they highlight only the sentences in each paragraph that match the topic they recorded in the margin. If sentences remain unmarked after the first step, peers might have to identify a secondary topic and repeat the steps with a different color. After completing this exercise, students should describe whether or not their paragraphs reflect the same color (meaning all sentences relate to a topic sentence) or multiple colors (meaning some paragraphs have unrelated sentences). Students then can use the colored paper as a guide for revision and reorganization.

### **Process Theory: Supplemental Reading**

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(Original work published 1971)

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Reither, J.A. (1985, October). Writing and knowing: Toward redefining the writing process. *College English*, 47(6), 620-628.

### **Expressivism (or Neo-Platonic) Theory**

Overlap almost always occurs in the approaches to teaching writing because the boundaries between many of the theories are indistinct and blurred. This overlap is particularly true of expressivism because it reflects characteristics of other concurrent philosophies, namely process theory. Clark (2011) writes, “[P]rocess and

personal, or expressivist writing were often associated with one another in the early days of the process movement” (p. 16). In fact, one of the pivotal concepts in expressivism is the idea of personal “voice” and the goal is to help writers develop a personal and authentic voice in their work. Clark states that “[t]he initial phase of the process movement has often been associated with an emphasis on the importance of students being able to ‘express’ their thoughts and feelings through writing” (p. 15). The sacred quality of individual voice was the lightning rod that energized expressivism into a paradigm in its own right because “the discovery of voice [was seen] as a necessary prerequisite of growth” (Clark, 2011, p. 15).

As in the process movement, one of the common themes through expressivist thought is that writing cannot be taught, but it can be learned. This concept is contiguous with the search for truth that Berlin says harkens to the Transcendentalist and ultimately to Platonic views of learning and teaching. Truth, for the expressivists, “is discovered through an internal apprehension, a private vision of a world that transcends the physical...[Truth] is conceived as the result of a private vision that must be constantly consulted in writing” (Berlin, 1982, pp. 771-772). Because the writer, and not the product, is at the “center of communication,” teachers who subscribe to expressivist theories construct learning environments where students are empowered and where writing that comes from personal experience is highly valued. Berlin describes the classroom as a place where “students...write to please themselves, not the teacher” (1987, p. 76). In fact, the teacher no longer holds complete sway in the expressivist classroom. Rather, as Bildersee explains, the

teacher relinquishes authority to become more of a nondirective “guide and advisor—collaborator” (as cited in Berlin, 1987, p. 77).

The expressivist classrooms move away from the traditionally structured lecture toward classes that resemble laboratories or workshops. As a result, expressivist writing teachers, inspired by avant-garde figures like playwright Charles Deemer and English professor William D. Lutz, revamped their writing classrooms to become an “experience” or a “happening.” The happening is “an art form distinguished by its making the audience part of its very existence” and it is an “aesthetic experience [that] involves shocking and surprising the audience-participant into awareness” (Berlin, 1987, p. 150-151). Writing tasks in this environment focus on venues that allow for free expression, such as free-writing, journaling, and “classroom procedures...[that] encourage the writer to interact in dialogue with [other] members of the class” (Berlin, 1982, p. 772). In other words, despite the focus on the individual and what he or she has to say, the dialectic aspect is not totally eliminated because conversation with peer writers helps students crystallize what they believe and know as they dialogue. Their truths morph and adapt through interaction with other writers.

Nonetheless, writers are the ultimate authority of their own writing. The expressivist notions of audience are dramatically different from those in classical rhetoric, where consideration of audience was paramount and was used to guide tone, style, and even content. Peter Elbow (1995) tells students to “[k]eep a notebook or journal, explore thoughts for yourself, write to yourself when you feel frustrated or

want to figure something out” (p. 62). Expressivist teachers lament the fact that, while very young writers have a clear sense of personal voice, the academic machine has eventually trampled out student voice through heavy-handed assessments that tell students what is wrong about their writing as well as the voice from which their writing has grown. Pat Schneider (2003), founder of the Amherst Writers & Artists (AWA), identifies three distinct types of voice: *original* voice, the one writers first learn; *primary* voice, used at home; and *acquired* voice, which is used for formal presentations on an academic or professional nature (pp. 93-94). One of the key features of the expressivist movement is the goal of quieting the unproductive influences that have castigated students when they have used their own unique voice to write. In expressivism, writing can legitimately and equally span a wide range of nontraditional and innovative forms and students are free to use whatever format they deem appropriate. Berlin states that the types of writing seen in expressivism spanned, and continue to span, a wide range of extremes, with some writing teachers “arguing for complete and uninhibited freedom in writing, including the intentional flouting of all conventions” (1987, p. 145). In some cases, this freedom meant exploring language and modes that ventured into obscenity and indecency; however, poetic forms flowered as well. In fact, the emergence of creative writing courses can be directly traced back to the early roots of expressivism.

Assessments in the expressivist classroom are fundamentally different from those instruments used in other academic environments, especially current-traditional environments, in which focus rests solidly on the surface correctness of the written

product. First, as Pumphrey argues, there is a “definite shift in emphasis from teacher-student to student-peer evaluation” (as cited in Berlin, 1987, p. 148), and there is an increased use of “nondirective feedback from both teacher and [peer] students turn[ing] the responsibility for writing back to the student” (Burnham, 2001, p. 22-23). Therefore, the student is the person most accountable for judging the quality of written work. More importantly, the prevailing belief is that the “small improvement that [comes] from a student’s own effort [is] preferred to the outstanding piece resulting from the teacher having recomposed a student’s work” (Berlin, p. 76). As in the process movement, the portfolio is a major vehicle for demonstrating competence in writing and students assume the major responsibility for selecting and submitting the works they deem the strongest and best examples of their writing.

Burnham (2001) points out that expressivist theory has faced attacks from critics who label it “atheoretical,” a waste of students’ time, or even an attempt to co-opt the approach to meet a political agenda ( pp. 28-29). Also, some have argued that expressivism promotes a tendency toward writer-based prose in that it ignores audience, at least at first. Mainstream proponents of expressivism hold that the approach is decidedly non-political. Despite their stated goals of helping the individual voice to be heard and the notion that writing should “celebrate diversity” (Berlin, p. 76), the focus of expressivism is not on multitude or multiculturalism. Further, Elbow (1987) points out that writers have an “impoverished sense of writing as communication because they have only written in a school setting to teachers,” so writers must try to “blot out awareness of audience” and “push aside awareness of

those absent readers” in order to allow their authentic voice to come forward (pp. 50-51). Elbow concludes his arguments by acknowledging that both considering audience and simultaneously ignoring it results in paradox. Nonetheless, he argues that teachers need to help students “enhance the social dimension” of writing and, in so doing, become sensitive to audience. Nonetheless, he believes this goal is best accomplished by writers’ first gaining mastery in the “private dimensions” of being able to express themselves more fully and personally (p. 64).

### **Expressivist Theory: Names to Remember**

David Bartholomae	John Dixon	James Kinneavy
James Berlin	Peter Elbow	Ken Macrorie
Adele Bildersee	W. Walker Gibson	Donald Murray
James Britton	Maxine Hairston	Geoffrey Sirc
William Coles	Lou Kelly	Donald C. Stewart

### **Expressivist Theory: Classroom Applications**

Since the prominence of voice is key in expressivist writing, assignments should use modes that permit students to express themselves in unique and personal ways. Students should be encouraged to write reflective journals, autobiographies, blogs, and creative writing assignments. Additionally, providing students with choices allows them to determine what and how they wish to discuss subjects that have special relevance and meaning to them. Students should also be both allowed as well as encouraged to write using personal formats in communities or workshops where they can indulge in peer critiques and conversations about their work.

Soven (1999) describes expressivist writing as that kind which is “not highly explicit [and] [r]elatively unstructured” and which uses “language close to self,

revealing the writer, verbalizing the writer's consciousness, [and] displaying a close relationship with the reader" (p. 15). The writer's authentic voice must be heard over the text and writing students should be given opportunities to draft personal writing. One way to accomplish this goal is through in- and out-of-class freewriting exercises. Students will benefit even more if their teacher writes with them. In order to create a safe environment for personal writing, teachers should establish firm boundaries. Schneider (2003) outlines several such essential practices that include axioms such as [a]ll writing is treated as fiction"; and peer writers should refrain from criticizing, making suggestions, or directing questions on first drafts (p. 187). This idea that first drafts are sacred actually empowers students to muster the courage to use their own voices and to make headway against the internalized rules of writing conventions that sometimes stifle or inhibit composing.

One way to capitalize on this newfound freedom to write, is through the use of shared folders in *GoogleDocs*. Students upload drafts from various stages of writing and peer writers make comments on their work. Students will begin to regard the praise and encouragement they both give and receive as genuine appraisals of their work and this positive reaction can serve to bolster flagging self-images many students have about their writing. There are a great number of resources that provide appropriate freewriting prompts for use in the composition class. Schneider's (2003) *Writing Alone and With Others* has nearly 150 suggested topics for personal freewriting, and she provides a short description/explanation for nearly 100 of them.



Some require a bit of preparation in the form of props or brainstorming artifacts, but many can be executed “on-the-fly.”

Having students respond to literature or experiences using personal writing conventions is another way to use expressivism in the composition classroom. Instead of asking students to analyze symbolism or meaning in a piece of literature, students can be asked to describe how the piece of literature made them feel or what events in their own lives it made them remember as they read. Using the reader-response approach to literary criticism, students should focus on details in the story’s plot or the characters’ behaviors that resonate with them in personal ways. Along those same lines, the teacher might ask students to rewrite a story’s ending, providing an alternative they find more satisfying. In these kinds of exercises, students have the opportunity for creative writing, yet they are still required to apply critical thinking in the process of justifying their choices about how the work should have ended instead of how it did end.

Adding greater detail to completed drafts is another way expressive writing might be used. Barry Lane’s two volumes, *After the End* (1993) and *Reviser’s Toolbox* (1999), feature what Lane calls “creative revision.” These two works contain imaginative ideas for revision including ways to add detail and imagery to writing or conduct self-evaluation of one’s own writing. Despite the titles’ focus on revision, the author presents activities that can be used at all stages of the writing process and at all levels of writing including the sentence and paragraph. In fact, Lane provides hundreds of activities, and while the books are geared toward middle-school aged

populations, most can be easily modified for successful use in college freshman composition classes.

Teachers can provide stimuli for writing by using prompts that allow for personal discourse or by staging a “happening” as described by Lutz. For the teacher uncomfortable with the idea of hosting a radical presentation in order to shock students into reacting, teachers could instead substitute a writing assignment that asks students to share their responses to powerful situations drawn from actual current events. Students would be asked to write about what they believe they might have done or might have felt, had they been present in the midst of these events. These kinds of assignments allow students to explore nontraditional ways of expressing themselves, ideally engendering a sense of personal freedom.

### **Expressivist Theory: Supplemental Reading**

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Burnham, C. (2001). Expressive pedagogy: Practice/theory, theory/practice. In G. Tate, A. Rupiper, & K. Schick. (Eds.). *A guide to composition pedagogies*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Elbow, P. (1987, January), Closing my eyes as I speak: An argument for ignoring audience. *College English*, 49(1), 50-69.

Elbow, P. (1998). *Writing without teachers*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Fulkerson, R. (1979, December). Four philosophies of composition. *College Composition and Communication*, 30(4), 343-348.

Gere, A. R. (1986). Teaching writing: The major theories. In A. R. Petrosky & D. Bartholomae (Eds.) *The teaching of writing: Eighty-fifth yearbook of the national society for the study of education*, (30-48). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

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### **New Rhetoric Theory (Epistemic Rhetoric)**

The New Rhetoric Theory might as easily be labeled epistemic rhetoric because of its characteristics with regard to knowledge and truth and how it can (or perhaps cannot) be attained. The most well-recognized proponents of this model include Belgian philosophers Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, who revived the classical model of rhetoric and whose landmark book *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (1958/1991) paved the way for discussions regarding the ways in which truth can be known. Berlin (1987) comments that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca “called for a reinterpretation of Aristotle in positing a rhetoric of discovery” (p. 187). Others have pointed out that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s treatise suggests invigorating the field of rhetoric through the three branches of rhetoric. The three branches on which they focus their attention are judicial (forensic), deliberative (legislative), and epideictic (ceremonial or demonstrative) with a renewed focus on epideictic which classical rhetors used least. Jasinski (2001) avers that “[c]onceptual reflection on the category of epideictic discourse was especially intense during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (p. 210) largely due to

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's opinion that this "genre of oratory seemed to have more in connection with literature than argumentation" (as cited in Jasinski, 2001, p. 210).

American rhetorician and philosopher Kenneth Burke also has made important contributions to the conversation, declaring that the new rhetoric approach was a means to "rediscover rhetorical elements that had become obscured when rhetoric as a term fell into disuse" (as cited in Hochmuth, 1952, p. 135). In his consideration of audience, Burke categorizes five ways (act, scene, agent, agency, or purpose) in which different audiences might draw differing meanings from the same text. Covino (2001) points out that "Burke's pentad defines the set of relationships he identifies with *dramatism*" (p. 45). This concept parallels closely the idea that rhetoric is based on the communication triangle consisting of writer, audience, and context.

While some of the other theoretical approaches to teaching writing are well-defined and have easily identifiable attributes, the definition and scope of new rhetoric is much more ambiguous. Some critics have even questioned whether or not it should be considered a legitimate approach in teaching writing. Interestingly, Foster (1988) argues that composition's identity itself is "obscure" because it has footholds in "cognitive psychology, behavioral psychology, text linguistics, psycholinguistics, discourse theory, phenomenology, ethnography, information theory, and, of course, educational theory and practice" (p. 30). This breadth of disciplines tangentially associated with rhetoric and composition has lent an interdisciplinary quality to the field. Conversely, composition and rhetoric departments have experienced a kind of

legitimacy as a result of the new rhetorical philosophy as colleges and universities around the country have created autonomous divisions moving this subject out from under the purview of literature or speech departments.

On the other hand, Berlin, implicitly labeling new rhetoric as a “major pedagogical theory,” chooses to list it among only three other paradigms described in his important essay “Contemporary Composition.” In fact, Berlin himself states, “I am convinced that the pedagogical approach of the New Rhetoricians is the most intelligent and most practical alternative available, serving in every way the best interests of our students” (1982, p. 766).

One of the common characteristics that Berlin, among others, identifies is the strong connection that the new rhetoric view has to oral forms of communication. Like Aristotle’s view of rhetoric, on which much of the new rhetoric is based, communication includes both written and verbal texts and considerations of audience are crucial. This connection to an addressed audience emerges from the idea that truth is an outgrowth of language. Berlin (1982) writes, “[T]ruth is impossible without language since it is language that embodies and generates truth” (p. 774). In this quest for truth and knowledge, the new rhetorics embrace a return to the study and use of classical rhetoric with a focus on invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Invention is the search for something to express; arrangement is the ordering of one’s ideas; style is the artistic manner in which the ideas are presented; memory refers to aids that provide mental landmarks in the text; and delivery is how something is communicated. Because of the recent and rapid changes in the ways in

which people communicate in the modern world, a certain logic exists related to the revival of classical rhetoric. Thomas (2007) grants that “[t]he five canons of classical rhetoric...are present in everyday communication...especially in technological environments” (p. 1). These classical categories reflect a consciousness and sensitivity toward audience that are markedly different from concerns evident in such theories as those used in the current-traditional, expressivist, or process methods, where text and writer feature prominently. Further, like current-traditional instruction, new rhetoric follows a linear pattern because of its close association with the temporal nature of oral discourse.

Some scholars have observed that an ability to gauge an audience and its reception of a text is one of the cornerstones of new rhetoric. It is for this reason that new rhetoric demands a strong correlative connection between both reading literature and writing it. Hochmuth details Burke’s beliefs about literature, stating that “literature is designed to ‘do something’ for the writer and reader or hearer....[I]t is certainly designed to elicit a ‘response’ of some sort” (as cited in Hochmuth, 1952, p. 134). Hochmuth’s analysis also points out that, for Burke, who “rediscover[ed] rhetorical elements that had become obscured when rhetoric as a term fell into disuse” (as cited in Hochmuth, p. 135), the key term for new rhetoric was *identification* as opposed to *persuasion*, which represented the key term for Aristotelian rhetoric. In other words, Burke believed that in order to persuade audiences to have any kind of genuine response, the writer/speaker must “cause the audience to identify itself with the speaker’s interests; and the speaker draws on [this]

identification to establish rapport between himself and the audience” (as cited in Hochmuth, p. 136). This focus on audience figures prominently in the Common Core English Language Arts Standards. In fact, audience is mentioned six times in the 11-12 grade writing strand alone (National Governors Association, 2012, n.p.).

This kind of immediacy and relationship between writer/speaker and an addressed audience is reflected in Bitzer’s article, “The Rhetorical Situation.” Foster later paraphrases Bitzer’s claim, arguing “that discourse is essentially situational, generated not by a rhetor’s specific intent but by the situation of the rhetor and the audience” (as cited in Foster, 1988, p. 36). Bitzer claims that “[R]hetoric is a mode of altering reality...by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action” (Bitzer, 1992, p. 3). According to the new rhetoric theory, because neither situation nor audience are fixed, truth and reality must likewise be mutable; therefore, this theory can “provide students with techniques—heuristics—for discovering [truth], or what might more accurately be called creating it” (Berlin, 1982, p. 776).

The idea of rhetoric as simultaneously a separate discipline and an interdisciplinary one has contributed to a recognition of the intrinsic value in the philosophy and what it can offer writing students in both secondary and collegiate writing courses. There is an enlivened interest in the treatises of the likes of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintillian as well as the works of more modern figures. As a result, a more concerted effort can be seen to pay homage to the time-honored and tested forms passed down from antiquity.

**New Rhetoric Theory: Names to Remember**

Alton L. Becker	Jeanne Fahnestock	Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca
Anne E. Berthoff	Sister Miriam Joseph	Chaim Perelman
Wayne Booth	James Kinneavy	Kenneth L. Pike
Lloyd Bitzer	Charles Kneupper	Ivor A. Richards
Lil Brannon	Cy H. Knoblauch	Louise Rosenblatt
Kenneth Burke	Richard Larsen	Marie Secor
Francis Christensen	Janice Lauer	Stephen Toulmin
Edward P. J. Corbett	Frank Lentriccia	George Yoos
Frank D'Angelo		Richard E. Young

**New Rhetoric Theory: Classroom Applications**

Assignments that could be said to reflect the new rhetoric theory of teaching writing could arguably be drawn from the same assortment of activities more commonly associated with the classical theory. Any of the five canons of rhetoric could serve as the impetus for appropriate assignments here. However, invention is a particularly fruitful source of ideas because it is the phase in which writers can explore the gamut of ideas without censorship. Having a range of potential topics or perspectives from which to draw is a major step in developing a cogent argument.

Sentence combining is a rhetorical strategy that can help students improve their writing. Among its other benefits, this kind of exercise provides instruction in syntax and coherence. Featured in Daiker, Kerek, & Morenberg's *Sentence-Combining: A Rhetorical Perspective*, Peter Elbow (1985) writes:

One of the main reasons people have trouble with writing is that they feel helpless and not in control. Open sentence-combining exercises would increase their sense that they can find options and choose freely among



them—and reduce their sense that there is some hidden magic involved in producing effective syntax. (p. 234)

Andrea Lunsford (1979), pointing out that this technique “is based primarily based on the ancient practice of *imatatio*” (p. 43), argues it can help students learn to infer and analyze. She includes a sentence-combining exercise in her essay “Cognitive Development and the Basic Writer,” but she warns that despite their effectiveness, such “drills will fail unless [these exercises are used] to build inferential bridges” (p. 43). The strategy presents a particular sentence pattern followed by a list of simpler sentences. Students make choices about how to combine the simple sentences together to create a new one that is modeled after the sample sentence.

Also, asking students to explicitly consider their audiences is another goal for writing teachers following the new rhetoric philosophy. Having students complete a checklist or survey about audiences will help them select appropriate writing conventions that appeal to the members of specific discourse communities. Also, having students read a variety of texts and asking them to identify the types of audience members for whom such texts are meant is another way of helping students develop a sensitivity to audience needs.

Not only are considerations of audience important, but so is understanding the requirements demanded by the “natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigency which strongly invites utterance” (Bitzer, 1992, p.4). Students can benefit from exercises that help them select appropriate formats and conventions that suit the situations in which they write. By returning to the patterns inherent in the

classical branches of oratory (including judicial, deliberative, and epideictic forms of invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery), teachers can provide writing students a proven method with which to create meaningful texts.

Teaching writers to develop, both a recognition of style in other's writing and skill in manipulating style in their own, would be appropriate for the teacher using new rhetoric. An attention to elements of style in one's writing comes out of the tradition of belles-lettres, or fine writing. Murphy (2001) defines belletristic writing as "writing with 'taste' and aesthetic principles as the main features" (p. 298). Belletristic writing is not typically associated with creative writing or fiction, so writers should use this type of assignment exclusively in nonfiction writing, like essays or speeches. Teachers should be reminded here that such writing need not always have a serious tone. Belletristic writing can be a feature of parodies or satire. Since some students have trouble recognizing irony or satire in others' writing, having students create their own examples before a required reading assignment could provide the inspiration students need to identify this tone in the texts of others.

Literary devices and figures of speech like metaphor, simile, personification, metonymy, and synecdoche are tools teachers should help students both identify and use in all forms and styles of writing. Teachers can also have students craft narrations from various points of view to see how such perspectives can change meaning. Also, students should consider how varying their sentence or paragraph lengths; using a mixture of simple, complex, and compound sentences; or using more sophisticated vocabulary can affect a text's reception by its audience. With regard to vocabulary,

students should be asked to consider their word choice in terms of characteristics like assonance, consonance, and alliteration. Students can check these values by reading their work aloud (always a good final step in proofreading regardless of the writing theory). Along these lines, a simple strategy to check for variety is to have students make a list of the beginning words in each sentence of their paper. Then, by merely adding adjectives, prepositional phrases, or participials to the beginnings of selected sentences, students will find that they can eliminate some of their writing's redundancy.

### **New Rhetoric Theory: Supplemental Reading**

Berlin, J. A. (1982, December). Contemporary composition: The major pedagogical theories. *College English*, 44(8), 765-777.

Bitzer, L. (1992). The rhetorical situation. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Vol. 25, Selections. Vol. 1, (1-14). University Park, PA: Penn State University Press.

Perelman, C., & Olbrechts-Tyteca, L. (1991). *The new rhetoric*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press. (Original work published 1958)

### **Mimetic Theory**

In 1979, modeling his essay after Abrams' four critical theories, Richard Fulkerson lists four essential philosophies that he believes are crucial for good writing. Among them is mimetic theory which, by Fulkerson's own account, he describes synonymously as a theory and model. Gere (1986) suggests that the mimetic theory is one "which nearly every theorist expresses differently" (p. 42), and

she adds that “the paucity of texts in this category suggests the limited number of instructors who use it” (p. 43).

In his text *The Mirror and the Lamp*, M. H. Abrams (1971) lists and defines four theories which he calls pragmatic, expressive, objective, and mimetic. According to Abrams, mimetic theory occurs “[w]hen the universe shared by artist and auditor becomes the primary element and measure of success” (as cited in Fulkerson, 1979, p. 343). By using a mimetic approach to teaching writing, composition teachers should be able to help students master writing that shows a “clear distinction... between good writing and good thinking” (Fulkerson, 1979, p. 345). Fulkerson continues by identifying two reasons why today’s students write poorly: 1) students use illogical and incorrect assumptions, or logical fallacies, as the basis for their arguments; or 2) they “do not write well on significant matters because they do not know enough” (p. 345).

However, merely “knowing more” is not a sufficient basis to craft writing that is mimetic in nature. Keeseey (2003) defines mimesis as any writing practice that “emphasizes...the correspondence of the poem to [an] external reality” (p. 205). To say that a text is mimetic (which comes from the Latin word meaning imitation), means that the text could be described by such terms or phrases as *lifelike*, or *realistic*, or *true to life*. Crowley (1987) writes that “the artist locates and studies some aspect of the world which is then literally re-presented” (p. 19). Plato suggests that the aspects worthy of such consideration were “Ideas” that exist only as mental constructs, and in his famous metaphor of the ideal bed, Plato explains how a

carpenter makes a copy of the ideal bed to be followed by the painter whose painting is merely a mirror image of the bed, twice removed from the ideal. Abrams explains that Plato rejected poetry because it “represents appearance rather than truth, and nourishes...feelings rather than...reason” (1971, p. 9). Because Plato considered poetry, like the painting of the bed, to be a only reflection of what cannot be seen, he censured poetry in his perfect state “on the grounds that it gives a false view of the world” (Keesey, 2003, p. 206). Aristotle later restores poetry arguing that its cathartic effects renders it worthy of being included in the life of the citizens.

In turn, the students of rhetoric use the works of recognized masters as models for contemplation and emulation in the process of learning how to eventually create their own pieces. In fact, the study of contemporary masterpieces used three means by which the student obtained rhetorical skills: “theory, imitation, and practice” (Corbett, 1971, 243). As students move through this cyclic process, they also begin to develop and advance the mental image of the construct they wish to record in language. This kind of pre-writing activity helps students develop the kind of good thinking skills they need in order to produce good writing. For example, as students explore their topic, they hopefully discover the nuanced aspects of the reality they wish to communicate with their audience. Kytte (1970) states that only when students become knowledgeable about their subjects can they write “responsibly” (p. 380).

A decade after his 1979 influential essay on the four philosophies, Fulkerson follows up with further discussion in 1990. He explains that all four philosophies coexist, but some in the field may favor one philosophy over the others depending on

where they direct their emphasis. He clarifies by saying that one who privileges the text typically adopts a formalist view; those who privilege the writer correspond to an expressivist approach; and those who focus on the reader correspond to the rhetorical perspective. Teachers who most value the external reality are mimeticists and, in turn, probably also “value accuracy of information, sound logic, and ‘truth’ in prose” (Fulkerson, 1990, p. 409).

This philosophy comes into play when composition teachers encourage their students to apply logic to their writing by taking the time to think critically about expressing their ideas/thoughts. Susan Sontag once commented that, because of the strong correlation between effective thinking and effective writing, students should be shown the value of investing in critical thinking before transitioning into writing because the latter will never be merely “an act of fate.” Good writing is the result of deliberate effort and practice. Fulkerson advises teachers to both “teach students how to think...[and] help them learn enough about various topics to have something worth saying” (1979, p. 345).

On the other hand, despite the strong correlation between thinking and writing, Beardsley (1974) uncovers a paradox when he points out that thinking and writing are not synonymous. As an example, he explains that it may be possible to correct a writer’s language without correcting his or her ideas because people “can use words thoughtfully or unthoughtfully...but it does not follow that we can think without using words” (p. 746). Beardsley, writing about logic in composition, argues that students who fail to spend adequate effort in mentally preparing may find that

their writing is ambiguous. Since the desirable characteristics of mimetic writing include texts that are accurate, specific, and logical, writers need to think intently about the specific details of their topics. However, Beardsley warns teachers that “students will not be able to identify the logical relationships in their own writing unless we take some pains with clear thinking” (1951, p. 258).

Even though mimetic theory has much to offer in helping students write more realistically and more logically, Fulkerson concedes that “mimetic axiology has never been common in writing courses” (1990, p. 413). However, his research evidence supports employing the a type of mimetic teaching that includes the study of formal logic, specifically logical fallacies, as well as an approach that “stresse[s] writing [about texts from] anthologized sources” (Fulkerson, 1990, p. 413). The use of readers in first-year composition courses is not uncommon. Also, the forms that mimetic writing usually take are almost exclusively limited to expository and argumentative formats. However, Kytte (1970) distinguishes between writing that is simply *about* a topic rather than writing that makes an *assertion* about a topic. Approving of the latter, he states mimetic writing should “elaborate, and support and illustrate particular and specific *assertions* about a subject” (p. 385). Also mimetic writing should use sufficient detail and description to show the topic to the reader rather than simply tell the reader about it.

Finally, it should be noted here that, while mimesis literally means *imitation*, Imitation Theory, which is based on educational practices that include repetition and drill, should not be confused with the paradigm suggested by Fulkerson, where the

guiding principle is achieving realism in one's writing. By contrast, the classical pedagogy of mimesis is an approach to learning founded on the use of rhetorical models that serve as the prototype against which student behaviors and skills are measured. Students study these models, emulating the compositional characteristics through rote memorization and repeated practice, until they can exactly replicate the behaviors or skills inherent in the model. This imitative approach to learning is distinct and separate from the mimetic philosophy described by Richard Fulkerson and others in which the writer's most crucial goal is to communicate truthfully and realistically.

### **Mimetic Theory: Names to Remember**

Theodor W. Adorno  
 Erich Auerbach  
 Meyer H. Abrams  
 Monroe C. Beardsley  
 Walter Benjamin  
 Wayne Booth

Edmund Burke  
 Jacques Derrida  
 Northrup Frye  
 René Girard  
 Ray Kytle  
 William K. Wimsatt, Jr.

### **Mimetic Theory: Classroom Applications**

When composition students submit written work that reflects poor reasoning and illogic, Gere (1986) suggests three techniques instructors may use to help students craft texts that accurately describe the topic or situation. These techniques include students' doing "more research during the early stages of writing,... emphasi[zing] discovery procedures, [and] having student read authors who take different perspectives on the same topic" (p. 43). An important concept for neophyte writers is understanding the necessity for providing credible evidence for the claims



they make in their writing. Teachers can provide opportunities for students to develop an ability to distinguish between claims, which are really no more than opinions, and evidence, which is fact-based, objective support for those opinions. As students learn to differentiate between the claims they want their audiences to believe and the evidence that supports those claims, they can see places in their writing where their arguments fail for lack of substantiation. Also, students need to become familiar with the kinds of logical fallacies that detract from their arguments.

One way to help students become more perceptive with regard to recognizing logical fallacies is to use point-counterpoint essays as the basis for class discussions. By presenting pro and con texts on the same subject side-by-side and then challenging students to look for common logical fallacies in others' arguments, student will ideally become more perceptive about such logical errors in their own writing. Also, having students work in pairs or in groups to peer-review one another's writing solely for the purpose of ferreting out logical fallacies can help students focus better by only looking for one facet of writing at a time. If an instructional goal is to help students write more precisely and more logically, students need to know first what wrong thinking and writing look like.

Another perspective on writing mimetically requires students to consider their writing, asking if it is realistic. Similar to logic, realism should be a necessary attribute of collegiate writing, particularly in scholarly writing. Students need to consider whether their arguments are specific and measurable, rather than based solely on opinion. One way in which these kinds of questions might be considered is

through the teacher-student conference. Giving students the opportunity to talk their ideas out with their teacher, coach, or tutor often helps students begin to isolate places in their writing that could be made stronger in terms of realism.

An important element that helps a paper stay focused with regard to its realism is a well-crafted thesis sentence. Just as the rudder steers an ocean liner, a thesis directs the course of a paper. A strong, logical thesis couched in realistic terms helps an academic paper stay on track by directing what evidence can and should be included. Rosenwasser & Stephen (2012) provide a helpful checklist against which thesis sentences can be measured with tips for correcting weak theses. They list five kinds of weak thesis sentences, including the “thesis that makes no claim, the thesis that is an obvious statement, a thesis that restates conventional wisdom, a thesis based on personal opinion, and the thesis that makes an overly broad claim” (pp. 256-260). Sometimes students see problems in their writing but do not know how to correct them. Having a tip sheet like the one provided in *Writing Analytically* gives students tools that can guide them, both in the initial drafting and revision stages, to make their writing more realistic.

Finally, students need to have the opportunity to work with exemplary pieces of writing from which to identify characteristics of clear, logical thought transcribed on paper. Having the opportunity to mimic or mirror quality writing of master writers can provide students with examples of well-constructed, thoughtful writing. However, a caveat is necessary: teachers should use such mimicry sparingly because students

may emulate the writing of others to the degree that they never develop an authentic voice of their own.

### **Mimetic Theory: Supplemental Reading**

Fulkerson, R. (1979, December). Four philosophies of composition. *College Composition and Communication*, 30(4), 343-348. Retrieved from JSTOR database.

Fulkerson, R. (1990, December). Composition theory in the eighties: Axiological consensus and paradigmatic diversity. *College Composition and Communication*, 41(4), 409-429.

Gere, A. R. (1986). Teaching writing: The major theories. In A. R. Petrosky & D. Bartholomae (Eds.) *The teaching of writing: Eighty-fifth yearbook of the national society for the study of education*, (30-48). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

### **Social Epistemic Theory (Social-Construction)**

Writing instruction that reflects a social-epistemic (also variously called social-construction) approach to writing means that student learning “focuses on the process of knowing, based on the assumption that learning is a process of constructing knowledge” (Chapman, 2006, p. 16). Despite the fact that writing teachers pursue the lofty ambition of helping students write about important issues that affect them and those around them, teachers face challenges beyond merely helping students articulate their ideas. Bizzell (2009) warns teachers not to take students’ capacity to think for themselves for granted. She explains that teachers have

erroneously assumed students struggle with writing because they lack the communication skills to make themselves understood, but the reality is that their very “ideas [are] ill-considered” (p. 479). This lack of ability to conceptualize core ideas and values is what inspires teachers to turn to social-epistemic modes of teaching writing because, as Royer (1991) states, “writing [is]...one chief way in which new knowledge is attained” (p. 287).

In this approach, the writing teacher must recognize that writing is accomplished within a discourse community and that, as such, writing will be adaptive following the conventions of the community in which it occurs. In his seminal article “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class,” James Berlin defines the approach he calls social-epistemic as “a political act involving a dialectical interaction engaging the material, the social and the individual writer, with the language as the agency of mediation” (1988, p. 488). Berlin (1987), traces the social-epistemic approach back to the 1960s with the work of Robert L. Scott, who argued that only through dialectical rhetoric is knowledge created (as cited in Berlin, p. 168). Basing his argument on Stephen Toulmin’s *The Uses of Argument*, Scott (1967) makes the claim that knowledge emerges from “cooperative critical inquiry” and that “truth is not prior and immutable, but contingent” (p. 13). In other words, certainty and knowledge are not stationary but must be reconstructed each time new variables are added to the writer’s environment.

Following Scott’s reasoning, another way of describing the social-epistemic approach to teaching writing is that writing is contextual in terms of both time and

place. Different writers will perceive truth differently and in terms of their individual situations. The meanings for even basic concepts will be affected by the social, economic, and political forces in which writers find themselves. People must construct their own meanings and their own truths, and these truths will be a unique reflection of each individual's environment and experience. Scott concludes his argument by saying, "Man must consider truth not as something fixed and final but as something to be created moment by moment in the circumstances in which he finds himself and with which he must cope" (Scott, 1967, p. 17).

Teaching writing from the social-epistemic position means that teachers must understand that knowledge and truth are socially constructed entities. Students must discover, through their writing, what they know or do not know. Royer states that the "emphasis [should be] on the writer, what the composing process itself is like, and how the mind uses language" (Royer, 1991, p. 288). Also, such writing helps students to formulate and crystallize their ideas about meaning with regard to social, cultural, and historical knowledge and students construct their knowledge of these areas through their writing. In other words, writing is a self-teaching and self-learning process. Through their writing, students explore, question, and test their personal beliefs and values as well as develop opinions about the ways they will and should interact with others.

To that end, such issues as racism, sexism, and Marxism can be addressed and discussed, and students likely discover that issues of inequality and unequal allocation of resources and privileges are problems that occur both within and beyond their own

discourse communities. Students build the schema that defines these mental constructs through and because of their writing, and Bizzell believes that “[s]tudents can be encouraged to see themselves as moral agents” (as cited in Durst, 2006, p. 90). Writing that emerges from a social-epistemic perspective will always be political in nature, but students can neither completely know nor appreciate this relationship without the benefit of writing from such a mindset. Bizzell further argues that “our teaching task is not only to convey information but to also transform students’ whole world view” (Bizzell, 2009, p. 479).

Another aspect of social-epistemic thought includes the way in which language is viewed, because adherents to this paradigm value the social dimension of language. Bizzell comments that a “‘writing’ problem [is] a thinking problem” (2009, p. 479), and she echoes Immanuel Kant’s views, stating that “one learns to think only by learning a language and one can’t have an idea one doesn’t have a word for” (as cited in Bizzell, 2009, p. 483). In a social-epistemic approach to teaching writing, the instructor guides students by “looking for ways to explain discourse conventions...by find[ing] patterns of language use and reasoning that are common to all members of a society” (Bizzell, 2009, p. 483). Hobbs & Berlin (2001) observe that the social-epistemic rhetoric “emphasizes...the constitutive power of language in human activity” (p. 281). When working in a social-epistemic paradigm, teaching writing means helping students identify and describe concepts and ideas within their personal discourse community and then extrapolating from these experiences to make connections with those themes that are common to all humans. Writing can serve as

the vehicle with which to bridge the gap between discourse communities, and as students gain facility using the conventions appropriate to their own communities, they can eventually be shown ways to describe common experiences using different dialects and writing conventions.

It is important here to distinguish between a message to be communicated and the language or dialect with which that message is conveyed. Wheeler & Swords (2004) point out that “English teachers routinely equate [S]tandard English with ‘grammar,’ as if other language varieties and styles lack grammar, the systematic rule-governed backbone of language” (p. 471). These authors make a clear distinction between writing that includes language errors and students’ incorrectly using vernacular dialects in an academic discourse community. Put differently, the kinds of errors associated with common language are less about using incorrect grammar and more about using an inappropriate language convention. When teachers tell their students that using common or everyday dialects is the same as using incorrect grammar, such teachers fail to exploit the “language strengths of [their] urban learners” (Wheeler & Swords, p. 471). Instead of dismissing the students’ thoughts and ideas as faulty, teachers should help students articulate their ideas, not in their everyday vernacular, but in a dialect more appropriate to scholastic discourse. This shift between vernacular and academic dialects is called “code-switching,” a term first coined by Hans Vogt in his 1954 review of Uriel Weinreich’s 1953 book *Languages in Contact* (Cáccamo, 2002, p. 3). It is important to clarify that, in using

code-switching, the message itself does not change, only the manner in which the message is expressed.

Sometimes students (as well as teachers) mistakenly confuse an ineptitude with the use of academic writing conventions with an inability to develop and communicate meaning. Writing teachers should help students recognize the fact that ideas and messages can transcend social, cultural, and intellectual boundaries, and although the dialects and conventions of writing may change, the students' message remains constant. Strictly speaking, students need to learn how to move between "the language they unconsciously use [and] the Standard English that is appropriate in school" (Turner, p. 61). Authors Wheeler & Swords argue that teachers should help students use "code-switching," by teaching "students to recognize the grammatical differences between home speech and school speech so that they are then able to choose the language style most appropriate to the time, place, audience, and communicative purpose" (as cited by Rickford, 2006, p. 197).

It should come as no surprise, then, that there is a natural correlation between students' common language and the social issues that concern them. Since there is a pluralistic nature to the social-epistemic approach to writing, students may seek to identify and describe injustices and inequities in their community and the world beyond, causing their writing on such topics to have a distinctly activist quality. For this reason, writing assignments that emerge from a social-epistemic view will necessarily be time sensitive in that, as the social, cultural, economic, and political landscape changes, so will the topics about which students may write. Writing



teachers, for example, might consider having students extend their audience by writing letters to editors of local newspapers or to community leaders on current voting issues. When students are invested in their topics, they gain a certain sense of empowerment and writing becomes important as a personal statement. Other kinds of writing assignments could include writing persuasion essays on topics about racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice and injustice. When students feel passionate about their subject matter, they are likely to become emboldened to express themselves in their written and verbal communication. Being afforded an opportunity to capture and capitalize on such emotion is one of the benefits of using a social-epistemic approach.

One important comment regarding the decline of the persuasive essay should be included here. While the classical persuasive essay appealed to audiences through emotion or the author's credibility, the new core language arts state standards, which make a clear distinction between persuasive and analytical essays, reflect a preference for essays whose appeals are based on logic and reason, such as the argument, exposition, or narration. In fact, despite acknowledging the usefulness of persuasion in activities that include some form of marketing or publicity, the new common core standard's guidelines encourage teachers to focus more of their attention and emphasis on the argument essay over the persuasive one.

With regard to students' affiliation with subjects and themes that resonate for them in a personal way, it is important to note that social-epistemic teaching methods lend themselves readily to collaborative learning models. Bruffee (1984) argues that

“knowledge is socially justified belief” but that students must “loosen ties to the knowledge communities they currently belong to and join another” (p. 651). He goes on to present several options for teaching writing in collaborative settings where students can learn from one another through conversation about relevant issues which can then be amplified in the context of a global community. Bruffee concludes by stating that “teach[ing] expository writing...involves demonstrating to students that they know something only when they can explain it in writing to the satisfaction of the community of their knowledgeable peers” (p. 652). For Bruffee, teaching writing is not simply about “reinforc[ing] the values and skills [that students] begin with” but more importantly a process of reacculturation.

As a final note, it should be noted that Maxine Hairston (2007) adds a precautionary note to this discussion for writing teachers who make use of political topics for pedagogical purposes. In her “highly controversial” essay, “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,” Hairston warns that, rather than pursuing personal agendas, writing teachers must both keep student writing at the center of the course and stay within their own areas of expertise. She adds that courses whose focus shifts to “racial discrimination, economic injustices, and inequalities of class and gender” should be taught only by “qualified faculty who have the depth of information and historical competence that such critical social issues warrant” (p. 483). In other words, the focus in the social-epistemic writing class should always be on the writing and not issues.

**Social Epistemic: Names to Remember**

David Bartholomae	Lisa Ede	Richard M. Ohmann
Charles Bazerman	Nan Elsasser	C. H. Knoblauch
Alton Becker	Theresa Enos	Kenneth Pike
Ann Bertoff	Lester Faigley	Hephzibah Roskelly
Patricia Bizzell	Janice Lauer	Ira Shor
Lil Brannon	Karen Burke Lafever	John Trimbur
Linda Brodkey	Min-Zhan Lu	R. Ross Winterowd
Kenneth Bruffee	Andrea Lunsford	Kohn Schilb
Gertrude Buck	Elaine Maimon	Fred Newton Scott
Kenneth Burke	Harold C. Martin	Kenneth Young
John Clifford	Carolyn Miller	Joseph Villiers
George Dillon	Greg Myers	Victor Vitanza

**Social Epistemic: Classroom Applications**

Students should be encouraged to write about issues that are important to them and that reflect their unique experiences and histories. Controversial topics that explore meaningful debates about sexism, gender roles, rape, prostitution, sexual objectification in the media, or the effects of sexism on men will likely offer students a chance both to explore and express what they already know about these subjects. In addition to exploring sexism, other timely subjects such as racism, the environment, and violence may allow students the chance to discuss difficult issues in a safe environment. Students should be encouraged to reveal points they find interesting, surprising, or particularly compelling. It is also a good idea for the teacher to have students consider opposing views by using complementary pieces with the goal of students' developing an attitude of objectivity in their writing. Teachers might consider having one student write an account from one perspective while another writes from the opposite one. Students can then share their writing and discuss how

and why they chose different details, different forms of expression, and conveyed different versions about the same issue.

Another significant assignment in social epistemic theory is to have students write a literacy narrative, documenting their growth and development as a literate person. Students should include the specific details that shape them as both readers and writers and/or include mention of the people who influenced their views about what it means to be literate. Rosenwasser & Stephen (2012) argue that the literacy narrative “offers [students] a good way to begin exploring...ways of thinking about writing and about [themselves] as writer[s]” (p. 20). They describe the procedure suggesting that teachers might have students begin the draft with fifteen minutes of prewriting in class. Students should “[d]escribe what [they] now take to be an especially formative experience in how [they] came to be the writer [they are] today” (p. 20). Students are further asked to identify specific writing “practices and ideas [that have resulted from] this experience” (p. 20).

Another insightful exercise is one requiring students to write an expository essay that explores the intellectual landscape that extends beyond the mere definition of a unique topic with which they are intimately familiar. Students who write an essay explaining a concept or idea they know well to someone who does not should find that they further solidify their knowledge about that topic. It is important to clarify that such essays should not describe a process or procedure, but rather develop and analyze a concept. This activity requires writers to question and examine the chosen concept in such a way that writers move beyond previous intellectual boundaries.

Giving students opportunities to write in forums where their work has an actual connection to some real-life audience has a timeliness that is associated with social epistemic rhetoric. For instance, if students are encouraged to write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper on an environmental topic of importance in their community, students will not only come to understand a real-life application but can, at the same time, learn correct formats and conventions for a business letter. Teachers should have students actually send such letters and the reactions by students whose letters are published or answered will provide opportunities for discussing the responses for writers who see their work in print.

Because of the important connection between language and meaning, writing teachers should focus on the code-switching technique Wheeler & Swords call “flipping the switch” (as cited in Turner, 2009, p. 62). Turner argues that students need “to see that what is appropriate to one setting may not be appropriate in another” (p 62). Turner suggests the composition teacher create an online blog where students can express their ideas but must decide for themselves which code is most appropriate for conveying their message. Helping students to develop a good sense of language awareness is becoming increasingly important as the population of digital natives continues to grow.

Turner also suggests students use checklists or logs where students, as they practice code-switching to academic writing, can record errors of Standard English such as text-speak abbreviations, phonetic spellings, capitalization, and punctuation. Students can complete such record-keeping individually or in peer groups and this

activity helps students develop a sense of language awareness. By considering the impact of language on communication, students gain greater facility in transliterating “their primary discourse into the discourse of school” (p. 63).

### **Social Epistemic: Supplemental Reading**

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Bizzell, P. (2009). Cognition, convention, and certainty: What we need to know about writing. in Miller, S. (Ed.). *The Norton book of composition studies*. (479-501). New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

Ede, L. (1989). Writing as a social process: A theoretical foundation for writing centers? *Writing Center Journal* 9(2), 3-13.

Hairston, M. (2007). Diversity, ideology, and teaching writing. In T. R. Johnson (Ed.) *Teaching composition: Background readings* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). (475-491). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Royer, D. J. (1991, Spring). New challenges to epistemic rhetoric. *Rhetoric Review*, 9(2), 282-297.

Scott, R. L. (1967). On viewing rhetoric as epistemic. *Central States Speech Journal* 18. 9-17.

### **Cognitive Theory**

Composition researchers frequently draw on the hypotheses of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Alexander Luria (developmental psychologists) to describe the cognitive theory of writing and its focus on the mental activity in which writers

engage as they create printed texts. In fact, the cognitivists freely adopt the vocabulary of psychologists and sociologists to describe the way they believe writers write. Alternatively, teachers should note at the outset that, while most cognitivists use the term *process* in their discussions about the mental acts writers use, the cognitive theory is not synonymous with the process theory of writing. More specifically, those who identify themselves with the process theory describe the writing process as a series of stages through which a writer moves, but by contrast, the cognitive interpretation of process refers to the kinds of mental activity writers consciously or subconsciously conduct in order to produce a tangible, print document.

Pointing out how cognitive theory differs from other writing theories, Royar states:

One aspect of cognitive theory not present in the other schools of thought is a reliance on positivistic techniques to study the way writers approach text and learning to write. For example, cognitivists might set writing tasks before subjects (i.e. writers) and record their responses to the prompt, including their mutterings, protocols about their planning processes, and the pauses between words as they write them. (R. Royar, personal communication, August 1, 2012)

As quasi-scientists, cognitive theorists list several mental functions that writers must accomplish, and these functions dimly parallel the stages process theorists describe. For instance, writers must first perceive the nature of their writing task in a step that corresponds to invention or pre-writing. In order to begin, the writer “expends mental

energy to search his storehouse of knowledge, concepts, attitudes, and beliefs, selecting those that have the potential to contribute to the topic area of his message” (Stallard, 1976, p. 183).

Flower & Hayes (1981) themselves define the cognitive writing process as “a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing” (p. 366). They further state that these processes have a “hierarchical, highly embedded organization,...reflect goal-directed thinking,... and are created by both generating high level goals and supporting sub-goals” (p. 366). They dispute the “stage [development] descriptions” of process theorists, arguing that they “model the growth of the written product, not the inner process of the person producing it” (p. 367). Flower & Hayes meticulously describe their cognitive model as having three major tasks or processes: planning, translating, and reviewing (all overseen by a monitoring process). Planning and reviewing are further divided into sub-processes with planning’s consisting of the act of generating ideas, organizing, and goal setting; and reviewing’s consisting of evaluating and revising. These processes and subprocesses are extremely fluid and can be iterative or occur “as simultaneous or parallel operations” (Stallard, 1976, p. 184).

As writers plan and generate ideas, they scan through available memory for relevant information; however, this retrieval sub-process is not limited to the writer’s mind alone but can also include any external informational sources consulted by the writer. Stallard states, “Many writers perform this search subconsciously...[as they] manipulate the variables of knowledge, attitude, concepts, and beliefs in a...concrete



way” (1976, p. 183). As writers organize, they must “identify categories...and search for subordinate ideas” (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 372); they also identify a sequence which will logically order their ideas and distinguish between levels of importance in order to make decisions about appropriate presentation patterns. Flower & Hayes point out that goal-setting is an under-researched mechanism but is nonetheless important in the cognitive process. Goal-setting sub-processes may reflect either “procedural” or “substantive” concerns but are always created, developed, and revised by the writers themselves (p. 372).

During translation, the writer must typically convert information from a symbolic system, which might consist solely of images, into a linguistic or semantic structure. Since these images are usually abbreviated, they “sometimes leave gaps when they are written down” (Everson, 1991, p. 10). Put another way, translation is not a seamless event because the requirement to add writing conventions such as syntax, punctuation, and grammar make the move from mind to paper much more complicated. Finally, this entire process is supervised by the writer as monitor who “determines when the writer moves from one process to the next” and poor fluency is almost always the result of a lack of an “executive routine” (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 374).

Lunsford (1979), using Benjamin Bloom’s 1956 vocabulary, considers analysis and synthesis (levels four and five on the cognitive domain<sup>5</sup>) as they apply to

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<sup>5</sup> Bloom’s Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain was revised in 2001. The revised levels are now: 1) Remember, 2) Understand, 3) Apply, 4) Analyze, 5) Evaluate, and 6) Create.

the writing process, but adds that she believes most of her students “have not attained that level of cognitive development which would allow them to form abstractions or conceptions” (p. 18). Others have observed the fact that even college students need more time to achieve physiological and intellectual maturity in order to master some of the tasks that writing teachers demand of them. Citing personal experience, Lunsford thinks this observation is an important one because, without recognizing the cognitive limitations of composition students, the teacher may inadvertently set students up for failure by giving them assignments that have unrealistic goals. Lunsford explains that Piaget’s concrete-operational stage and Vygotsky’s true-concept formation stage represent the apex of cognitive development, but she believes that many writing students are still growing into those levels and their immaturity explains why they have difficulty with even basic writing skills. Invoking Polanyi, Lunsford argues that this gap between students’ actual skills and the skills necessary for competency as writers requires teachers to mentor students as apprentices because students will “learn by doing *with* a recognized ‘master’ or ‘connoisseur’ better than by studying or reading about abstract principles” (1979, p. 40).

Another aspect of cognitive process theory has to do with the way psychologists view the use of internal and external language, particularly as these apply to composition. In contrast with Piaget, Vygotsky has argued that the external egocentric babble of youngsters is a precursor to a person’s transitioning to more sophisticated inner self-talk that contributes to better and more efficient planning. However, most students have not fully matured to this level and still need the benefit

of “talking out” their ideas. Everson (1991 ) argues that “students write fuller narratives, more detailed descriptions, and clearer expositions when they are given the opportunity to talk over their ideas before they begin to write” (p. 9). Flower & Hayes agree, invoking E.M. Forster’s oft-quoted statement: “How can I tell what I think until I see what I say?” For them, as for many others, writing is a means for learning through discovery and its “purposefulness...is based on a beautifully simple, but extremely powerful principle....[P]eople regenerate or recreate their own goals in the light of what they learn” (Flower & Hayes, p. 381). The cognitive theory is one focused on the private world of the writer and the rational elements of composition.

### **Cognitive Theory: Names to Remember**

Carl Bereiter  
James Britton  
Noam Chomsky  
Linda Flower  
Lisa Ede  
John Hayes

Andrea Lunsford  
Lee Odell  
Jean Piaget  
Michael Polanyi  
Marlene Scardamalia  
Lev Vygotsky

### **Cognitive Theory: Classroom Applications**

Because the cognitive writing teacher must acknowledge the importance of inner speech, the social aspect of teaching writing must also be emphasized. Giving students opportunities to engage in class discussions, peer- and partner-review, one-on-one mentoring, tutoring, and personal reflection is essential. One helpful essay assignment is to ask students to document their various writing procedures in reflective journals. Using the personal journal, students may review the areas in which they both falter or excel, allowing them the chance to mediate their writing by

working on weaknesses and capitalizing on strengths. When students are asked to describe their research strategies, prewriting rituals, or revision and editing techniques, students often think explicitly about *what* and *how* they write.

Another approach that reflects a cognitivist bent is using a writing workshop model and having the teacher participate in the writing process along with the students. When teachers place themselves at the level of their students, sharing their own writing processes as an equal member of a writing community, students can become empowered as partners. Also, students have the benefit of seeing that all writers share common struggles and this realization helps students eliminate some of the defeatist and incorrect beliefs about who can and cannot write.

Concept maps, wherein students create a graphic representation of the concepts they will discuss and the relationship among and between them, is a way of recording the mental visualization that goes before writing tasks. The more complete the concept map, the more thoroughly students can explore and articulate their topic. Students can create their own concept map or teachers can download and distribute one of the many generic templates available on the internet. Venn diagrams, brain maps and clusters, and matrices can help students think about their topic and its organization before writing about it. For some, the act of creating a graphic image of their topic helps them to think more clearly about the concepts and ideas they wish to detail in their writing.

Types of writing that help students get in touch with internalized voices are also useful tools. Bazerman (2009) says, "The autobiography and personal diary are

widely recognized as creating new perspectives on the relations and events in our lives” (p. 279). Asking to students to document their own writing progress by making a daily record of writing tasks, both completed and yet to be finished, helps students both track their efforts and identify strengths and weaknesses in their writing process. Writing about journals, Rog Hiemstra (2001) makes the claim that “as an instructional or learning tool, . . . psychologist[s] began seeing their value . . . in enhancing growth and learning” (p. 19). When students are required to write down their thoughts, they will begin to converse with themselves and others about the topics they describe. As the focus of personal journaling shifts to one’s writing process, writers should begin to recognize familiar patterns and preferences.

It is probably safe to say that there is no single, clearly defined series of steps skilled writers follow in their writing process. Also, researchers further suspect that writers themselves do not accurately describe what actually occurs as they write. As Emig discovered in her 1971 landmark study about students’ writing processes, when researchers try to pinpoint specific strategies skilled writers use, they find “writers’ comments on how they write assume many modes” (p. 229). Because the process is multi-level and complex, the teacher using cognitive theory is encouraged to explore a variety of writing scenarios so that, as students’ mental processes differ, multiple avenues are opened to them in order that they might find one compatible with their own learning style.

Writing skill seems to be correlated to reading ability. Based on her thirty years’ experience, Anne Ketch (2005) observed that skilled readers consistently

exhibited the following behaviors: they make connections, question as they read, read using mental imagery, determine importance, make inferences, retell and synthesize, and monitor and correct meaning (pp. 8-9). What was especially important in her study was her discovery that conversation about what readers had read was critical in their ability to make sense and meaning out of their experience. The teacher who wishes to capitalize on these reader skills and translate them into writing skills should use conversations as a mechanism for helping students figure out what they want to say. Such class discussions must be specifically designed and well-planned in order to elicit the meaningful kinds of reader behaviors from writers.

### **Cognitive Theory: Supplemental Reading**

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Flower, L., & Hayes, J.R. (1981, December). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication*, 32(4), 365-387.

Lunsford, A. A. (1979, September). Cognitive development and the basic writer. *College English*, 41(1), 38-46.

Stallard, C. (1976, May). Composing: A cognitive theory. *Composition and Communication*, 27(2), 181-184.

### **Post-Process Theory**

John Trimbur first coined the term *post-process* in his 1994 review of texts by Bizzell, Knoblauch, Brannon, and Spellmeyer. In his critique, he claims that the books describe what has come to be called the "social turn" of the 1980s, a post-

process, post-cognitivist theory and pedagogy that represent literacy as an ideological arena and composing as a cultural activity by which writers position and reposition themselves in relation to their own and others' subjectivities, discourses, practices, and institutions (p. 109).

However, to call post-process a theory is antithetical to its definition. Gary Olson (2002) states, "Post-process does not refer to any readily identifiable configuration of commonly agreed-on assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that would constitute a paradigm" (p. 424). Additionally, post-process proponents argue that, not only is it impossible to teach writing, but that there is no actual content or subject matter to be taught. Breuch (2002) claims that "writing is not a system or process and therefore cannot be taught as such" (p. 123).

Further, in the same way that the process theorists created the notion of a current-traditional theory so that they had a theory against which to measure themselves, post-process theorists react to process theory in the same way. In other words, a number of researchers have cited Pullman's observation that the "expression current-traditional rhetoric does little more than create a daemon for the sake of expelling it" (as cited in Breuch, 2002, p. 132) as an analogy for the similar contemporary reaction to the process movement. In response against the process movement, post-processes' major criticism is that teaching process is an activity—not content. Further Breuch points out that many post-process adherents argue that there is no singular, unique process to writing, but rather many. Breuch writes, "I suggest that there is no identifiable post-process that we can concretely apply to writing

classrooms” (p. 120). She goes on to argue that the writing act cannot be “predicted in terms of how students will write (through certain formulas or content) or how students will learn (through certain approaches)” (p. 133). This idea of writing’s indeterminacy is one of the characteristics that causes critics to complain that there is no theoretical basis for contemplating a post-process pedagogy.

In the introduction to his edited anthology on post-process, Thomas Kent (1999) outlines three principles inherent in post-process thought: “1) writing is public; 2) writing is interpretive; and 3) writing is situated” (p. 1). The first criterion, that writing is public, is an outcome of the belief that writing occurs during the move toward “communicative interaction” that results in making meaning. Further, this meaning should not be construed as the “product of an individual” but rather the situated statements that come about because of a writer’s desire to be understood by a particular audience. It is not the message that is as important as the interaction. Breuch alludes to Donald Davidson’s use of the word *triangulation* to identify “this public interaction” that demonstrates a “connection between language users and the world” (as cited in Breuch, p. 134). This idea, then, rejects the goal of students’ achieving mastery that is implicit in other theories of teaching writing. When composition teachers accept the fact that no one *ever* masters writing, they will perceive that all writers fall somewhere along an undulating continuum where the teaching of writing cannot be forced into a pedagogy that expects students to achieve mastery of any given skill set. Royar observes, “This view seems to cause problems for teachers when they are expected to raise all students to a standard” (R. Royar,



personal communication, August 2, 2012). Specifically, the notion that there can never be a single established criterion or benchmark for measuring writing achievement argues against the attitude of those academic administrators who expect teachers to teach a given skill set such that it can be mastered.

Kent's second criterion, writing is interpretive, "suggests that meaning is not stable" (as cited in Breuch, p. 136). Put differently, one must relinquish the belief that one can actually discover either knowledge or meaning (Breuch, p. 134). The post-process teacher understands that there is no consistent or foundational knowledge that undergirds the individual act of writing. The post-process teacher also understands that any act of writing is contingent on the specific circumstances that prompt it, and because contexts naturally vary, the conditions under which the writer writes can never be known or predicted (Breuch, p. 138).

Breuch, Kent, and others are quick to add that they "do not reject the instruction of system-based content such as grammar" so long as it is understood "that these skills do not themselves comprise the writing act and that we cannot reduce the writing act to a system that can be taught" (Breuch, p. 122). Another way of making this claim is to say that they "do not suggest that teaching writing is impossible; [only] that teaching writing *as a system* is impossible" (Breuch, p. 123). Royar states,

There is an unintended level of irony in this school of thought. Graduate students in the last decade who claim to be post-process will often align with the Greek sophists. However, the view that writing cannot be taught aligns

better with Plato and Socrates than it does with Gorgias. (R. Royar, personal communication, August 2, 2012)

The rejection of writing as a closed system is seen in the writing of Heard (2008), who corroborates the idea that the act of writing cannot be codified when he writes “the very nature of written communication has been misunderstood...as a ‘closed system’ that might be eventually captured through enough training” (p. 284). He reaffirms the concept that writing is not a skill that can either be taught or mastered.

One of the most salient features of post-process philosophy that emerges from this idea that writing cannot be taught is the fact that the act of writing is paralogical. Kent (1993) defines paralogy as:

the feature of language-in-use that accounts for successful communication interaction....[and] refers to the uncodifiable moves we make when we communicate with others....[T]he term describes the unpredictable, elusive, and tenuous decisions or strategies we employ when we actually put language to use. (p. 3)

These notions that writing is anti-foundational and paralogical are important to the model Kent describes in his post-process paradigm. On the other hand, critics often point to these aspects, arguing that they impede pedagogical efficacy in the post-process classroom. It is important to note that post-process theorists do not suggest jettisoning writing activities and assignments. Rather they believe that adjustments might be made on the basis of philosophical attitudes alone that make the writing course more relevant and effective for contemporary students. The idea of mentoring

and one-on-one interaction, similar to expressivism, is crucial in the post-process writing class because of its dialogic nature. Additionally, the resources of the institutions' writing center might be incorporated to reinforce the personal and conversational interaction that reflects post-process thought. The important element is the fact that the writing teacher steps down from having all of the authority in the classroom in order to empower student writers. When teachers use mentoring and tutorial approaches, students will typically feel more confident and, as a result, assume greater responsibility for their own writing.

According to post-process theory, approaches to teaching writing need to shift from content-based instruction, such as current-traditional as well as process-based instruction, because some of the characteristics of the post-process philosophy of writing are that it is indeterminate, public, interpretative, and situated. Breuch describes this mindset as a necessary choice for “‘letting go’ of the desire to find a *right* way to learn and teach writing” (Breuch, p. 141) [emphasis mine].

In the end, the discussion of post-process as theory may be moot. Heard (2008) laments the fact that “postprocess has essentially disappeared from recent critical discussion in composition circles” (p. 285). There is still a dearth of scholarly writing on post-process theory that Heard allows may be due to misperception of the tenets of the philosophy, but giving empirical evidence from his own classroom experience, he seeks to rally support for an approach to teaching writing he believes still has merit.

**Post-Process: Names to Remember**

Roland Barthes

Patricia Bizzell

Lil Brannon

Lee-Ann M. K. Breuch

Donald H. Davidson

Sidney I. Dobrin

Stanley Fish

Michel Foucault

Paulo Freire

E. Kay Halasek

Thomas Kent

Cy. H. Knoblauch

Gary Olson

Joseph Petraglia

David Russell

Kurt Spellmeyer

John Trimbur

Lynn Worsham

Victor Vitanza

**Post-Process Theory: Classroom Applications**

In his essay "What Should We Do with Postprocess Theory?," University of North Texas English professor Matthew Heard (2008) explains that writing teachers need not forego traditional kinds of writing assignments and activities in order to follow post-process philosophies. What is key, however, is making sure that the philosophical impetus that drives the assignments is not one of achieving mastery since post-process theory denies that mastery is even possible. However, there are traditional activities through which students learn. For the post-process advocate, learning and teaching are mutually exclusive, so teachers must encourage students to see the writing class as a place where they must take ownership of their own learning process, rather than expect the teacher to deposit knowledge in the act Freire calls "banking." When students teach themselves how to continuously analyze their writing instead of trying to achieve mastery, they will be working under assumptions that are appropriate to post-process. Writers of all ages and levels must recognize the fact that writing is never actually mastered and that learning to write better is a

lifelong pursuit. Instead of learning formats and conventions, the post-process writer should rather question them as part of the move toward analysis (Heard, 2008, p. 299). Heard also suggests that writing instructors should “expose students to as many different communicative scenarios as possible” (p. 288) because academic writing is not the only form students will need to learn.

Writing activities in the post-process approach should involve activities and topics students will take with them after the class has ended. When students write about the messages in cartoons, advertisements, popular songs, and television programs, they will use skills that will go with them in life. Students could be given opportunities to write to teacher prompts but be free to use a style, tone, and format that plays to their interests and skill set. For instance, students in a freshman writing course could write a police report, legal brief, marketing pitch, or psychological profile on the topic of a Poe short story depending on whether their major was criminal justice, forensic science, business, or psychology.

This kind of approach to learning is best embodied in project-based learning, which William Bender (2012) defines as a learning approach that uses “authentic, real-world projects...to teach students academic content in the context of working cooperatively to solve the problem” (p. 1). Project-based learning is intended to engage students to such a degree that the learning and pleasure associated with that learning stays with the student for life. The steps in the project-based-learning model begin by articulating a driving question, then designing a project plan, creating a

schedule, mapping project progress, assessing the outcome, and finally evaluating the experience.

Stanley (2012) suggests, that when designing a project-based learning assignment, teachers should understand that, in order to fit the model, all of the following twelve essential characteristics must be present:

1. student choice
2. open-ended question
3. a real-world problem
4. lack of teacher prescribed activities
5. student-led constructive investigation
6. authentic assessment
7. student-drive time management
8. student-drive learning
9. collaborative learning
10. student autonomy
12. end product fashioned after a real-world model (p. 2)

By its very nature, the project-based learning assignment has a hefty writing component, but because the project is student and interest driven, students are more than willing to exert a strong writing effort.

Lastly, it is important for the post-process writing teacher to exploit the writing knowledge students already have. Often students understand the concepts they wish to describe but simply lack the vocabulary with which to express their

ideas. As student writers mature both mentally and emotionally, they may find it easier to express themselves, but writing is never static. In the post-process model, writers need to understand the paralogic nature of writing by understanding that it cannot be predicted or codified. This quality means that even what a writer knows about writing today will not necessarily be the same in the future. Writers often do not really know what they will write until they see the words inscribed on the page. It is necessary to understand the fact that meaning in writing is temporal and that, while a text makes sense in one context, its meaning may change over time. Helping students to recognize that there is no single, rigid, absolutely correct way to craft a text frees students to explore their own best ways of expressing themselves.

#### **Post-Process Theory: Supplemental Reading**

Breuch, L. M. K. (2002). Post-process “pedagogy”: A philosophical Exercise. *JAC*, 22(1), 119-150.

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## Chapter 5: Teaching Writing in the Future

The knowledge base, reasons for writing, and media platforms that writing uses are changing at rates that are increasing exponentially. Composition teachers face challenges their forebears never saw coming. As a result of fast changes and new challenges, writing teachers need to be flexible enough to adapt to the needs of the next generation, recognizing that, all the while, such needs exist in a constant state of flux. Even though the landscape of writing pedagogy is ever-changing, the mantle of responsibilities and duties that writing teachers don has not changed. Students still need to be equipped to navigate the kinds of writing situations that they will face in their professional and personal lives and writing teachers have an obligation to help students realize their full potential as writers. One of the ways in which teachers can accomplish this noble goal is by staying on the crest of innovation through conversing, studying, reading, and ultimately being writers themselves. This notion of teachers' being writers melds with the idea that teachers can collaborate with their students as partners in the learning process. More and more writing teachers are embracing the workshop model in their classrooms and students will benefit when they can recognize that their own writing has value and merit. However, engendering this kind of reflective response in student writers means that composition teachers cannot stand still in the face of changes such as the astonishing number of advances in technology.

While many instructional needs for 21<sup>st</sup> century students exist, some of the most powerful sources of challenge for writing teachers are the ways in which



technology is impacting the way people write. For instance, print formats as a medium for writing are losing prominence as “the norm.” In her book, *Writing Alone and With Others*, writing workshop advocate Pat Schneider (2003) explains, “Those who do not write stories and poems on solid surfaces tell them, sing them, and, in so doing, write them *on the air*” ( p. xix). The ways in which modern students tell their stories is as varied as the students themselves and, in addition to print, will include images of sound and sight.

With the proliferation of speech-to-text and text-to-speech computer applications, the lines between reading, writing, and speaking have become blurred. Writing teachers can, and do, encourage composition students to use these software programs to construct first drafts of their writing. For instance, students, who are habitually overtaken by writer’s block, are typically energized when they begin to orally dictate their writing using a speech-to-text application. Then, using careful editing of their transcribed text, students who have previously struggled with the process of simply getting the words on paper, find that they have quickly moved past the difficult drafting phase.

In her doctoral dissertation at MIT, *Speaking on the Record*, Tara Rosenberger coins words like *spriting* (speak + write) and *talkument* (a spoken document) to describe the novel ways in which modern young people communicate. She argues that being confined to print results in an unequal distribution of communicative power. In her dissertation, she introduces “a counterpart to writing in a spoken

modality” (p. 2) and in so doing, opens a new realm of communicative opportunities for the participants in her study.

Pioneer and visionary Nicholas Negroponte saw the creative and educational potential for electronic media long before many of his peers. In his 1984 TED Talk, Negroponte made several astonishing predictions about computers including the advent of electronic books (now easily available via Amazon’s *Kindle* and Barnes & Noble’s *Nook*), touch screens and service kiosks, branching programs and adaptive learning, and face-to-face teleconferencing such as today’s *Skype* or Pearson’s *Elluminate*. In his lecture, Negroponte challenges his listeners by posing a rhetorical question. He states, “The key to the future of computers in education is right there, and it is: when does it mean something to a child?” (1984). Christopher Anson (2003) admits that there may be concerns “that faculty are not attentive to the frenzy of innovation in computer technology,” and reactions include “delight, resistance, apathy, or outrage” (p. 799). The truth is, though, that many writing instructors embrace ways that enable today’s digital natives to express themselves through the written word.

Computer-based instruction is another avenue open to writing instructors. Fred Kemp (2000), writing specifically about teaching composition, outlines six functions of computer-based instruction including the following:

1. computers could grade essays
2. computers could provide self-paced drill and practice exercise
3. computers could provide interactive invention heuristics

4. computers could provide powerful word processing capability
5. computers could provide...much greater student-to-student interaction
6. computers, using hypertext,...could closely mirror the associate properties of the brain (pp. 208-209)

Kemp compares and contrasts former and more recent modes of writing and argues that today's writing teachers must use the kinds of "conversations that are most familiar and important to students" (p. 159). Anson has argued that using computer-mediated writing and instruction has made concerns like the type of paper and where one should place a staple meaningless for today's composition students. On the other hand, giving students tools like speech-to-text and grammar tutorial platforms like *Grammarly*, fits better into the modern student's world view.

Additionally, the ways in which digital natives choose to express themselves go beyond even the written word. Christel & Hayes (2003) describe the various modes of communication open to today's students while reminding their audience that modern "advancements in the teaching of reading, writing, and speaking...would have been the proverbial pipe dream" (p. 217) for writing teachers who worked in classrooms in the early 1900s. Nonetheless, technological developments provide students the opportunity to communicate through, not only the written word, but through a plethora of audio and visual media and platforms. For instance, it is not uncommon to see computer-based instruction (CBI) being used in both online and seated classrooms. CBI, now ubiquitous in education, began with research projects like TICCIT (Time-shared, Interactive, Computer-Controlled Information

Television), a CBI model that contributed to the advent of distance learning (Whithaus, 2004, p. 154).

On the other hand, the compelling reasons that motivate teachers to look forward do not negate the wisdom and value of the past. Much can be learned from the rich heritage of composition studies. As Heard (2008) has sagely counseled, there is no need to abandon all of one's teaching strategies in order to modernize teaching practice. By enlisting student buy-in and changing one's goals from that of teaching mastery of skills to the teaching of textual analysis, teachers can use the same time-proven and well-established techniques they have used in the past. Encouraging students to question forms and conventions while, at the same time, showing them how to code-switch in order to use the language of power and prestige ideally helps them knowingly adopt and appropriate those forms and conventions that will most easily facilitate communicating their messages in various contexts and for differing tasks.

Depending on how writing strategies are presented and applied in the classroom, judicious use of multiple approaches, even those that come out of the current-traditional paradigm, can result in improved student writing. The real litmus test of the value or applicability of any teaching strategy is ultimately the degree to which it benefits one's students.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

In 1982, Charles Moran opens his essay "Teaching Teachers of Writing" with that perennial question: "What should writing teachers know?" (p. 420). Now thirty years later educators are still wondering how to respond. Opinions vary widely and proponents from widely divergent camps make compelling arguments for their views. While some argue that a familiarity with the scholarly research and theoretical grounding are necessary to guide instruction, others note that theory and scholarship follow as a result of writing and observing what competent writers do. The real truth is probably somewhere in between.

Effective writing teachers recognize the necessity for being well-versed in both the knowledge base of their own discipline and the general pedagogical canon that describes instructional philosophies, strategies, and techniques. The best writing teachers are those who are lifelong learners and writers, for as one works to master the increasingly complex intricacies in various compositional formats, she discovers new and more efficient ways to teach others the components of writing. A curious investigator can do much to inspire a sense of wonder and excitement in her pupils and it seems self-evident that those who find the writing experience a pleasurable one will be those who have developed the most positive attitudes toward writing over the course of their lifetimes. Being an effective writing teacher means that an educator does more than impart facts or even truths, but rather teaches writing processes and strategies that help her students construct their own knowledge base. Like teaching a man to fish, the teacher who helps her students develop their ability and capacity to

think and write critically about their world will accomplish so much more than one who merely encourages rote memorization of conventions of grammar and mechanics.

Writing is a cyclic process for both master and pupil and each ideally returns to that place of discovery to evaluate and assess what was worthwhile and meaningful in the experience and then capitalizes on the valuable and positive outcomes of the learning experience. For those who are drawn to teaching writing, part of this reflective process means reading, writing, and collaborating often with other writers (both novice and expert) in order to continue adding to one's own knowledge base. On the other hand, it is not simply enough for a teacher to grow as a writer. Teaching writing cannot be effectively accomplished in isolation or without employing sound pedagogical strategies.

The effective writing teacher is one who also measures her own successes and failures against the practices and achievements presented in educational and pedagogical literature and research findings: both public and personal. Additionally, the reflective process requires an understanding of both the benefits and limits of student assessment and using such evaluations in appropriate and ethical contexts. Teachers must understand the constructs of reliability and validity in the collection, interpretation, and application of data gleaned from student assessment.

In order to be able to serve all her students in the least restrictive environment, a teacher must be sensitive to the surroundings—both immediate and far-removed—of school, community, and government. It would be naive to assume that good

intentions alone will ensure that effective learning takes place. A writing teacher must be attuned to her students' home climate and the relevant details of their social backgrounds and acquaintances. This goal can be best accomplished by continually plugging into the wealth of pedagogical and psychological resources that are present in today's information age and by staying connected with her students' needs and interests.

The effective writing teacher has the attitude and perspective that all learners can realize success in the writing process. However, in order to facilitate and nurture such success, a writing teacher must be prepared and equipped to offer writing opportunities across a wide range of modes and styles to accommodate the variety of learners who populate today's diverse classrooms. Further, such a teacher must be prepared to grapple with newly emerging problems and challenges and to search for fresh and even novel ways of enabling her students in their learning efforts. Using differentiated instruction, the teacher must be prepared to create writing opportunities using multiple learning platforms and media. Today's students reflect attitudes toward acquisition of information and materials that differ greatly from those widely practiced only a few years ago. The modern composition teacher must exhibit a high degree of flexibility and sensitivity and be willing to remediate writing as students' needs demand. Using action-based research strategies, a successful writing teacher explores and pushes the limits of her knowledge and skills to meet the ever-changing demands of each new cohort of students.

Finally, one of the most powerful skills that the effective writing teacher needs in order to create a versatile and contemporary learning environment is the ability to establish a haven of safety (physical, emotional, and psychological) and equality for her students. Students must have the freedom and confidence to approach their teacher unabashedly and without hesitation in order to work out problems or overcome obstacles. Much can be accomplished when teacher and student work together in mutual collaboration without inhibition or fear. By establishing an environment of caring, compassion, and cooperation, the writing teacher can help her students mature into lifelong and self-directed learners.

Ultimately, one must acknowledge that writing teachers have been granted both power and privilege. However, too often educators recognize neither the degree nor breadth of these bequests. When writing teachers fail to comprehend the reach of their control or responsibility, the most severe and perhaps insoluble problems result. In order to transfer their legacy unspoiled to those generations who follow, writing teachers must appreciate the nature of that which they have been afforded, consent to the highest level of commitment to their task, and wield their power and influence fairly and wisely.



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