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Superimposing R.E.A.L. principles on the project writing pyramid: A paradigm shift in teaching professional writing

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Abstract

Institutions of higher education introduced professional writing classes as a way of preparing students for on-the-job-writing. To better accomplish the goal as well as to get a more consistent output from these classes that require the writing of a project proposal or report, writing teachers may want to incorporate *R.E.A.L.* principles onto the *Find-Test-Deliver* pedagogical triangle that mark the three phases of their project writing courses. When R.E.A.L principles, where R stands for *Reader oriented*, E for *Extensively researched*, A for *Actionable solution*, and L for *Looped composition,* are used, the writing output becomes both academically sound and workplace appropriate. The article delves into the rationale behind the principles and proffers suggestions on how teachers could incorporate them into their teaching. It concludes that such an approach is a paradigm shift in professional writing instruction. First presented at the University of Maryland Global Campus's "Explore, Collaborate, Innovate" conference in 2017, the article grows out of the author's experiences and insights from being Marketing Director and Technical communicator at INFINITEE & other corporate houses as well as a Professor and content expert of business and technical writing courses at Rutgers University and other institutions of higher learning in the United States.

Keywords: Professional writing, Technical writing, Business writing, actionable solution, looped composition, reader oriented, extensively researched

1. Introduction

Colleges and universities began to offer professional writing classes as a way of preparing students to write in the real world. Though they go by different appellations, these undergraduate courses can be grouped into two buckets: technical and business writing classes. While technical writing classes offer exposure and training in preparing technical proposals, user manuals, and scientific papers to students majoring in the sciences; business writing courses give students majoring in business, social sciences, and

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the humanities an opportunity to gain expertise in writing official memos and letters, resumes and feasibility studies, proposals and reports. While both Writing Across the Disciplines (W.A.C.) courses include assignments on different forms of technical and business writing with varying weightages, they all feature a proposal or report writing assignment that requires students to write about how the implementation of their research-backed plans solves real-world problems.

To contend that college graduates can learn to do this realistically only with on-the-job-training is to assume that universities can play no role or have no understanding of the broad contexts of activity their graduates are bound for. Since business and technical writing classes are specialized W.A.C. (Writing Across the Curriculum) courses, their development not only reflect revisions of local assumptions about the place of writing in and across the curriculum in higher education but also highlight the evolving realization that academic institutions needed to cater to corporate developments and workplace requirements. What W.A.C. professional writing courses need to do was to be very explicit about connections between real world needs, real world information, and real world skills to be learned. In this context, it becomes necessary to find how far that happened and probe into principles that can help instructors help students to acquire mastery in business and technical discourses while reifying the social relations and expectations of which those discourses are a part.

This paper focuses on the project writing component of W.A.C professional writing courses and offers fellow instructors a teaching methodology based on R.E.A.L. principles that can be superimposed on the three vertices or phases of the find, test and deliver apices of the project writing pyramid. The paper discusses how such project writing instruction is different from product based professional writing and may be successfully taught in online and hybrid as much as in onsite modes of instruction. The paper finally concludes that the paradigm shift in project writing instruction that R.E.A.L . introduces leads to students successfully receiving training in college on the kind of on-the-job writing they would need to do when they join the workforce.

1.1 The Employers Weigh In: The Problem

Business and technical writing programs had been set up to prepare students for the workplace. However, as far back as 1982, Faigley and Miller's surveys of employers in businesses and industry found that the required composition courses and elective courses in business and technical writing were not producing competent writers, with 78% of the upper-level managers in business and industry commenting that the writing done by new graduates on the job was poor. The finding was backed up by Bizell (1982) who pointed out that a wide gulf had crept up between what colleges were delivering and what industries expected their students to know.

> We want our students to succeed in the dominant culture. The theoretical question suggested by this conflict–and it is especially urgent for researchers and teachers of professional and non-academic writing–is the relation of discourse to social practice…I am not condemning research and teaching in professional writing; rather, I am making the claim that this research and pedagogical practice do not go far enough. If we recognize and explore the challenge presented by the relationship between discourse, teaching, and social reproduction, we may be able to discover ways to intervene…This would, of course, require that we expand our research goals and significantly alter our teaching. (p. 7)

The alteration did not happen and the gulf continued to grow, prompting Herndl (1993) to warn that our current pedagogical practices were producing "students who are not aware of the ideological development of discourse and who do not understand the cultural consequences of a dominant discourse or the alternate understandings it excludes" (349). To bridge the chasm and to ensure greater levels of " 'job readiness' among graduates"(11), Lee Harvey (2000), called for renovations of higher education curricula. There was not only an evolving perception that a new methodology was required but also the realization that it is necessary to listen more keenly to the feedback from and be more sensitive to the requirements of the workplace.

A college education to many is as good as the way it prepares students for their careers and their professional roles. As industries increasingly monitor how effectively universities are fulfilling their roles, they find that institutions of higher education are not able to endow students with satisfactory communication, especially writing skills. A McKinsey & Co. sponsored survey (2012) found that less than half of employers believe that new graduates "are adequately prepared for entry-level positions" (Mourshed et al, 18). In contrast, 72% of the educational providers consider their graduates to be work-ready. Given the difference in the perceptions, the authors affirmed that the two sectors seem to "live in parallel universes" (Ibid.). The report's summary of recommendations noted the desire of businesses to see greater alignment between university curricula and the needs of industry, and a greater emphasis placed on the development of specific employability skills such as communication skills in university programs (209). Jackson (2013) took the point further when she highlighted that "there is a need for role and attitudinal changes to the assumption of transfer" as well as to perceptions that workplace skills can only be acquired in "workplace settings" (776). The absence of these changes not only hold graduates back from gaining satisfactory employment, but, as Moore & Morton (2017) point out, it also has an inhibiting effect on the performance of employing organizations, and ultimately the broader economy (591). Hence, the 2018 National Association of Colleges and Employers survey went so far as to say that "when it comes to the types of skills and knowledge that employers feel are most important to workplace success, the large majority does NOT feel that recent college graduates are well prepared" (Bauer-Wolf). The AAC&U report (2018) goes on to add, "This is particularly the case for applying knowledge and skills in real-world settings, critical thinking skills, and written and oral

communication skills–areas in which fewer than three in 10 employers think that recent college graduates are well prepared" (Ibid.). The emergent consensus is that college students need to develop proficiency in various workplace document types for them to be successful.

Since professional writing programs had taken up the task to prepare students for workplace writing, a best practice approach was one that required all prescribed assignments to be written in the format of business documents.

> The most common feature of workplace writing was the need for brevity and concision. A related area was the need to often avoid the use of academic and technical language in one's writing. It was pointed out that in the professions, the recipient of any written communication–both within an organization and outside–will typically not share the same technical background & expertise as the writer, so there is a need to constantly monitor and adjust one's language…[A]nother parameter was the action-oriented nature of writing in the professions, such that all messages are somehow concerned with prescribing or responding to some form of action…hence an important written communication 'skill' that needs to be developed in students is the ability to recognize the specific circumstances and constraints that shape any writing episode (purpose, audience, etc.), and to be able to 'adapt' their writing to suit such contexts. (2009, Hancock et al, p. 11)

While it is clear as to what the goal of the new kind of professional writing instruction was, the change, even if necessary, brings several pedagogical challenges that need to be both explored and overcome.

1.2 Pedagogical Challenges: The Background

That professional writing classes have to train students to write to audiences both inside and outside the office has various implications for professional writing teachers. Signposting and structuring become very important since, as Faigley and Miller (1982) rightly point out, a lack of clarity and poor organization of messages in the workplace lead to wasted time, misunderstandings, and poor public relations (564-69). As per Price (1985), business and technical writing instructors need to accept the following.

> 1) teachers have an obligation to make sure their students leave professional writing classes with the writing skills and composing strategies they will need after graduation, and 2) teachers must design courses that expose students to the various forms they will use and to the rhetorical considerations they will encounter in on-the-job writing. (p. 3)

Composing strategies (such as signposting) that need to be taught are direct outputs of audience centeredness. Unlike academic writing classes, the instructor-a member of the academic community-is not the audience. Instead, s/he, along with the student writer, are working together to compose messages and produce writing for corporate and workplace

use. It can be pedagogically challenging for both the instructor and the writer to be conscious of the audience without. The need to teach students to be audience centered, where the audience comprises of institutional decision-makers, cannot be overemphasized. As professional or on the job writing is conscious of organizational objectives and targets, it is always cognizant and clear about what it wants the audience-the reader-to do. Since it wishes it's reader to give an order, reply with a clarification, connect to someone and so on, workplace writing needs to be more audience oriented and reader friendly than academic writing. Since workplace writing caters to and seeks to persuade its audience to take action, teachers need to work at the development of a persuasive skillset and acute audience consciousness in their students. To present and teach this to our professional writing students is important even if it entails teachers taking up the challenge of having to put themselves in the shoes of their students' intended audience.

Several discourse studies have focused on the types of contrasts noted between written communication in academic writing and professional writing domains. As Lannon and Gurak (2013) point out, "Proposals attempt to persuade an audience to take some form of action: to authorize a project, accept a service or product, or support a specific plan for solving a problem or improving a situation" (582). The persuasion has to be done through targeted research that involves the ability to perform investigations into theoretical domains, case studies, and best practices. Student writers, consequently, need to be guided through and develop expertise at research methods that subsume academic writing research into library academic databases to include interviews, surveys and other modes of primary research. The challenge of professional writing curriculum design, therefore, is to evolve one that bridges domains of academia and industry, theory and application. What is needed in our professional writing courses is not just instruction in the writing of specific workplace genres such as emails, letters, memos, instructions, white papers, proposals, reports, and so on, but also exposure to a range of experiences and tasks that will help student writers learn how to shape their acquired knowledge and expressive discourse in distinctive and communicatively appropriate ways. Hence, the assignment of writing a real world proposal or a report offers exposure and opportunities to be trained in multiple communication tasks that prepares students for their workplace writing very well, however, the challenge is in evolving and breaking up the assignment into looped deliverables that do not overwhelm the learners.

Proposal or report writing, henceforth, referred to as project writing, is often a significant part of a larger course in technical and professional communication. Research on course design finds that there are not many courses solely dedicated to teaching this important area of technical and professional communication and almost always include other forms of professional writing. As the differences between technical writing and business writing courses are often arbitrary and are always accompanied by a letter or memo drafting assignment, a resume or a manual, a technical description or a white paper writing assignment. As dissertation researcher, Price (1985), puts it, both classes could

feature "a memo to a subordinate, a letter to an irate customer, instructions to a consumer on how to assemble a bicycle, or a written advertisement for a computer" and be classified as professional writing practice (1). If a technical writing course often includes the writing of a product description or user manual as also a technical paper aimed at informing readers, so they can understand the parts, operate a device, or understand an issue, and take a decision; business writing classes require students to write website comparisons, social media analyses, or position papers that entail that students learn how to evolve parameters, understand content & design principles, and take stands. Even if courses differ across universities in the number of assignments and student deliverables, they all feature a project writing component that is the focus of this article. While there is a consensus that all courses have a project writing component, there is little agreement on whether these projects are to be simulations or implementable solutions, or on how these projects are taught and graded. Moreover, the trend is to teach project writing in a vacuum because it is pedagogically easier to do so. This can be self-defeating because the outputs students produce cease being like on-the-job writing and the importance of customizing writing to an evolving situation stops being a course objective. Realism definitely needs to be reinstated into the proposal writing pedagogy if the courses are to fulfil their mission of being academically sound while teaching students to write in ways that are relevant to and required in the workplace.

Even though realistic project writing is so necessary, analyses of course syllabi and assignments reveal a need to redress the limited spaces in which project writing is being taught today. An analysis of business and technical writing textbooks, as undertaken by Lawrence et al (2019), reveal the need for texts and courses to fully explore proposal writing through active and practical experiences so it does the following:

1. Textbooks offer rhetorical advice about proposals, describing them as persuasive documents that must be attentive to the audience and the need the proposal is meant to address.
2. Textbooks offer practical advice about proposals, which emphasize the multiple modes of communication required in a proposal as well as the basics of proposal components and the proposal process (identifying, reading, and responding to a solicitation; modulating texts and projects to an audience; and producing ethical, impactful results or changes). (p. 36)

While course texts need to discuss how proposals function across various spaces that range from basic requests for institutional or workplace policy changes to generation of business and sales development tools, what the teaching needs to emphasize is how the proposals' complexity, range of purposes, and audiences impact the writing. Encouraging students to write about campus-wide or township improvement initiatives may be an effective way to teach the rhetoric of proposal writing in terms of its persuasive functions while incorporating realism and real world factors into the writing project.

If the teaching of technical and professional discourse is to be successful, the classes need to build abilities of students to persuade readers to take purposive rational action and resolve institutional and organizational problems. As Lawrence et al put it (2019), "Instead of a form-based conceptualization, proposal writing instruction and research must emphasize the differences in the rhetorical situations in which proposals are written in order to equip student writers and researchers with a wide set of rhetorical tools for analyzing and understanding the writer's role, audience, resources, limitations, and intended proposal action in the development of a proposal" (44). The proposal writing assignment in an undergraduate course replicate the rhetoric of proposals in corporate environments when it offers an opportunity for students to evolve and practice the skills they will be called upon to use in developing on-the-job writing proposals and workplace reports in the future. To help enhance proposal instruction and to bring in synchronization with how project writing operates in the workplaces, it may be worthwhile to explore the methodology of superimposing the principles of *Reader orientedness*, *Extensive research*, *Actionable solution*, and *Looped composition* on the three aspects or vertices of the proposal writing pyramid: search, test, and deliver. This superimposition may be the way to bridge the gulf between proposal/report pedagogy and real world proposal/report writing.

2. Method

2.1. The Project Writing Pyramid: Search-Test-Deliver

Business and technical writing are taught in face to face, hybrid, and online formats. Irrespective of the mode of delivery, instructors may want to center their teaching not on telling students what to do for their current projects but on developing a skillset that will help them write project documents in the future. All projects and project writing broadly follow the three phases of “find”, “test,” and “deliver.” If the writing task is envisaged as a triangle with three vertices, it begins with a search, climbs up to testing, and devolves into composing a plan that is delivered and presented in proposal, report, or presentation formats.

In the real world, the project writing process begins with “Request For Proposals” or R.F.P.s. Similarly, the student's writing task begins with the search for a project to write out a proposal or report for. The question to spark off the search is this: What is the key problem that my project proposal needs to find a solution to write about? As students search for possible topics, they *find* one that is in line with their professional interests, career goals, and disciplinary knowledge. At the beginning of the semester, the answer to their question is indeterminate. As students search, investigate, and probe into disciplinary matrices, case studies, and best practices, their research converges towards what could be a solution. As their research coalesce, the question around the midpoint of the assignment sequence becomes: Is the solution I am recommending and the plan I am evolving from my research feasible? In order to be able to answer that question, students need to be tutored in *testing* procedures or feasibility investigations such as surveys,

interviews, and other instruments of primary research. When the feasibility testing is completed, the *delivery* stage sets in. In this phase, student writers offer their research and their feasibility results, their recommendations and their action plans in a written format as well as a presentation. In this phase, students practice conceptualizing, organizing, and structuring their data in a real-world environment such that it answers the question in the audience's mind: What is the guarantee that the solution will work and what is the projected return on investment?

Even when the class is taught remotely, all business and technical writing classes feature a formal presentation component using tools like Skype, Zoom, or Webex so students learn how to present their projects live. Project presentations, like project documents, must have an official tone and take place in a formal setting. Each student practices his or her persuasive skills in presentations where each attempts to convince the class–who stand-in for real-world audience–that their data and their recommendations are sound. Facilitating presentations sessions that are followed up with question and answer exchanges and offering presenters suggestions in writing and verbally offer valuable opportunities to students to prepare for their future role as workplace presenters.

Even if the pedagogical pyramid with its vertices of search, test, and deliver is useful in course planning, teachers need to be offered strategies to use in the three phases. In Ballantine (2010) words, "Public works require public words….Both deal with the public…The best way is to offer an open and flexible professional and technical writing curriculum" (236). Each aspect of the pedagogical pyramid presents instructors with unique challenges and may require instructors to create a subset of assignments that leads to the final project document. As the student writers needs a lot of handholding before they reach the final delivery stage, business and technical writing textbook writers and teachers may need to create mini-lessons and lead up assignments in the "find," "test," and "delivery" stages. Again, workshops and instructional aids may be required to help students through the cycles of drafting, reviewing, and revising before the project documents can actually be delivered to the patron.

Given the onerous responsibility on them, instructors may require a pedagogical set of principles that help them in their teaching of workplace writing. Integrating R.E.A.L. principles onto the "find," "test," "deliver" vertices of the pedagogical triangle that mark the three phases of their project writing courses may be both empowering for the teacher as well as a way to get consistent and workplace appropriate project writing assignments. To advance the purposes of the class and the needs of the students, the teaching pedagogy and syllabus may need to incorporate R.E.A.L. principles where R stands for *Reader oriented*, E for *Extensively researched*, A for *Actionable solution* and L for *Looped composition*.

Before going into the details of the method and offering some practitioner tools of how to incorporate each principle into the teaching methodology, it may be necessary to explore

how these principles map to the find," "test," "deliver" instructional pyramid. *R* o*r Reader orientation* is the first principle of R.E.A.L. that project writing and project writers are likely to find helpful. Being conscious of the needs of the audience or *reader orientedness* is what makes or breaks on-the-job writing. Being mindful, knowledgeable, and aware of the audience–whether it is an institutional entity or a corporate/technical reader–not only influences the way students conduct their upcoming research but also impacts the tone and techniques they choose while writing and their ability to successfully persuade their audiences. If in the "find" stage, students zero in on a problem in their workplace or institutions, or in their schools or communities; they embark on the search for a solution in the stage that follows. Examining theoretical frameworks and illustrative case studies aid writers to identify ways and means to both scaffold and *test* their solutions This is what the second postulate or the E for *Extensive research* principle is all about. Students need to be guided when they are *find*ing a problem in their disciplines or their communities as also when they attempt to *test* the feasibility of their solutions through library explorations, market research, and survey projections. The *Extensive Research* principle maps onto both the "find" and "test" vertex of the triangle as they offer writers a validation opportunity for their proposed plan. As students move on to the *deliver*y stage, the *Extensive Research* principle needs to work in tandem with the *Actionable solution* postulate since the critical differentiating principle between academic writing and project writing outputs is that students write in the latter about how an actionable solution was or can be implemented. Writing teachers not only need to instruct students about how to cite their research but also teach them how to validate their proposed solution through local level fieldwork, The fourth principle of *Looped composition* guide students in arguing for the workability and actionability of their proposals. The need to bring in opportunities for constructive critiques and peer feedback in conferences and workshops in the "delivery" stage cannot be over emphasized. Put differently, the looped composition principle is necessary in all phases but particularly impacts the "deliver" phase of project writing instruction when the project documents are being made ready for the patron or audience. Going through multiple drafting and multiple review sessions, feedback cycles, and presentation sessions make it possible for student writers to come up with detailed, well-supported, actionable plans in presentation, proposal, or report format.

While it is easy to see how R.E.A.L. principles coalesce into each other and impact every phase of project writing instruction, it is necessary to explore the method by which the four principles may be introduced and integrated into professional writing instruction in more detail.

2.1.1 R for Reader Oriented

At the cost of being repetitive, it must be emphasized that professional writing is *reader-oriented***.** Put differently, professional writing is writing with a "you attitude" that focuses on reader benefits. As project-writing teachers need to find opportunities to make students

aware of different writing tones and the need to write differently for different audiences and for different purposes, a suggested mini-assignment is an audience analysis summary. A *P.A.T.* (Purpose-Audience-Technique) brainstorming lesson followed by an audience analysis micro-assignment can be helpful since students study their audiences against their purpose with the intent to understand what kind of an argument would be most effective for them. As students explore what the best *Technique* for them could be, given their *Purpose* or objective in their project writing and analysis of the *Audience's* needs, they not only develop *reader orientedness* but also arrive at a successful argument methodology. Appealing to the need to surpass competition might work with one audience while return on investment or adding brand value or being compliant with laws and regulations might work with others. Introducing audience awareness during their "find" process leads to students adopting and adapting their styles and content to audience tastes, requirements, and situations.

Just as creating a new drill user manual for a novice user requires more explanations in contrast to composing one for a drill press operator in the maintenance shop, project writers, too, need to learn to write in different styles for the different audiences they deal with while they work on their project documents. In the "test" phase, students draw up an interview questions list for the decision maker who is a company or institutional head, and create a survey form for deploying to the targeted population or intended product/service users. Instructors get several teaching opportunities and moments to introduce a primary research mini-lesson that expands on how *reader orientation* and audience analysis are required to come up with successful surveying and interview questionnaires.

Reader orientedness comes into play in the "delivery" phase too. When teachers of both technical and business writing make students aware that the best writing style for a given occasion is the one that improves clarity and removes obstacles to the audience's understanding, students make conscious writing choices and evolve signposting and visual strategies in their project writing and analytical presentations. As Flower and Hayes(1981) point out, "A cognitive process explanation of discovery" and "ability to decenter from his own reality to consider the needs of a reader" is the hallmark of all successful professional writers (386). All on-the-job-writers understand that writing is essentially another way of managing behavior, and hence writer-managers always focus on or reader actions and benefits when they write. In keeping with this, instructors may want to encourage students to highlight the *W.I.F.M.* (or *What is In It For Me*) in their project documents. By having student writers emphasize audience takeaways in every section of their project documents, including case studies analyses, teachers facilitate the creation of clear, unified, and uncluttered message in students' project work. When instructors integrate *reader orientation* in assignment instruction and rubric evaluations, students learn to deploy a reader-benefit heuristic that will come in handy in their future roles as workplace writers.

2.1.2 R.E.A.L.: E for Extensively Researched

Professional writing is persuasive writing. Much of the writing for business and industry has a predominantly persuasive tone because the goal is to argue for a particular service, solution, or product that they have evolved after audience analysis and feasibility testing. As Price (1985) puts it, writers are seeking cooperation from the reader, either in the form of a financial agreement or a social contract that will allow the reader and writer to reach a common goal (68). Given this background, it is clear that vague generalizations and unbacked statements will not work in student project writing either.

In the "find" stage, instructors can facilitate library resources demonstrations to show students how to conduct extensive research into problem and solutions. Introducing evaluation metrics and apps like Evernote can help students evaluate their findings and take notes. In the "test" stage, a mini-lesson on conducting and reporting on primary research and taking students through tools like Google forms or Microsoft survey would not only lead to stronger student projects but also well prepare student writers for the workplace. In the "test" stage, instructors may want to teach student writers on how to report on the testing of the solution's feasibility with signposts, visuals, and infographics.

Using instructional tools to help students conduct and report on their *extensive research* into marketplace studies or laboratory investigations in the "find," "test," and "deliver" stages ensures that students use the right discourse framework or theoretical scaffold to peg their proposed solution/ plans onto. At all points, it becomes important for instructors to remind student writers that they are not writing a research paper but coming up with an *actionable solution*. While student writers do perform *extensive research* to find support and data to support their claims, what cannot be forgotten is that *actionability* is a fundamental characteristic of workplace communication, and must therefore characterize all documents produced by students of professional writing courses. Even though a business or technical proposal involves research, the research, even though it is extensive, is *actionable* and, hence, quite different from what goes into an academic research paper.

2.1.3 R.E.A.L.: A for Actionable Solution

A distinguishing trait of professional writing, undoubtedly, is that it features an *actionable solution*. As problem solving is the underlying rhetoric of project writing, it works around the actionability principle that characterizes all on-the-job writing. Also, the *actionable solution* principle impacts all three phases: "find," "test," and "deliver." Exploring the problem from the *actionable* perspective implies that that student writers be encouraged to "find" or pick a problem that can be solved though concerted action. Similarly feasibility "tests" and primary research tools explore ways of and reactions to putting the students' proposed solution into action, regardless of whether the solution is a new or improved product, service, or policy. In the "delivery" phase, the success of the plan that the writer comes up is directly dependent on the writer's ability to forecast and engage with objections and complications when the solution is actioned or implemented.

The *actionable solution* principles presumes *reader orientation*-it imagines that the student writer has analyzed the readers' situation and anticipated their reactions. The greatest advantage of the problem-solving approach is that it even encourages the student writer to carry out *extensive research* and feasibility testing keeping the reader in mind. This not only metamorphoses the writing output but also turns the writing into a writer-to-reader act. Targeted finding and *extensive research* strategies may help writers come up with their proposals, but the *actionability* rhetoric helps the writer frame the plan and adapt the information such that it is ready for readers to use. That is why Flower & Hayes (1977) perceived professional writing to be a way for authors to identify their intentions for the reader-based text they are crafting; develop a plan to achieve that intention; and execute, monitor, and revise that plan (459). Since student writers often have trouble structuring the solution, teachers may want to step in with teaching tools that help students utilize appropriate real world project frameworks to lay their plans on.

Real world projects have phases and timelines. Successful project writing classes thus need to encourage students to create detailed phase-wise action items and also engage with projected cash inflows and outflows. Estimating time and money requirements are important parameters of the *actionability* scaffolding of workplace projects and should be present in students submissions too. Unfortunately, as Slomp et al (2018) put it, "some do not give us detailed budgets that explain how the money will be used; others don't explain very clearly why the project is needed. The most common problem, though, is that they don't provide enough detail about what the writers want to do, why they want to do it, and how they are going to get it done"(88). Procuring and analyzing real actual real world project writing samples in class can go a long way in helping students and teachers to identify rhetorical strategies and view at first-hand how each plan section has been written. As per dissertation writer, Jeansonne (1998), "providing models and samples" is an "effective pedagogical method" (6), and can be very effective and useful teaching tools for professional writing teachers.

If project proposals are going to incorporate detailed plans that include phases, timelines, expense justifications, and budget explanations that map to and are outputs of the students' research and feasibility testing, class instruction and grading rubrics in professional writing class needs to build these in as assignment deliverables. As this is no easy task and so as not to end up overwhelming students, instructors may want to create detailed class schedules where the project work is planned, composed, and reviewed in doable sections or chunks with models and samples offering patterns to help students in their writing task. What this signifies is that instructors are likely to find it helpful to opt for a looped composition process.

2.1.4 R.E.A.L.: L for Looped Composition

Professional writing is process not product based. The term "process" refers to the stages that a writer goes through recursively while composing such as invention, drafting, and

revision. Even when use samples and models to model their work, the process rhetoric reverses the situations when students are told what to do but not how. Whereas practitioners of product-centered instruction tend to center their instruction on qualities typical of the ideal finished product, process pedagogy emphasizes the how-to of writing. Adopting a process approach means that teachers intervene in the students' composing processes and offer instructions and tools to students to write out the project writing sections. As Price (1985) describes it, the process approach

1. focuses on the process of writing, the "how to," not the "what"; the instructor intervenes in the composing process;
2. recognizes and attempts to teach strategies for prewriting, writing, and rewriting;
3. attempts to reduce threat by stressing an environment of cooperation;
4. is informed by rhetorical context, including audience, form, purpose, and subject;
5. is informed by current research and theory;
6. views writing as recursive rather than linear;
7. emphasizes that writing is a way of reconceptualizing material, resulting in learning rather than recording;
8. organizes the modes around purposes instead of forms;
9. does not attempt to reduce writing to rules and forms; and
10. views writing as holistic, intuitive, and non-rational as well as rational. (p. 10-11)

While the “find” and “test” phases do incorporate the writing process approach, the *looped* principle of project *composition* comes to the forefront in the “delivery” phase. When the project goes through multiple drafts and reviews in class as it is made ready for delivery, the *looped* method replicates the way documents go through various departments and supervisors at the workplace.

A well thought out *looped composition* approach takes student writers step by step through the proposal/report writing process. Along with instructional tools that have already been alluded to, scheduling peer review sessions go a long way in generating high-quality professional project documents. Peer reviews brings in the audience into the reckoning since the students’ peers, who stand in for their final audience, examine how well writers have clothed their ideas and research in clear language. Teachers can not only emphasize deliverables for each peer review workshop so students understand their own writing processes but can also bring in more efficient and effective means of composing and revising by including *W.I.R.M.I.* or the "*What I Really Mean Is*" reflection sessions. Vocabulary, tone, and phraseology matter in project writing. If students often use substitute phrases instead of the real phrase-this can render project writing and the writing process ineffective, hence *W.I.R.M.I.* is a useful strategy to incorporate into peer review sessions.

As the project writing process is recursive, simultaneous, and individualized, teachers can easily include the *looped composition* principle in their instruction. The fulfillment of the various stages of the project writing process, namely, incubation, articulation, and production need to be marked with review workshops that allow the writers, their peers, and the instructor to review writing progress and offer written comments. If stage one is prewriting when stimulation, ideation, brainstorming, bundling, verbalizing, and sketching happens leading to a project charter, the research into the charter moves student writers from project gestation to project articulation. If the first phase or loop one ends with a review of the project charter by peers and the instructor, the *extensive research* stage of *looped composition* is signaled by student-writers articulating what information they will relay and how they will relay it. In the post-incubation stage, student project writers articulate their findings from their primary research and case studies exploration into what may be termed as charter execution. As the charter grows into a persuasive argument and becomes the first draft of an execution plan, midterm reviews and midterm conferences may be scheduled to mark the end of the stage. In the production stage or post-articulation phase, when the project document is getting ready for delivery, multiple revisions, multiple edits, and multiple evaluations need to take place. The teacher may want to guide the revision process through the creation of detailed peer review forms and the holding of peer review workshops. The revision loop needs to factor in content and structure review as well as mechanics check through editing and proofing. Halpern (1983) suggests six goals for the review processes for the business writing teacher: invention, audience adaptation, clarifying purpose, organization, controlling voice or persona, and polishing (39-53). Similarly, Jeansonne (1996) suggests that the technical writing instructor teach technical writing as a recursive or linear process with an emphasis on planning, organizing, writing and reviewing (85). Just as in the workplace, the delivery stage marks the culmination of the project writing process and largely takes the forms of project presentation and a project document. The project presentation itself can be a way to receive rigorous instructor feedback and peer comments on the incorporation of the *actionable solution* principle since that ensures that the end project document is true to the project charter.

Better class writing is an output of instructors' meticulous class planning. Since on-the-job writers too do not complete an entire document in one writing session, it is, therefore, pedagogically appropriate that writing teachers plan the project writing such that it goes through the writing loops just discussed as the project evolves from finding to testing to delivery. Perhaps the most important upshot of the *looped composition orientation* is the students' realization that what is as important as the final document is the process of preparing it.

3. Using R.E.A.L. Principles: Results

Coaching students using R.E.A.L. rhetorical practices not only provides training for students to manage and produce competitive proposals in their future work lives but also

results in tighter technical and business professional documents from professional writing classes. What is more, it brings in uniformity in student output, irrespective of how professional writing is taught. As more and more students opt to take professional writing classes in hybrid and online formats, using R.E.A.L. principles for teaching leads to pedagogical consistency across various modes of classroom delivery.

As per National Center for Education Statistics, 2018, complied by Ginder et al (2019), the proportion of all students who were enrolled exclusively online grew to 15.4 percent up from 14.7 percent in 2016, or about one in six students. The share of all students who mixed online and in-person courses grew slightly faster, to 17.6 percent in 2017 from 16.4 percent in 2016. Again, the proportion of all students who took at least one course online grew to 33.1 percent, from 31.1 percent in 2016. Since the digital environment has implications for how communication is created and disseminated, Carradini (2019) posits that as "more businesses and fields transition to natively digital work, giving students experience with natively digital communication environments will actually help them prepare for future careers" (136). In the context of professional environments getting digitized, the fact that more and more business and technical writing courses are being offered online is a welcome development.

As we explore how R.E.A.L principles impact the output of business and technical writing classes, whether they are taught onsite, online, or in hybrid formats, it is important to consider certain findings. As per studies conducted on the question of how "writing improvement" is understood in the context of Technical and Business Communication classes, and how the “writing improvement" achieved in online/hybrid formats course matches the writing improvement of their counterparts enrolled in a face-to-face version of the same course with the same professor, the move away from the face-to-face format does not seems to impact the perceived "writing improvement." Matthew's 2016 doctoral study using a mixed between-within subjects' analysis of variance with repeated measures found that the hybrid version of the course could be as effective as the face-to-face version in producing improvement in students' writing (72). The findings are a pointer to the fact that equal improvement can be achieved across all formats if the *same* instruction principles—such as R.E.A.L.—are followed. "My study and several others advance the conversation on the efficacy of hybrid and online courses to a point where it seems reasonable to state that there surely are many hybrid and online courses at universities across the country that produce as much student learning as their face-to-face counterparts" (ibid., iii). "Students who want to enroll in hybrid courses for whatever personal preference or lifestyle reason will be heartened to know that they are not necessarily receiving an inferior education to their counterparts who take courses in the face-to-face format" (Ibid.,71). The study adds how it is "reassuring for students, who can only access a college education through technology-assisted course formats or whose lifestyles make technology-assisted courses easier to complete than face-to-face ones, that hybrid courses can in many cases produce learning outcomes comparable to face-to-face

courses" (Ibid.). What is important is not the form of delivery but that the same dialectic supports the pedagogy of the professional writing class.

All project writing students have to work independently and play big roles in facilitating their own learning, making professional writing classes a good fit for modes of teaching that are not face-to-face. Superimposing R.E.A.L. principles on the pedagogical writing pyramid thus ensures that teachers assist in the same ways and at the same points of the writing process such that the kind of learning that happens in an online class equals that which occurs in face-to-face or hybrid courses**.**

4. Discussion: Why is this a Paradigm shift?

The article presented strategies of how instructors of technical and professional writing classes across all formats could use R.E.A.L. principles to help students conceptualize and write out proposals that move away from form-based approaches toward a more productive, rhetorical, process based method. By electing to go in for a project charter & on-the-job "proposal writing" scenarios, where the tangible, material practice of producing text has to be compliant with the demands of the audience as outlined in the Request for Proposals (R.F.P.s), a shift from conventional professional writing instruction was effected. As conceptualization of R.E.A.L. proposals reifies form-based practices associated with proposal writing, the new practices and strategies presented here spark off a paradigm shift in the teaching of proposal writing. As R.E.A.L. principles build on each other to become an informed methodology of instruction, they generate the kind of project writing that is workplace appropriate. Since proposals, and the funding they mediate, drive many parts of the academic and nonprofit worlds, using R.E.A.L based instruction can help students write successful proposals or reports even before they join the workforce as competent, capable, and expedient writers. The paradigm shift that superimposing R.E.A.L. principles onto the project writing pyramid ushers in can make professional writing the kind of bridge course that finally connects institutions of higher education to the industry.

5. Conclusion: Significance of the Paradigm Shift

The article detailed current problems and practices and discussed both the feedback from and the expectations that companies have of their employees when it comes to technical and business writing. It discussed problems that professional writing course teachers face while instructing project-writing classes. The paper discussed methods and tools through which the principles of R. for *reader-oriented*, E. for *extensively researched*, A. for *actionable solution* and L. for *Looped composition* principles or the R.E.A.L. approach can be superimposed on the search-test-deliver phases or vertices of the teaching pyramid. The paper pointed out that when the course is designed and taught with R.E.AL principles, students produce *extensively researched*, *reader-oriented,* feasibility-tested, and *actionable* project documents. The paper deliberated on how outputs of a *looped composition* process, whether they are used in online, onsite, or hybrid classes, produce writers who are in tune

with the requirements of the kind of real-world writing that they will be called to do after graduation. Finally, the article concluded that the use of R.E. A.L principles produces a paradigm shift from the way professional writing classes are conventionally conducted.

While such a paradigm shift in writing instruction is necessary as it produces student-writers who can better author professional documents at the workplace than their predecessors ever could, moving to R.E.A.L. instruction requires a concerted effort on the part of institutions. As most teachers, unlike this one, do not have experience in the corporate world, it becomes really difficult for them to create bridges between the academic and the work world even if they want to do so. However, it is not impossible for institutions to build that expertise in their writing instructors. Organizing training and creating interactive online and onsite forums, promoting linkages, and arranging interactions between academia and corporates by university administrators can create aha moments for the teachers and empower their efforts in making their project writing instruction more relevant to the workplace. If this helps to bridge the divide between industry and educational institutions, the struggle, the efforts, and the shift are well worth it.

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