WHAT IS WRITING? STUDENT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE TECHNOLOGIES OF LITERACY IN COLLEGE COMPOSITION

A Dissertation

by

SARAH CATHERINE SPRING

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2010

Major Subject: English

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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

What Is Writing? Student Practices and Perspectives
on the Technologies of Literacy in College Composition. (August 2010)
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M.A., Texas A&M University
Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. M. Jimmie Killingsworth

Despite the increasing presence of technology in composition classrooms, students have not yet accepted the idea of multiple writing technologies – in fact, most students do not yet fully understand the role of the word processor in their individual writing process. The research goal of this dissertation is therefore to examine the physical experience of writing, both in and outside of a computer composition classroom, from students' perspective by investigating their definitions of writing and how they understand the relationship between writing and technology. To highlight student writing practices, the analysis uses both qualitative and quantitative data from two classes in a PC computer lab at Texas A&M University, one freshman composition and one advanced composition course. Several important patterns have emerged from the analysis of this data, and each of the main chapters focuses on a different student perspective.

Chapter II argues that students tend to view computers simply as instruments or tools, an understanding that affects how they perceive and work with classroom

computers. Because how they perceive and approach computers affects their writing, Chapter III examines student theories of writing and technology. The discussion postings indicate that students write differently at home than they do in the classroom, and this distinction creates context-bound theories. They are more familiar with the personal context, often exhibiting an inability to translate their ease with this type of writing or computer functions into an academic environment. Their makeshift theories lead to writing practices, and Chapter IV examines student responses for patterns regarding how writing happens. Specifically, discomfort with academic writing leads them to compose with a computer because they believe technology makes this process faster and easier; however, their choice of medium can actually derail writing when made for reasons of ease or convenience.

This study finds that physical set-up of the classroom and the curriculum are factors that have perpetuated these problems. Despite these obstacles, a computer classroom approach has unique advantages, and a new approach is proposed, one that focuses on developing rhetorical flexibility or the ability of students to produce multiple texts in multiple contexts.

DEDICATION

To Dad, Mom, and Elisabeth

and to Jimmie Killingsworth, who has become like family

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No words can adequately express my feelings, but I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Killingsworth, and my committee members, Dr. Balester, Dr. Del Negro, and Dr. Shipman, for their continued guidance and support throughout my graduate school experience.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As technological advancements in the nineteenth century complicated the boundary between orality and literacy, the social context of the twenty-first century presents complications involving race, class, and access. These developments expose the urgent need to redefine the composition classroom within the computer age. Early research in computers and composition stresses the democratic potential of the medium, and its role in reducing what critics see as a "digital divide." What this phrase suggests is that computers separate people into two groups – the technorich and the technopoor (Grabill). Traditionally, those races or classes with resources were seen to have greater access to and therefore greater familiarity with technology. But such classifications represent only one kind of divide.

Research on computer literacy and technology in the classroom has typically focused on how computers and/or technology interact with gender (Wolfe), ethnicity (Monroe), or non-native speakers of English (Lam and Pennington). Joanna Wolfe in "Gender, Ethnicity, and Classroom Discourse: Communication Patterns of Hispanic and White Students in Networked Classrooms" combines the first two in her study of Whites and Hispanics in networked classrooms, calling the lack of data and understanding about Hispanic females a "glaring gap" in literature (513). She ultimately concludes that

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This dissertation follows the style of *Modern Language Association*.

ethnicities harbor assumptions about classroom discourse, and much like the research findings of Deborah Tannen and other linguists, that men tend to be more verbal and active in discussions; "many women feel ignored in online discussions because they are uncomfortable with the competitive character of academic debate" (515). Similarly, Barbara Monroe's *Crossing the Digital Divide: Race, Writing, and Technology in the Classroom* and Jeanne Marie Rose's "'Be Seeing U' in unfamiliar places: ESL writers, email epistolaries, and critical computer literacy" strive for critical literacy and literacy education among students of nonwhite backgrounds. In Monroe's words, "the 'have-nots' can speak for themselves, and in doing so, they can teach educators at all levels much about nonwhite ways of knowing and interacting in the world" (4). None of these studies address the particular problems in my teaching situation at Texas A&M University, however, as relatively few studies explore the relation between student theories of writing and degree of computer literacy, and even fewer address these issues within a student population that professes easy access to technology.

The Importance of Context

My experience in the computer classroom suggests a different divide, the nature of which involves student theories and practices of writing and technology. Rather than continuing to focus exclusively on bridging the digital divide, then, I believe that we should reconceptualize it in terms of context, meaning I want students to be able to write and use computers in a variety of contexts – home, personal, popular, academic, and writing. Certainly, the skills needed to surf the Internet are markedly different from those

required to type a paper or attend class in a computer lab. Once we begin to see the computer classroom as a distinct environment, we can see a set of patterns and guidelines shared by those in that context. Once these guidelines have been identified through observation and research, they become teachable; once students practice with these new skills, they can begin to function fully in the academic context as well as the personal context.

I currently teach composition courses in one of the English Department's computer labs, and as a result, the initial focus on my own research was the available technology. In my experience, the large majority of students placed into my courses are surprised on the first day, as they have little or no idea that the room will have computers. My students are also unaware that they are being charged for the privilege of using the computers; a fee entitled "Instructional Enhancement" in the amount of $50 has been added to the semester's tuition. Despite this enhancement, scholarly attention to the unique context of the computer classroom is only now beginning to help scholars and teachers understand student perspectives of writing and computer literacy. By computer literacy, I mean to imply academic competence – the ability to approach the computer and operate it successfully in the classroom environment; computer operations may include navigating a word processor, uploading papers to the online course software, and accessing the library's electronic databases. In the course objectives and descriptions provided in the standard syllabus, literacy of this kind is not currently a priority, yet we expect students to be able to type papers rather than submit handwritten copies. Such

expectations are the result of the assumption that A&M's largely middle class student population is competent when it comes to technology, particularly computers.

After discovering that I cannot expect all of my students to be familiar, much less comfortable, with computers, I reworked my syllabus to better integrate the computers into the daily class routine. One way to achieve this integration is through daily electronic freewrites in the form of online discussion postings, and I often use topics that solicited responses on student attitudes towards technology. These responses reveal insights into many issues, including the level of student comfort while typing and looking at a computer screen. More importantly, however, students spoke of technology in terms of context and a relationship between technology and writing that was also based in context. The questions then matured from an initial look at student attitudes towards computers to a more complete analysis of the writing process as experienced and explained by students.

Research Questions

Students indicate that, despite the increasing presence of technology in composition classrooms, they have not yet accepted the idea of alternate writing technologies; in fact, most students do not yet fully understand the role of the word processor in their individual writing process, and as a result, do not engage with course learning objectives as we would hope. It is this outlook, coupled with my own classroom observations, that leads me to believe the following research questions regarding the student writing experience are important: how do students understand and define

writing? how does writing happen? and how do they feel technology affects the experience of writing?

By asking these questions, I learned that a divide exists in my own classroom. And while I initially perceived this divide to be, at its heart, a lack of computer competence in the areas such as typing and navigating the Internet, it is also evident in the more complex areas of writing attitudes and writing practices. So, these two divides are actually symptoms of a larger divide, one that separates writing and computer use into two distinct contexts, personal and academic. For example, initial student responses in my class demonstrate that typing, conducting online research, and maneuvering class websites are skills not everyone learns or masters, nor are many students aware of how to approach or write in an academic context. Qualitative words such as "hard," "difficult," or "slow" are often used in conjunction with their own perceived abilities, indicative of attitudes that may have a detrimental effect on the creation of a polished, typed paper in correct MLA documentation style. I decided to observe my students and attend to their online discussion postings for attitudes towards writing and technology, particularly evaluative references to ability and familiarity, in the hopes that I would be able to help students navigate the space between contexts.

Present State of the Question

Despite the increase in research regarding writing technologies and their place within the composition classroom, more work needs to be done. According to Jeffrey T. Grabill's "On divides and interfaces: Access, class, and computers," the issues of class

and access are in severe need of additional study and research, especially as the introduction of computers into the composition course has done little, if anything, to rectify the "digital divide" and first-year composition courses remain what Lynn Bloom calls a "middle-class enterprise." Grabill's article calls for "sustained attention to issues of digital inequality in a broad range of contexts" (456). While I do not dispute the existence of such a divide, I would argue that it exists amongst the white middle-class students he so passionately argues are on the "correct" side of the gap; in other words, they may have greater access to computers and cyberspace, but access should not be confused with comfort, familiarity, or ability.

Yet the composition classroom continues to assume that current students who grew up with technology are therefore capable of learning technological skills in addition to reading and writing. Mark Goddard's "What Do We Do with These Computers? Reflections on Technology in the Classroom" suggests that curriculums develop "based on what is popular at the time" (20). In light of this theory, it is no surprise that computers and other technology have become commonplace in the composition classroom, and yet students continue to show considerable resistance.

Student resistance suggests that simply integrating computers into the composition classroom is having little, or even a negative, effect on students. One possible explanation offered is that the teacher-researchers attempting to diffuse this anxiety are in need of assistance. Gerrard notes the recurring theme of fear or loss of control throughout the discipline's conference presentations and article titles, concern about "being overwhelmed by the size of the task we have undertaken" (7). This term

"task" refers to the implementation of computer-based teaching, a daunting responsibility for any instructor or administrator for a number of reasons. First, it is a risky endeavor; second, it is nearly impossible to stay current in terms of technological changes and equipment. Indeed, it may even be the teachers who have anxiety about technology or at least its increasing presence in the classroom. So how do teachers react to this everchanging curriculum and encourage students to release anxieties? Perhaps we should employ Charles Deemer's theory that teaching should become a shared experience involving mutual learning, fulfilling his desire for the classroom to be a "unified, joint experience" (122). The teacher learns to master her presentation and grasp of the material, in this case the computer, in conjunction with each student's struggles to comprehend each performance and piece of information.

To complicate matters, classroom research argues that new aspects of a class can contribute significantly to the creation of anxiety, and one of the recent subsets in computers and composition involves the keywords new media or multimedia. Best defined by Wysocki's chapter in *Writing New Media*, new media refers to "those that have been made by composers who are aware of the range of materialities of texts and who then highlight the materiality; such composers design texts that help readers/consumers/viewers stay alert to how any text – like its composers and readers – doesn't function independently of how it is made and in what contexts" (15). Its emergence has ties to not only technological advancements, but also student contact with multimedia forms such as video games and websites. Works in this category subscribe to Jay Bolter's prediction for print literacy from *Writing Space*: "the printed book seems

destined to move to the margin of our literature culture […] this shift from print to the computer does not mean the end of literacy. What will be lost is not literacy itself, but the literacy of print, for electronic technology offers us a new kind of book and new ways to read and write" (qtd. in Wysocki et al. 1). Indeed, in "Literacy Online," Myron C. Tuman comes to a similar conclusion; for as he articulates, the reworking of reading and writer will be "so broad, so complete, and so sudden that we will soon find ourselves inside the world of [compound] literacy and completely adjusted to it, using the language of print […] without being fully aware of our having crossed into a wholly new world" (40).

In many classrooms, the idea of a new world of literacy continues to be a frightening and foreign concept to students and teachers alike. Lewis and Atzert specifically look at the introduction of computers and other unfamiliar technologies into the Computer Assisted Language Learning classroom (CALL), but their findings suggest that any student, when faced with learning new discourses and technology, can experience distress. Similarly, Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher's recent *Literate Lives in the Information Age* reveals that students do not see computers as tools of writing and literacy, but instead view computer lab time as non-English time and vice versa despite the authors' efforts to help students embrace multiple forms of literacy. Andrea Lunsford also encountered resistance while attempting to develop a new course in the Writing and Rhetoric program at Stanford. Lunsford intended the course to focus on the idea of "secondary literary" or a looser prose style infiltrated by visual and aural components to mirror the agility and shiftiness of language filtered through and transformed by digital

technologies and to allow for, indeed demand, performance (170). Students complained that while they loved the opportunities to use new technology, they did not feel as though their writing was improving; "in other words, they knew they were learning something, but many of them wouldn't call it writing" (174). Lunsford and the committee were then forced to reevaluate their course goals, focusing on presentation (in addition to rhetoric, research, and argument) rather than media production and construction.

In *Geographies of Writing*, Nedra Reynolds speculates this reaction arises because acts of composition are drawn from familiar spatial practices. Students are so familiar with their own habits and tendencies that they may even be unaware of the impact these practices have on the way they approach the world. New situations (whether academic writing or computers) cause students to be disoriented, leading them to rely on the spatial metaphors of frontier, alien space, borderlands and others in an attempt to regain a feeling of comfort or safety. These "mental maps," according to Reynolds, help students to navigate in the unfamiliar until they are able to act as an "inhabitant" again. The concept of inhabitance or habitation is particularly important in regards to students for they may continually resist until such a state of familiarity is achieved. It is then the responsibility of the instructor or researcher to help them make new maps or habitus.

But just as environment shapes spatial practices, Reynolds also argues that the tools of writing shape mental processes, a concept echoed by many in the field of computers and literacy including Andrea diSessa. Krista Homicz, for example, studied

student interactions with computers only to find that while many perceive technology as a benefit, they are not always comfortable with all of the computer's functions (particularly in regards to the creation and analysis of web pages and hyperlinks) – like my students who compose in Word but never with PowerPoint or Visual Knowledge Builder. Susan Kirtley's recent survey of a group of students enrolled in a Writing and Technology course makes a similar observation, and she, like Reynolds, links students' views on technology to their prior history with computers. Her research focuses on two central questions: what did the computer in the composition classroom mean? and did it help or hinder the students? Student narratives (as assigned in her Writing and Technology course) suggest a "strong link between prior access and present feelings" (219), with the term *access* encompassing factors such as socioeconomic status and family attitudes towards technology, and Kirtley ultimately concludes that writing instructors should be aware of what students are likely to experience as they compose with computers.

Kirtley's findings call for further research in two key areas. First, there is a need for the scholarship in this field to focus on student voices. Critical research on new writing technologies remains important; however, as Kirtley argues, part of that research should illuminate the practice of these technologies from the perspective of the users themselves. Kevin Eric De Pew's article about digital subjectivities provides its own interpretation of recent scholarship, citing that "there was still an insignificant amount of empirical data about computer user practices" (106). His argument reports on these practices, challenging instructors to not only approach technology rhetorically in order to

empower students with the possibility of new subject positions, but also develop strategies in order to empower themselves.

In other words, while a great deal of scholarship offers theoretical or pedagogical possibilities for technology in the composition classroom, we are only recently discovering whether the integration is productive or even noticeable to our students. Authors such as Duffelmeyer and Gos have begun to work more closely with students for their research, but more inquiry into the student experience of technology is needed to assess the idea that more training is all that is needed (as argued by Grabill and others). This inquiry may best take place, as Lisa Gerrard suggests, through interviews, surveys, and case studies, "methods that have become staples of feminist research [and] help answer questions like this" (qtd. in Kirtley 211).

Second, while there is a possible link between history and current experience, the relationship between writing and computers has only been hinted at. As Grabill suggests, ignorance of this relationship or of student feelings in general reinforces digital divides in the classroom. Several of Kirtley's students, for example, wrote that they were "bad at computers and bad at writing" (223). But, as she asks in the closing paragraphs, how is computer competence related to writing? Do students with writer's block see the computer as a help or a hindrance to their flow of ideas?

Authors such as Kirtley, Duffelmeyer, and Kitalong (and her co-authors Moore and Selfe) advocate the assigning of techno-biographies as a clear first step in easing student anxiety, a tactic I have adopted in my own classroom with only limited results. In their minds, it is important to encourage critical analysis of technology in order to

facilitate discussion of computer culture and its influence, and Lewis and Atzart agree that developing critiques of technology help place student fears in perspective. The technoautobiography (TA) helps lead students into the realm of academic discourse by beginning with a personal subject, but my students often still have difficulties developing areas of deeper thought from the TA into a more formal argument supported by sources – yet another indication that we do not yet fully understand their experience in a classroom that combines academic writing with writing technologies.

But how do we go about gaining a better understanding? Robert Johnson, in *User-Centered Technology*, points to Langdon Winner as a proponent of ceasing to collect mere information about technology, and instead turning our attention to making changes in how we live with technology. As Winner argues, "as long as we lack the ability to make our situation intelligible, all of the 'data' in the world will make no difference" (qtd in Johnson xi), and I would add that the same inability exists when discussing the implementation of technology into more traditional composition classrooms. Simply put, we forget or don't know how to take student experience into account when planning course objectives or content, and have therefore lost our bearings. The perspectives of our students become particularly important, however, if we consider Philip Davis' survey of undergraduate students and his conclusion that students prefer to learn about technology using trial-and-error (instead of formal instruction, lab time, etc.). Such findings encourage me to ask myself if such a disconnect exists within my own classroom, and give my research an ultimate goal: to identify the words, metaphors, and analogies used by students to describe their experiences on the way to

discovering the best way to implement writing and writing technologies into the computer classroom curriculum.

Methodology

It might seem natural to solicit feedback regarding the implementation of classroom technology, but it is only recently that scholars have begun to call for an investigation into student perspectives. The article by De Pew combines theoretical practice with classroom experience, and Krista Homicz, in "Virtual Arenas: Students' Computer Interactions Shape Their Perceptions of Themselves as Writers," shifts her scrutiny from the computer to the participant. Citing Sullivan and Porter, Homicz argues that the "focus of research should be on the people affected by technology rather than on the processes of technology or the products it creates" (40). In other words, we should know and understand our students – best accomplished through direct observation and open discussion. This statement most closely echoes my own teaching/research philosophy, and her methods of examining student work are a model for future studies.

Taking up the call for further investigation of student experience, in their own words, I gathered both qualitative and quantitative data from four classes in a PC computer lab at Texas A&M: one section of ENGL 104: Rhetoric and Composition and three sections of ENGL 241: Advanced Composition (two classroom sections and one hybrid section). The resulting body of data was several hundred pages, and following recent methodology among ethnographers Maxwell, Stone and Stone, Anderson and Jack, Geertz, and Borland, I have culled the data to focus only on the first year writing

course and one advanced course. Also, in accordance with the work of those scholars, I interpreted the attitudes and actions of the students as represented in my field notes and observations, but I more directly solicited their views by analyzing writing samples in the form of online discussion postings, blogs, and self-critiques. The resulting interpretations are useful in helping to determine which theories regarding student practice help to explain their experience, but student responses are the heart of the dissertation. Several important patterns have emerged from my analysis of this data, and each main chapter focuses on a different pattern or perspective.

ENGL 104

In my sections of ENGL 104, I rely heavily upon class discussion and online topic responses. Due to the students' familiarity with the daily response, using this medium to ask questions seemed a natural step to elicit honest answers and maintain a sense of routine. Along with the usual weekly responses, I created a six-question survey and introduced it to my students in the same format of an online discussion board. The questionnaire was posted online during the fourteenth week of the semester (see Appendix for a complete list of questions). Unlike the daily class activities, the survey was prefaced by a brief explanation of the project's goals and intentions. I had reasoned that revealing the ultimate purpose of the responses too soon would affect the way in which each student approached it, perhaps even altering their answers. The students were told that all should attempt complete the online questions, but signing the accompanying consent form gave permission for their responses and final course grades

to be analyzed. After addressing questions and concerns, I stepped out of the room in order to portray the idea that participation was strictly voluntary. Of the twenty-one students in the class, fifteen (nine females and six males) posted their completed questionnaires and returned the consent forms. These questions were specifically formulated to be easy to answer; most students could respond with a single word or phrase. Conversely, the freewrites were most often in the form of a paragraph, and together the information gathered attempts to convey an accurate picture of the attitudes expressed.

As the entire class completed the various freewrites and responses throughout the fifteen weeks but not all wanted their answers to be analyzed, I first looked to the questionnaire as a starting point. After glancing through the set of fifteen questionnaires, I went back through the five discussion questions in order to concentrate only on the responses of the students who had chosen to participate. A separate document was created for each student's responses, in the order that the freewrites were given. It was then possible to compare the freewrites with the questionnaires, an exercise that revealed general patterns in the data (due to the format of the questionnaire, it was relatively easy to "count" the answers and divide them into categories: yes, no, both, other, etc). This comparison helped to explain some of the comments on the questionnaire as the majority of students discussed the same attitudes or themes throughout the semester, and as a result, I examined responses to each question as well as an individual's comments from the entire semester.

ENGL 241

Data collection for the advanced composition course occurred in a similar manner. At the end of the semester in Fall 2006, students were approached with the consent forms (given at the same time as course evaluations), and told that their responses would be used to reevaluate course content. I mentioned the possibility of linking the data to this larger project, stayed to answer any potential questions, and left the room. One of my students collected the consent forms and placed them in a sealed manila envelope, which I did not open until after final grades had been turned in. In a class of twenty-five students, thirteen consented – four males and nine females.

Although I again rely upon class discussion and online topic responses, I was given the administrative freedom to create the course content of these sections (titled *Computers and New Media* and *Writings and Technologies* respectively), freedom that enabled me to focus specifically on the intersection of computers and literacy. Like the students in ENGL 104, this class was asked to identify their prior experiences with various writing technologies, to divulge their composition preferences, and to post a response introducing them to the rest of the class. In terms of assignments, though, the class was required to complete a different set of assignments: technobiography, collaborative project using the spatial hypertext program Visual Knowledge Builder, argument/position paper, and rhetorical analysis. Some of the weekly response questions focused on student perception of these prompts, as well as their understanding of key course concepts such as writing, technology, and literacy.

Course Comparison

I consciously made the decision to highlight only the online discussion postings due to their format. Students were less careful about punctuation, spelling, and grammar, and I believe their answers to various discussion questions are the best source of student feelings and attitudes regarding writing, technology, and the relationship between the two. For as Killingsworth tells us in *Appeals in Modern Rhetoric*, there are many rhetorical motives for storytelling, and because students were asked to talk about themselves as writers and technology users, I believe these narratives fall under the category of stories which reinforce values. Students, for example, talk about how they choose which technology to use, or examine their previously unchallenged notions that all technology is good. Other themes such as dislike for academic writing and how writing practices differ depending upon context also surfaced.

Two similar course management programs were used to collect and store the responses, Insite in ENGL 104 and Turnitin in ENGL 241. Due to the structure of the "Discussion" feature in these programs, data are organized chronologically according to question; in other words, student responses from Spring 2005 come first, followed by the subsequent semesters. Within each semester, data are further organized by date and time. The discussion postings are listed in order of completion date, and the responses are in the same order that students completed the assignment (the first to respond and so on) unless otherwise noted.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter II establishes my theoretical framework by engaging with prominent works in the field of computers and composition and analyzing a series of metaphors employed by scholars to describe the experience of the computer classroom. While scholars and authors in the field may desire to understand the computer classroom in a variety of metaphorical ways (e.g., as community, space, or place), my survey of the teaching literature highlights the prominence of tool and machine metaphors. Put another way, there is a disconnect between theory regarding the computer classroom and the practices that exist within it. The presence of these instrumental metaphors in classroom pedagogy and assignments has a profound impact on both teachers and students, encouraging them to continue to see the computer as a functional tool rather than something more complex. This transfer of metaphor is an example of the global discourse community determining local practice, or what Brian Street describes as a "trickle-down" theory of literacy, and the chapter concludes by looking at student metaphors to encourage a more critical look at how technology is both integrated and discussed in the classroom.

The tendency of students to see the computer as an academic tool speaks to their attitudes regarding academic writing, and Chapter III concentrates on student theories of writing. This chapter argues that students internalize context-based theories of writing, meaning their writing processes and attitudes shift depending on whether they are writing for personal or academic purposes. They are successful in their personal lives because they are willing to invest time and energy into leisure writing and computer

activities; however, they often associate negative emotions and attitudes with academic writing, and are reluctant to practice this type of writing. As a result, there is a distinct boundary between personal and academic writing in the minds of students. The academic context is less familiar, and students are unable to transfer their comfort and ease with personal writing processes into this more formal environment, a trend I identify as a problem of context-switching.

Chapter IV examines the responses for patterns regarding how theories of writing become practices or habits. Students indicate that they cope with this problem of context-switching by composing academic assignments on a computer. Most students use the positive adjectives *easier*, *faster*, or *quicker* to describe the computer, suggesting they see it as a time-saving or labor-saving device that helps them complete writing; however, when asked about their own writing processes, students are more likely to praise computers in the revision stages of writing, not when they are brainstorming or creating. Because they are reluctant to practice academic writing and often spend less time writing for school, students have less established writing habits. In fact, most students are unaware of how they write in and for an academic context, and when they attempt to use the computer to complete these assignments, writing is often no longer faster or easier.

Overall, analysis of student responses not only deciphers how students approach the intersection of computers and writing, but also illuminates student definitions of writing and technology, definitions still under debate in many theoretical circles. The conclusion offers a final discussion of student experience, as well as a comparison of the

two courses, and focuses on the need to develop new writing assignments and approaches for the computer composition classroom that will help students thrive in both the personal and academic writing contexts.

CHAPTER II

COMMUNITY, ENVIRONMENT, OR TOOL WORKSHOP: WHAT KIND OF PLACE IS THE COMPUTER CLASSROOM?

In *The End of Composition Studies*, David Smit argues convincingly that the field of composition has reached a crisis point and is in need of a revolutionary new approach in the way it both understands and teaches writing. Smit feels that while the goal of an undergraduate writing classroom is to "promote the use of writing" (1), faculty and graduate students are not approaching it in a way that would accomplish that purpose. I adhere to a similar goal within my own computer classroom, to promote writing in such a way that students are able to respond to a variety of rhetorical situations. It is really a double purpose, however, for the addition of computers into composition requires orientation within English and technology. To "orient" suggests a need to define the place of composition, or as Nedra Reynolds admonishes: "know your terrain, or situate writing within an environment" (4). In order to understand the computer classroom, we need to investigate the best way to see its terrain. What kind of material or theoretical place is it?

Reynolds' first rule of writing is representative of two important trends in the literature about the computer classroom. First, there is a tendency to think of this kind of classroom in metaphoric language in order to understand its *terrain* or *environment*. Second, these metaphors are increasingly borrowed from surrounding fields of knowledge such as eco- and techno-rhetoric. Indeed, the burgeoning field of geographic

rhetoric draws on the science of geography, which focuses on "what makes places unique" (Reynolds 55), provides metaphors for studying writing, writers, and places. These metaphors often "reflect and construct accepted ways of knowing" and influence the way we are encouraged to understand place. They are often applied uncritically, however, meaning that the comparison is extended past its breaking point or is based upon unexamined assumptions. Being cognizant of the metaphors which prevail in the field of computers and writing and their dimensions is therefore an important first step towards critically viewing computer classrooms.

A survey of this field's published scholarship from the last twenty years identifies the three metaphors used most often in relationship to computers and the computer classroom: community, place, and space. Looking more closely at this literature, however, adds tool or workshop to that list. Many critics have dismissed this metaphor as being simplistic or critically substantive, yet it continues to be present in the academic conversation and in the classroom. This chapter argues that the existence of instrumental metaphors may inadvertently encourage students to fail to engage with the idea of the computer classroom as a community or even a place. Indeed, my research and teaching experience show that students persistently view computers as tools, a mentality they likely gleaned from my own teaching philosophy and the required reading, and resist seeing computers as anything more complex. Such a transfer is an example of the global discourse community determining local practice, a "trickle-down" theory of literacy best explained by Brian Street's "Futures of the Ethnography of Literacy," and I

conclude with the implications this transfer has for teachers in computers and composition.

Metaphor Theory

Metaphors embody rhetorical appeals as they attempt to reduce distance by identifying one position or thing with another; or, metaphors link dissimilar concepts, such as the concrete and the abstract. In trying to reduce distance, metaphors aid comprehension; they act to "smooth the waters between author and audience or any two positions" (Killingsworth 2). This definition hints at the meeting of the minds that can occur with shared language. Therein lies the power, and the appeal, of metaphor.

But metaphors are capable of transformation as well as identification: "they always involve swerves, indirections, substitutions, twists, and turns of meaning" (Killingsworth 121). In this definition, metaphors are capable of showing us new things. These turns of meaning, traditionally called *tropes*, subsequently come to symbolize a way of knowing. In more everyday terms, if metaphor means to know something by seeing it as something else, we are then privy to another's perspective or ideas about the world – in the words of I. A. Richards, "to think about [word] choice is the most convenient mode of thinking about the principle of all our choices" (86). Metaphors then become windows or entry points into thought processes, not necessarily confined to our own.

Richards explains that metaphor is an "omnipresent principle of language" (92), that it is unavoidable. It is our very reliance on metaphors that makes them transparent.

By transparent, I mean to suggest the difficulty in recognizing metaphors that remain in the background or are used unconsciously or uncritically, many with meanings so constant that we can disregard them. But the invisible metaphor (similar to Richards's unuttered word) must also be taken into account: "we think increasingly by means of metaphors that we profess not to be relying on. The metaphors we are avoiding steer our thought as much as those we accept" (92). The awareness suggested by Richards is therefore a complex and multi-dimensional skill which must be practiced in order to prevent metaphors and tropes from either deceiving us or taking us into unintended meanings or attitudes. Such a skill acknowledges not only the limits and advantages of present metaphors, but investigates the relationship between the author's accepted and discarded analogies. Only by habitually working with metaphors can we develop a greater awareness of their shifts and transformations.

One way to accomplish this is to see metaphor as a ratio. Such a structure allows us to separate the distinct parts of the metaphor, as well as identify any invisible or unacknowledged assumptions at work. Consider the popular metaphor instructors rely on when encouraging students to write in their own voice: in this analogy, voice is to speaking as X is to writing. How a person completes the ratio indicates what she values or assumes about writing. I may see style as "X," the written equivalent of voice, which means I value the way words are arranged on a page; on the other hand, I could equate experience as "X" and encourage students to use personal examples or opinions. To return to Reynolds ("know your terrain, or situate writing within an environment"), writing is to environment as X is to terrain. She does not explicitly reveal what "X" is in

this example, but the reader can infer that X refers to knowledge or a familiarity with terrain. Writing is then a valued way to explore and describe the author's surroundings, and with this metaphor, Reynolds further stresses what she sees as the importance of environment and its effect on writing.

The heart of this discussion focuses on what is revealed when the values behind the metaphors of community and place are viewed in relation to one another. I argue that these metaphors can be placed on a continuum according to what each values or prioritizes: community metaphors focus on people, place metaphors value environment or context, and space metaphors tend to privilege the objects or instruments within them. Metaphors that are people-oriented or object-oriented form the two "ends" of the continuum, with place-oriented metaphors falling in the middle (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Metaphor Continuum

This continuum parallels the dichotomy between the instrumental/communal views of technology first expressed by Habermas, then Feenberg. Habermas felt a strong tension between instrumental (object-oriented) and communicative (people-oriented) rationalities, with the former emphasizing control, efficiency, and hierarchy against the latter's unified social and democratic action; Feenberg's views and approaches to

technology can be categorized as instrumental, substantive, and critical. Instrumental approaches view computers as neutral tools, while substantive thinking regards technology as potentially destructive in its capacity to alter entire societies.

Metaphors in Composition Scholarship

Metaphors carry complex value systems, including competing agendas for action, and are capable of revealing the user's cognitive processes. This understanding of metaphor arms us with an outline for critical study as we approach the figurative language that seeks to describe the computer classroom. As mentioned above, my examination of scholarship in computers and writing from the last twenty years initially led me to make three classifications of metaphor: social or community, place, and space. Tools are still prevalent, but I first analyze these key metaphors as they have the potential to reveal much about how individuals identify the classroom or wish to relate to it.

People-Oriented Metaphors

A computer classroom could be seen as a distinct community, a viewpoint that acts to supply an established set of patterns and rules to those within that culture. James Boyd White's defines community in *Heracles' Bow* as "a common language, such as a common story, is in fact, what we mean by community" (172). On one hand, this is an optimistic metaphor for White, and his goal is seemingly a community of friendship in which people are not seen as means or ends. Therein lies the appeal of community with

its image or sense of cooperation, trust, and openness. Unfortunately, the sense of inclusion does not allow White to adequately address the possibility of cultural tourists or refugees – perhaps because they do not exist within his communal vision. White hints at problems with the ideal through his discussion of textual ambiguities, ranges of meaning, and changing contexts, but the omission of potential disadvantages of community acts to dull the metaphor's very benefits. A community group then, in this example, is by its nature exclusionary. Those not aware of the story or unable, perhaps even unwilling, to speak the language are automatically outside of the community.

Bartholomae speaks further about communities of academic discourse. Students often come to the university without being aware of these communities, and their writing attempts to mimic, without authority or understanding, the established discourse with often disastrous results. As Bartholomae argues in "Inventing the University," writers do not write, but are themselves written by the languages available to them. The community concept in the university setting additionally risks homogenizing its members by neglecting to see students as part of their own smaller communities or rather establishing a hierarchy of priority that privileges membership to the larger group. I initially did not consider these aspects of the metaphor, but instead focused on community's power to make the classroom more accessible, heeding Nelson's call for composition instructors to see students as carriers of experience and to be initiated into their world as they are initiated into our academic one. Not all students were able to acclimate themselves within that electronic community by the end of the semester, however. I see this as further proof that some members of the classroom community could not successfully

transition from their individual communities, and I reevaluated my use of the metaphor when students did not see our class in community terms.

Although the use of community as metaphor has limitations, it retains certain power and is perhaps the most popular metaphor among composition scholars who refer to the computer classroom. James Inman's *Computers and Writing: The Cyborg Era* explains that he uses the term *community* because it represents the field of computers and writing as a group of individuals, rather than merely scholarship or knowledge. Emphasizing the personal allows Inman to characterize the community as one of "relationships and resources," differences and respect for a diversity of viewpoints (2-3). In fact, it becomes clear that Inman must view the field in this way in order to validate his own author position, one of a "practitioner, a participant-observer with a professional and personal investment in the computers and writing community's growth and development" (1). He, like White, values sharing, at least partly because this idea of exchange places importance on his own contributions to the scholarly literature.

Other scholars are also drawn to community for its inclusive qualities. James Paul Gee sees New Literacy Studies as emphasizing communities of practice, where people are no longer content being individual cogs, but instead desire to see and participate in the whole picture. Lester Faigley's *Fragments of Rationality* visualizes the networked classroom as an online community that discusses and debates in order to come to a consensus, while Mark Goddard's advice on handling the computer classroom addresses the community of teachers in an attempt to encourage them to use technology in their own classrooms and see other instructors as resources.

These examples point to the possibility of students engaging with the community metaphor. For example, Philip Davis' survey of undergraduate students reveals that, in their opinion, students choose to and work best in collaborative groups (even when formal instruction or help is available); in fact, student anxiety is greatly reduced when they are placed in situations with others like themselves. Carol Cyganowski finds Davis' conclusions to be true in her own classroom as well, adding that her role as teacher has shifted from authority to that of adviser or mentor, a necessary step if students are to feel like full-fledged members of the group.

Place-Oriented Metaphors

Reynolds argues that as theories of writing and space develop, this movement encourages the creation of new metaphors "for asserting where the work of composition studies should concentrate" (28). Not only do geographic metaphors help lead scholarship in previously unexplored directions, but these new ways of understanding tend to borrow from unfamiliar sources in an attempt to further extend the analogy. As Kenneth Baake explains in *Metaphor and Knowledge: The Challenges of Writing Science*, metaphors can bridge a variety of disciplines through what he calls "harmonics," the degree to which the metaphorical layers of meaning create associations, whether positive or negative (9). The communities discussed above, for example, blend law and theories of technology with composition scholarship in their search for place, and Shoshana Zuboff's concluding chapter speaks of technology's

power to change the "nature of our reality" and give "definition to our worldly place" (387), theories which link technology, geography, and environment.

Another example of the connection between technology and place is the desire to promote technology by offering the parallel between the computer classroom and a sustainable environment, such as Richard Selfe's *Sustainable Computer Environments*. I read the term sustainable in light of Selfe's arguments of habituation: the process of establishing metaphorical awareness is a habit that must be sustained or maintained in order to be truly effective. In other words, we must be "on guard" for shifts of meaning and usage, keeping mentally alert. However, for Selfe, the word *sustainable* occurs in another context entirely; "computer-using teachers need robust, connected, electronic teaching environments that allow for a wide range of teaching style and learning efforts, in multiple media, and over a sustained period of time" (xi). His argument is largely concerned with "sustainable practices" for electronic teaching rather than what he sees as short-term solutions, an echo of environmentalism that hints of political and progressive values. This argument is reminiscent of the environmentalists who called for reform, and Selfe aligns himself with the rhetoric of sustainability and its accessibility, optimism, and democratic values.

The word *sustainable* in the title obviously has a doubled meaning that is applicable both to nature or the environment (to supply with necessities or nourishment, provide for) and computers (to affirm the validity of). And if Reynolds is correct that the first rule of writing is to "know your terrain or to situate writing within an environment" (4), Selfe has established a particularly meaningful connection. There are definite

advantages to sustainability, especially in terms of individual agency or activism, which are worthwhile goals for any classroom. Selfe sees the purpose of his work to encourage participation with technology: "to become technological activists who are willing to productively influence and shape the technological systems around them" (xiii). By relating systems of value that are foreign to the more familiar, Selfe is attempting to strengthen his own argument.

Despite his optimistic enthusiasm, there are objections to the analogy of the computer environment. First, Selfe does not seem to adequately consider those excluded by his statement. I do not mean teachers or students who are unwilling to engage with their electronic environments, although that group certainly exists, but the much larger population that is not unwilling but rather unable to. In his own words, Selfe paints a picture of his ideal reader: they are interested, willing, productive, active, and expert. These teachers, administrators, and even students must possess the *resources* that would allow them to devote time and energy to such a *cause*. External and internal forces that would derail these attempts at sustainability are briefly discussed; overall, though, the environment metaphor is allowed to *grow* unchecked.

Second, both Reynolds and I can be critical of Selfe's seeming inability to move away from his metaphorical environment to more real places. As Reynolds so eloquently argues, "through the ability of electronic technologies to simulate travel or movement or a 'speeding-up' of tasks or activities, we think we're 'experiencing' a different culture, otherness, or diversity" (18). The computer classroom, in other words, creates a false sensation of movement, despite the fixed location of the workstation itself. Selfe does

not seem interested in living outside of his metaphor, even to acknowledge that geographically speaking, moving toward something means coming away from something else.

In *Changing Minds: Computers, Learning, and Literacy*, DiSessa continues the attempt at a critical theory of technology by offering computers as material tools that are both culture and value specific, and if tools are artifacts of place, the computer classroom becomes a workshop or museum. As I understand the analogy, culture shapes or designs the material substance of the computer and the literacy it provides, making the tool into a unique reflection of the original creative force. It is a process that endures a "gradual, cumulative development," but the end result is material that "is worth the considerable effort of teaching it to all newcomers" (19). As a tool that is dependent upon cultural values, computers possess the ability to adapt in order to fulfill "particular purposes in particular contexts" or genre-specific social niches (22, 24). Like Selfe, DiSessa borrows his term *niche* from ecology: "genre is to social niche as species is to ecological niche" (24), thus extending the geographical metaphor.

In more everyday terms, computers, as tools, become representative of each niche that they fill, and this analogy is problematic. DiSessa attempts to examine multiple perspectives regarding the viability of niches, but his very discussion of the materiality of tools overrides any potential criticism. Computers are malleable material or material support, and as such, form the foundation for DiSessa's pillars of computational literacy. The foundation is relied upon to hold up the rest of the structure, but rarely visible. DiSessa encourages the collection and display of these tools for the

very reason that they are symbolic of scientific or "tool-rich" communities, yet the high profile that he bestows upon them effectively renders them invisible to all but the most critical eye. For DiSessa discusses their position and purpose within their niche, qualities that while highlighting their usefulness relegates them to the background. Tools are rarely noticed until they malfunction or breakdown: "literacy disappears in literate communities [an emblem] I likened to the invisibility of water to fish" (46). I would argue that literacy disappears only in communities of novice writers like my students. Advanced writers are aware of literacy, in its many forms of literary criticism, poetry, and rhetoric – all the self-conscious components of a self-critical literate community, but all seemingly invisible to DiSessa. And despite DiSessa's arguments about the productive potential of computers, he shows little concern for their predominantly uncritical position in society.

DiSessa instead considers blindness to be a "problem of perspective" (26) rather than problems of access or ability, and suggests tilting our head to change the view, a vague point that fails to get at the heart of perspective, not to mention one that seems to contradict his earlier comment on memory and material form: "literacies leave traces of themselves in autonomous thinking, making us smarter even when we're not in the presence of the material form" (16). Automatic responses do not encourage, in my own mind, the kind of deeper learning that DiSessa calls for in later chapters. Rather, if we are to remind ourselves of the "simple and easy" (64), and track our own or our students' development, how does the unconscious serve to make us smarter? I concede that

perhaps DiSessa sees instinct as a valuable asset in dealing with abstract concepts or foreign situations, but he does not make the best use of this metaphor.

Reynolds critiques the assumptions present behind many of these metaphors by introducing the concept of space into the discussion of geographic place. Unlike the previous authors, she connects assumptions or habit-making in terms of familiarity and memory: "most acts of composing take places in similar ways, drawn from a store of remembered and well-rehearsed spatial practices that come from the everyday and become engrained, habitual, embodied" (2). Once a theory, act, or metaphor becomes familiar, it is mentally "encoded" or no longer easily noticed, an argument very similar to the one Richards makes in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. The mind is not static, however, and new metaphors or practices occur, adding additional layers to the extant framework. Reynolds uses the word *layer* to reinforce that the old is not replaced, perhaps merely repaired or updated.

This image of road repair fits quite well within our discussion of metaphor. To return briefly to White, I wish to highlight his description of Gibbon's history of Rome and the admiration of the roads as a great work: "the roads make intelligible and manageable what was theretofore incomprehensibly various and disjunctive […] the force of mind and industry that can organize [the geographic world] and make it usable by man" (151). I think both Richards and Reynolds would agree that metaphors work in this same way. If or when we discover the limitations of a specific metaphor, we repair the pothole by adding another layer – a theory that helps to explain the various metaphors used in conjunction with the computer classroom. During this process of

critique or analysis, the "material" of the metaphor is tested, as well as the ability of the human mind to make meanings and comparisons.

Similarly, as roads are built, Reynolds believes "actions and habits are constructed by the spaces in which they are enacted" (57). Habits are then intrinsically connected with issues of place, and as the word habit implies practice that develops over time, these places initially seem as if they would be infused with a sense of comfort or empowerment. Reynolds ultimately argues that locations are not always secure or welcoming, and according to geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, this is the moment when place becomes space. In *Space and Place*, Tuan writes, "place is security, space is freedom, we are attached to the one and long for the other" (3). Those students who are unfamiliar with the computer classroom become tourists or explorers in this new space. My own experience with students in the computer classroom supports such a conclusion, prompting me to offer yet another metaphor – that of alien space.

The metaphor of alien space evolved from classroom observations. I emphasize *alien* because, despite the fact that students are all familiar with classrooms and computers, they generally have yet to experience the two together, particularly within an academic writing context. The general reaction is one of surprise and disorientation, for they have clear memories of composition or English classes and none of those memories include computers. Consider Richards' analogy of traveling to a foreign country: "anyone who has […] come into close contact with its life knows how unsettling and disorientating is the recognition of the place of conventions in our mental world" (42). When students are called upon to compose in my class, usually timed activities on the

computer that bear no resemblance to their writing practices outside the classroom, I observe the panic and frustration that occurs when their traditional writing processes are no longer familiar and therefore no longer effective. Both Richards and Reynolds' work tells us that acts of composition are "engrained, habitual, embodied" spatial practices (Reynolds 2), and changing the space disrupts or unsettles these practices.

Space is equally important in this metaphor then for two reasons. First, space is intimately connected to composition practices, and second, it best reflects student understandings of the classroom. Students do not understand it as a distinct or theoretical place, but rather have a tendency to focus on the objects present within the space. Nelson tells us that students read classrooms as texts, and during such a reading, it is logical to assume students would attempt to comprehend the presence of computers. And if the classroom is an unfamiliar text or alien space, students would naturally be cast in the role of tourist or observer, a role that encourages passive rather than critical interaction with computers. Computers are then viewed as tools or mere objects in the composition process, blending place, space, and object.

Object-Oriented Metaphors

Both people- and place-oriented metaphors contain elements of the other, as well as the third category of objects, and this crossover affirms the need for a metaphor continuum. Stuart Selber's *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age* offers that "no one metaphor could be complete and sufficient by itself, but collectively they offer a diversity of perspectives that have become associated with computer technologies" (24). This

argument seems to echo Richards's idea of multiple linguistic and metaphorical meanings, as well as Reynolds's explanation of cultural geography's need to define the new in relief against the old (57). The end goal is understanding and awareness, and students, also teachers or scholars, should be "adept" at using metaphors appropriately and critically. The word *critical* is important here because of the "danger as well as potential of this mode of engagement" (35). Simply, metaphors have complex dimensions that may ultimately prove helpful or detrimental depending on how they are used.

Selber agrees with DiSessa (in a sense) that the idea of computers as tools is useful in encouraging responsible usage or "demystifying" various functions. But thinking about technology in this way does not act to reveal or analyze what scholars view as the political and social aspects of technology; there is also a danger in assuming that tools, and therefore computers, are neutral. Users need to be cognizant of not only what the metaphor encourages or allows, but also what it deemphasizes or masks. Selber argues that this knowledge can then act as parameters to lead to a more accurate portrayal of literacy (44).

Traditionally, as further explained by Haas and Neuwirth, these philosophies have influenced how we see technology, both in and out of the classroom. We tend to see technology in one of three ways, as transparent, all-powerful, or an instrument. The introduction of computers into the composition classroom further illustrates these philosophies by encouraging instructors and students alike to consider computers as efficient tools for the production of literacy. In other words, we are users of this

technology rather than shapers, where students can either choose to use computers or not use them. But while scholars and instructors struggle to see the computer classroom in such metaphorical terms as community, place, or space, students continue to rely on the original object-oriented terminology of tool. For while the computer is a tool, an appliance, or a machine in its simplest functions, it can have other possibilities, and this instrumental rationality keeps students from seeing its wider, more complex possibilities. Like Haas and Neuwirth, I argue for a better research agenda that addresses this gap between classroom theory and teachers on the one hand and classroom practice and students on the other. This chapter is a step in that direction by first critiquing metaphors in the literature about computer classroom, and now analyzing metaphors from classroom curriculum.

A brief look at articles and books regarding computer classroom pedagogy suggests that despite academic desire to move away from tool metaphors, we may be unable to escape them. Consider the abundance of literature on the physicality or *space* of the computer classroom – how to position computers, worktables, and teacher workstations versus the position of the instructor inside the room. Welch's article on "Technical Communication and Location," for example, focuses on physical examples of "best practices" in computers classrooms, and these practices include "turning [students] away from the computer screens when that is pedagogically necessary" and the ability to "have enough space so that the humans control the computers" (341). The standard syllabus for first year writing at Texas A&M attempts the latter through a statement prohibiting classroom disruptions or misuse of technology, while Lisette

Austin's "Cell Phones, Pagers and Computers: Where Have All Our Spaces and All Our Times Gone?" instructs teachers to "reclaim control" of their classrooms by remembering to "put machines in their place" (9). Both Austin and Welch reinforce the student mentality that computers are merely objects in the classroom. Indeed, I would further suggest that we can occasionally view even our own students as tools or instruments, yet continue to wonder why it is difficult to move students past this perspective.

While the idea of students as objects or vessels may initially sound far-fetched, examples can be found in research on the computer classroom. Kirtley's study desires to access prior student experiences with technology by soliciting personal narratives, and Stanley Fish says students are in "possession" of information (qtd. in Nelson 411), hence the need to solicit student feedback in the form of surveys, questionnaires, and writings. Kitalong's co-authored article has the purpose of finding out more about their students in order to "tap into this knowledge and excitement" (140); students are further described as "cultural repositories of technological expertise" (143), and other teacher-researchers like Kirtley and Duffelmeyer identify students as research subjects as well as participants – a popular phenomenon from which I am not immune as we all seek to study student behavior within the computer classroom. Additional analogies liken students to text processors, manufacturers, cultural or academic products, translators, interpreters, or instruments capable of short-circuiting. Such terminology may perhaps be understood when we consider that most teachers are motivated by a sincere desire to increase writing skills or improve accuracy. Again, however, even these learning

objectives reflect an instrumental mentality regarding learning and writing, one where our view of students in simplistic terms can influence a simplistic view of the technology students use to produce the information we seek.

Metaphors in the Computer Classroom

Academics are preoccupied with these metaphors of community and place for the simple reason that we are attempting to better connect with our students – "construct" a better computer classroom design (Kitalong et al. 137). But such construction requires student input, input that is difficult to give if they do not think of the classroom as a place or space as we do. How then do they see it? My own experience as an instructor suggests that regardless of their feelings about technology, all students tend to view the computer as separate from them, something to be used to write a paper or surf the web. A tool.

Upon learning that I was to teach a first year composition course in such a classroom, I read through the available materials and ready-made lesson plans. Because I was a new instructor, however, I relied too heavily on the activities within the pages of these books without considering how I wanted to use them or what I wanted the students to learn. As a result, both the students and I began to see the computer as a fancier or cooler version of paper and pen without considering the other possibilities. We could freewrite on a given topic, conduct peer review, or practice transitions, yet none of these tasks were particularly foreign to the students. Students did not alter their current practices and theories of writing because the activities did not force them to think about

why they used computers for writing or how computers fit into their individual writing process. The overall opinion at the end of the semester was that having computers in the classroom was "cool" but not earth-shattering or unique. Their attitudes towards technology hadn't changed, much less been challenged, since as Lunsford and Cynthia Selfe have also discovered, students often fail to connect computer time with composition time. The failure widens the gap between computers and writing.

This mentality was likely gleaned from my own teaching philosophy and the required reading. I, in turn, chose readings based upon my understanding of the changing teaching philosophies and my desire for students to possess what Duffelmeyer calls critical computer literacy or Berlin sees as a balanced perspective, readings which unintentionally and/or subconsciously revert back to tool tropes. For example, earlier that semester, I introduced a blind writing exercise from *An Introduction to Teaching Composition in an Electronic Environment* (Hoffman and Scheidenhelm). The activity calls for students to compose with the monitor turned off, and when I asked students to respond to the experience, a tool mentality can be seen in virtually all of the answers. One student said she likes having computers because "they are a great learning tool and can make some processes so muck [sic] easier," but her classmate wrote "technology hinders the process to think creatively because one is on a scientific machine that was originally designed to do calculations." Most students, though, saw computers as helpful particularly for their ability to correct mistakes. As one student explained, computers have resources such as spell check and thesauruses and "all that stuff" – resources that cause her to think that computers are a "huge help" to her learning process. Because

computers provide visual feedback, students did not like writing without the monitor, with one student commenting that she disliked it "very, very much." This student prefers writing with a computer due to her ability to type faster than she can write. Overall, three students explicitly referred to computers as a tool or machine, while nine students used the positive adjectives of "easier," "faster," or "quicker" to describe technology, suggesting the perennial view of the tool as a time-saving or labor-saving device.

For the next online discussion, as a follow-up to the class reading of Lunsford's *Everything's an Argument* (Chapter One), I asked students if technology can be seen as an argument. Even more students expressed views of computers as tools and machines. The responses can generally be put into three categories: computers as physical objects, computers as particular pieces of hardware such as the monitor or keyboard, or uncritical statements about computer's various functions. Responses that fall into the first category refer to computers as "tools," but only when they "work" or are "used properly." In the second category are the praises for the Internet, communication abilities, and mathematical computations. The second and third categories are closely related, with students briefly acknowledging potential disadvantages to computers briefly before deciding technology is good and helpful. For example, one comment states, "I do think it makes our generations a bit more lazy, but not to a harmful extent," and another student describes computers as "great relatively new invention that have greatly benefited society and improved many aspects of life, while it also has it's drawbacks." In all of the above examples, students do not explain their comments further.

Asking additional questions during the remainder of the semester was only partially successful in causing students to reflect on their earlier statements, as evidenced by their end of the semester evaluations discussed above. Even questions that did not require students to label technology as easy or hard, a hindrance or an asset, resulted in similar responses. Finding research that indicates students do not use computers for all parts of their writing processes, I asked students if they preferred to compose with a pen or a computer. Here is a sample of the answers:

- I see computers as helpful when it comes to writing because it takes less time to write something. I don't remember writing something without using a computer.
- I find I prefer [computer] to a good ole' piece of paper and a #2. My thoughts flow faster because my fingers move faster.
- It allows me to finish the task quicker, but it also allows me to view resources and other useful information.
- I am glad that I don't have to rely on pencil and paper anymore. It saves lots of time, too. Not having to go back and erase or cross out is a relief.
- Typing is much faster and less painful way of writing.
- I like using computers when writing because I can type faster than I can write, so I can get ideas down faster this way.

In particular, the repeated comparison of the computer to the pen suggests that students may see the first as a fancier version of the second. Computers are helpful because they provide services that a pencil does not (the delete button, for example), and they are faster, at least in most cases. Not all students viewed the computer as faster, but even

these students saw computers as beneficial and blamed themselves for being slow typers. The overwhelmingly positive statements do not reflect a critical view of technology, merely a superficial idea of technology as empowering.

These questions and responses are merely the informal discussions of student attitudes and knowledge regarding a number of topics, and in order to encourage deeper, more critical thinking, I borrowed from the techniques of other teacher-researchers the next semester and introduced a new writing assignment – the technoautobiography. Both Kirtley and Duffelmeyer stress the importance of discovering students' personal history with technology, whether in the form of technology narratives or surveys, but it was the piece on technology autobiographies by Kitalong, Moore, and Selfe that was the most influential to my own teaching. By following the lesson plan outlined by NCTE and creating my own prompts, I was indeed able to learn more about my students, but their experiences continued to be expressed in instrumental terms.

Why did students persist in using such language? One answer can be found in Haas and Neuwirth's observation that "people often attempt to remain independent of what they do not control" (326). My students do not really have a choice about using the computers in class; instead, they strive to see computers as mere tools or instruments and themselves as users rather than shapers of technology. Haas and Neuwirth would likely identify these students as operating under the assumption that "technology is transparent." In other words, the processes of reading and writing remain the same, regardless of whether a pen or a word processor is used, or, if writing is indeed different with computers, it is simply a difference of efficiency (321); tasks are completed with

greater speed, without actually changing how the writing is done. Moving past such an assumption is important because, as this chapter demonstrates, scholars have tried to complicate this instrumental view of technology.

Feenberg is particularly outspoken against the instrumental assumption that technology is neutral. If technology is neutral, it can be either positive or negative depending on its use and user. Neutrality then allows the parallel argument described above that while technology is a "means to produce reading and writing," these two things remain uninfluenced by that same technology (Haas and Neuwirth 320). One of the problems with this mindset, according to Selber and Feenberg, is that it allows only a limited number of choices: users either reject or accept the computer as an instrument. Either choice can lead to what Feenberg calls "autonomization" or the separation of subject from object, rather than encouraging the user to view the tool in its context of design and use.

Now while Feenberg and Haas and Neuwirth believe the tool metaphor acts to separate users from technology (my students from their computers), Selber argues that functional literacy can actually "help instill a sense of control" (40). Users are, after all, in the subject or power position, and in this position, students can manipulate the technology in productive or efficient ways to accomplish their own purposes. As I mentioned in the section on academic metaphors, seeing the computer as a tool helps to demystify it – students can use the computer as a "prosthetic device" (36) that enables them to be better and faster. But Selber is quick to point out that the metaphor of computer as tool is not complete by itself as it is too easy for the tool to become

"invisible" to the user as merely a means to an end. Students should also be critically and rhetorically literate, able to see the computer as a cultural artifact and hypertextual media respectively, and it is the responsibility of instructors to introduce these perspectives in the classroom.

Selber may want students to develop multiliteracies, but the prior student examples are proof that those in my classroom prefer the instrumental version of literacy. And while control or the lack thereof may be partially responsible, there is another possibility. Sherwood's dissertation concludes that metaphors and ideas in textbooks influence the classroom, and my puzzlement regarding the pervasive nature of the object-oriented metaphors slowly disappeared as I reevaluated both the content of my classroom and the sources I had used as a guideline. Composition scholarship may rely on a variety of metaphors, but teaching materials and texts contained helpful tips about prompting students to look at technology through a critical lens (see Duffelmeyer or Haas and Neuwirth) and designing prompts and assignments that would act as "blueprints" or "tools" for learning without being overly restrictive (Nelson) – advice that encourages both the students and myself to see computers as objects.

The discussion question about blind writing is an outstanding case in point. It asked students to focus on the role computers play in their writing processes, specifically *Was it easier or harder to write without the monitor during the blind writing exercise*? *Do you see computers as helping your thinking or learning process? or does technology hinder this process?* My question was a deliberate echo of Kirtley's research questions in her article written for "Computers and Composition": "what did the computers in our

composition classroom mean to the students? Did they help or hinder?" (209). By critically examining the wording of the question, it becomes clear as to why nine students referred to computers as faster or easier. They were simply answering the question in the same language in which it was asked. The problem is not just the question, though, but the exercise itself. Borrowed from a book that repeatedly uses the word "basic" in its Preface, the blind writing activity is inherently instrumental, for it encourages students to focus on the means rather than the substance and practice of writing.

Kirtley's study is representative of the current scholarship that simplifies technology with terms like tool, obstacle, hindrance, and advancement. Even the technology autobiography article by Kitalong, Moore, and Selfe speaks passionately about the creation or construction of learning environments, describing students as architects, designers, and engineers of the classrooms. According to the article's authors, a student's past experiences have the potential to be better building materials for this construction with computers as the tools or instruments from which it is built. The prompt calls for students to explain how they became the technology *user* they are today. When students read these words, they compose autobiographies that detail independent or distinct memories of encounters with technology rather than a pattern of working with technology or learning how to use it. Looking at examples of the assignment encourages students to include photos and graphics, and the lesson plan provides a link to an interactive graphic map that creates a timeline (with pictures or images) of key technology interactions – again prompting students to see technology in simplistic, two-

dimensional terms. And while I still believe this writing project to be valuable for its ability to reveal student experiences with technology, the wording and the philosophy behind it likely produce simplistic answers and thinking requiring me to revise it.

As Street explains, literacy pedagogy requires "students to perform precise and regulated procedures in these new modes of communication, as measures of their suitability for the next 'stage' of education" (327). Students are granted access to academic language and resources, yet we as the "ruling group" have little control over how these global practices will be absorbed into local ways (Street 328). However, we should be cautious. Even instructors use computers in functional ways and for their own benefit, and students are likely to pick up on what they are allowed to know, not just what they are encouraged to know. So if students only see technology as having one function – like a hammer – we must look to ourselves as the reason why literacy is not evolving with the times.

Some students even struggle with this instrumental mentality, revealing their difficulties through phrases like "technology hinders the process to think creatively" or "sitting in front of the computer and just trying to write a paper isn't a good idea, at least for me." Many of these students learned simply through trial and error, one admitting that being self-taught is "not a good thing." And I am not the only teacher to notice such patterns. Kirtley writes that "students are not as prepared to utilize technology as we might assume" (209). Working with her own students led her to conclude that prior experience with technology, coupled with personal assessment of their skill level, influences student attitudes towards computers. It is her emphasis on assessment that

concerns me the most – are my students who speak negatively at a disadvantage? Do students who view themselves as unable to effectively work with computers tend to perform poorly in the classroom? While these questions point to an area in need of future research, I wish for the present to mention them as a way of introducing student tendencies to categorize computer usage as right or wrong, easy or hard.

Fixation on proper computer use is worth noting for two reasons. First, even those students who do not have an affinity for the computer still view it as a tool and seem to want to be able to "work" it. Second, students talk about the computer in connection with their academic writing. There is little or no mention of other types of writing capable of being produced with a computer, making it difficult to discover their feelings about the technology in additional contexts. The student who believes technology is a hindrance to his creativity does offer one clue: "I believe technology hinders the process to think creatively. I have not been able to lately because I have an English paper that I am researching for, but I often like to express my feelings through this connection to the world." He is referring to his weblog, and in this case, the computer provides him with access to the world outside of his English class, making it a resource or gateway rather than merely a tool.

The disconnect that exists in student understandings of types of writing or computer activities is a direct contradiction to Gee's argument that we are experiencing a social turn towards new capitalism. While old capitalism emphasized individuals who were only interested in certain bits of knowledge, new capitalism, on the other hand, pushes workers to apply their skills to the entire process and encourages them to form

collaborative groups, what Gee calls communities of practice. But, as my students demonstrate, there is still a tendency to see only what is in front of them. To quote a student, “I try to write when I can but when school is in session it’s hard to find the time.” Research is not part of the writing process; computers are tools in conjunction with their ability to help complete writing assignments, indicating that students have their own theories of writing and technology that are often at odds with those of scholars and instructors. These theories are often makeshift or subconscious, yet vital to their identity as writers and students, even as human beings.

Unfortunately, students do not often let us know how they integrate technology into their writing processes. What we do know, as evidenced above, is often fragmented. I think, however, the comments mentioned here are sufficient to draw a parallel between academic and student metaphors. This comparison urges me to be more aware in my dual roles as scholar and instructor because what I read in this field colors my understanding of computers and composition, which then appears in my classroom to the benefit or detriment of students. But these perspectives of the classroom as community, place, space, or workshop retain a certain appeal and, when viewed together, contribute to our theoretical understanding. Perspectives from both scholar and student are necessary, for while academics tend to focus on metaphors of place, students often do not recognize the computer classroom as a distinct, self-contained classroom. I had initially viewed their lack of comprehension as a failure on my part, but now see it as an opportunity to develop a “new, more mature research agenda” (Haas and Neuwirth 320). For if students are not engaging with our current curriculum regarding technology and

writing and if we are to heed Smit's goal for the composition classroom, there is an urgent need to revise such thinking.

CHAPTER III

ISSUES OF TIME AND PLACE

AND THE PROBLEM OF CONTEXT-SWITCHING

The focus of the computer classroom, whether a first year or advanced composition course, is not solely on the student. It is also on the technology, with less emphasis on how students react to or even understand the presence of classroom technology. Despite our best efforts to encourage students to possess what Duffelmeyer calls critical computer literacy or increase student comfort with various forms of technology, there is a disconnect between what we hope to accomplish and what we actually accomplish in the classroom, as evidenced by the reluctance of students to complicate their view of technology. But by asking questions about students and their writing processes, as Sean Williams suggests, we can begin the first step of successfully identifying the underlying motivation of such reluctance, behavior which is likely the result of student theories of writing and what role technology plays in those processes.

Other scholars are asking similar questions about practitioner philosophies of teaching and technology and student levels of technological literacy. Studies in the first category, like Kanuka's "Understanding E-Learning Technologies-in-Practice through Philosophies-in-Practice," encourage instructors and administrators to question how teaching philosophies affect technology choices, while research conducted in the second area prompts us to learn from student experience and use this knowledge to construct a better classroom (see Kitalong et al., Kirtley, or Duffelmeyer). Literacy narratives and

technology autobiographies are popular ways to capture student philosophies in practice, and although I have used such techniques in my own class, they do not always reflect what Grabill calls rhetoric of the everyday. The technoautobiography, for example, may help students to see encounters with technology as isolated events, even memories, rather than a pattern of learning; as a result, this assignment does not speak directly to the question of computers as part of the writing process. It is, however, a good example of Sullivan and Porter's call for a research focus on "people affected by technology rather than on the processes of technology or the products it creates" (107). Such a focus illuminates the practices within a "particular class and with particular students who are using computers in their work" in order to better assist student learning (Homicz 40), yet student practices are often difficult to identify or measure.

Selfe and Hawisher's *Literate Lives in the Information Age* tells us that the reason for this difficulty is due to the "major political, economic, social, and educational events, factors, and trends that may have influenced, and been influenced by literacy practices and values" (25). Due to the complex nature of literacy, and in an attempt to be a more effective teacher, I observed my own students, analyzing their responses to online discussion questions aimed at soliciting information about the still obscure relationship between writing and technology. From Chapter II, we are aware of students' tendency to view computers in instrumental terms, but a second look at these instances of tool metaphors reveals another pattern – metaphors and understandings of the writing process that are vastly different from ours as instructors and academics.

These student theories of writing are context-bound, meaning students have different ways of composing that are contingent upon whether the writing is personal or academic. Students are often unable to translate their success with personal or lower stakes writing to formal assignments, an inability that I argue is actually a problem of context-switching. My use of the term *context-switching* refers to student comfort with certain aspects of writing and computers, such as personal or leisure writing, but not other, more unfamiliar composition practices in academic settings. Part of this context-switching phenomenon may be that student ideas about academic writing conspire with the restrictiveness of the course and its environment to hamper productivity and learning. In other words, there is a digital disconnect between how students write in schools and how they write and learn outside of it. The disconnect can be expressed in terms of time, place, and body. The present chapter examines how time and place play a role in this difference for both teachers and students, and Chapter IV deals with issues involving the body.

Students Inside and Outside the Classroom

Sidney Dobrin states, "we write our places and in turn those places write us" (18). So, to adequately address how students write both inside and outside of school, we must first consider the locations or the environments in which student writing happens. The first chapter discussed the computer classroom as a theoretical place, but now we should examine the physical set-up of the classroom from the student's perspective. At Texas A&M University, it is a rectangular room with two large tables in the center, a

SmartBoard on both ends, and a teacher workstation in the middle. The design effectively and efficiently uses the space to allow for the maximum amount of technology and the maximum number of students. Twenty-five computers are divided into two organized lines down opposite walls. If a student is sitting at the table, her back is to the computer, which allows for only one focus at a time; likewise, monitors face towards the interior of the classroom, and student work is clearly visible to both peers and the instructor. The chairs are mobile with each leg attached to rollers, a feature that allows for an easy transition between individual computer work and group activity or discussion on the teacher's command. White pieces of paper with the rules of the classroom or passwords for the computer log-in screen printed with black text adorn the walls; black computers contrast with white walls, and everything in the room is bathed in the hum of fluorescent lighting, with no windows other than a small glass window in the door. But the student does not even see the classroom initially, as she must wait outside in the hallway until the arrival of the instructor due to the lock on the outer door. All of these appearances combine on the first day into an overwhelming impression of structured order, the sense of no wasted time or space and everything under the control or watchful eye of the instructor.

My own behavior as instructor during the first class meeting unintentionally reinforces this feeling. After I unlock the door, the students file in behind me and find a seat at the tables (the chairs are most often at the large center tables). I admit that I do not encourage students to be comfortable in the classroom, but instead speak only when it is time to start class; as a result, students are largely silent due to the unfamiliarity of

their classmates and environment. I spend the minutes before class preparing for the lecture, organizing my notes, or downloading my PowerPoint presentation, actions that take place with my back to the students. Once class actually begins, I call attention to the time, reiterating that it is time to get started. I begin a series of activities that do not include the computers, such as asking the question of the day, reading the syllabus, and discussing course requirements and expectations. Students raise their hands to ask questions or offer comments, and part of the discussion always touches on my definition of good classroom behavior: turn cell phones to silent, respect the opinions of classmates, and stay on task, which means no websurfing or checking email after class has started. These additional rules imply that time in the classroom is special, something unique in comparison to how students use computers outside of the classroom, and should be spent to its best advantage.

Overall, there is controlled access to the classroom's technology. I obviously use the central workstation to project presentations or class lectures onto the SmartBoards, yet this privilege is not extended to students, at least not on the first day. Depending on how many students have registered on the course website prior to our first meeting, I typically allow students to familiarize themselves with the website, but this exercise is timed and I walk around the classroom to monitor activity and offer assistance. I verbally remind students of the time (i.e. "you have five minutes left"), and ask them to come back to the center of the room when they are done.

In-class assignments are completed in a similar manner throughout the semester. Students in both courses, ENGL 104 and 241, respond to a series of online discussion

prompts as part of their participation grade. The students in ENGL 104 use Insite, a course management program similar to turnitin, while ENGL 241 students post their thoughts through the Discussion feature of turnitin. Both websites allow students to simply click “Reply” in the open discussion forum.

Time is an important element of these prompts: all but two of the prompts in ENGL 104 were completed as freewrites - writing continuously for five to ten minutes, with little regard for coherence or punctuation - in the beginning minutes of class, while the remaining two and all prompts in ENGL 241 were assigned as homework with an emphasis on quality of thought rather than quality of presentation. Despite the emphasis on content rather than presentation, in-class freewrites had an immediate audience; students on either side of the writer could easily see the response, and the entire class had access once it was submitted. In fact, students who finished early would frequently read the other responses in the extra time. Discussion postings may have been written outside of the classroom, but were still visible to all class members and subject to a deadline.

The atmosphere of the computer classroom contrasts sharply with the places where students do most of their composing. The first discussion question asked of my ENGL 104 class encouraged students to introduce themselves to the rest of the class, and one of the sample questions to help them get started was “what is your favorite place to write?” Unsurprisingly, no student mentioned a classroom or computer lab, but rather personal spaces like a bedroom. Ownership of and/or in this preferred writing space is important since eight responses used the possessive pronoun “my” in conjunction with

location; by contrast, none used a possessive pronoun when talking about the classroom. Several students gave additional details about their desired noise level, and the preference for either quiet (five students) or music (three students) is likely part of the reason students prefer a place where they can control certain aspects of the setting. Creating an environment in which students feel comfortable and relaxed is certainly a universal teaching goal, yet it may be impossible to recreate this atmosphere outside of a student's own space. For the three students who explicitly stated that writing happens when they are alone, the classroom will never be a favorite place to write.

This reflection on how the classroom and my actions in it are perceived leads to the conclusion that students may believe there is little or no free time within its walls, only the ability to accomplish distinct tasks in the time allotted. In their minds, the computer classroom has more in common with the standard classroom, in that there is restricted student/computer interaction and students act formally rather than naturally, and little in common with their personal writing spaces. One student described his writing space as a place with "little or no commotion, small or dim lighting, soft noise like music or distant conversation," a setting that is far removed from my earlier description of the computer classroom.

Theories of Personal Writing

My observations led me to analyze more than just behavior, since student attitudes can best be expressed by their own words. A search of the discussion postings from the different courses reveals that students explicitly used the word *time* (or some

form of this word) approximately 200 times. At first glance, this finding may not seem significant, especially when the word *technology* appears twice as often; however, many of the prompts themselves contained the word *technology* and only one specifically mentioned time, prompting me to explore the frequency with which students talk about time (and the context in which they do so).

The finding emerged first in the responses to the initial discussion question in ENGL 104, which prompted students to share their perceptions of their own writing abilities and habits:

> Write an introduction of yourself to the class, focusing on how you see yourself as a writer. This text should represent you, so feel free to be as formal or playful as you wish in how you write it, but remember that it will be sent to everyone. Use the prompts below to help you get started.
>
> *What kinds of things do you write?
>
> * What is the best thing you have ever written? Tell us a little about what it is and why you wrote it.
>
> * What is your favorite place to write?
>
> * Do you have any special writing rituals?

Students had several days to think about their answers, but responses had to be posted before the next class meeting. Although I did not anticipate an answer to every question, student appeared careful to address each topic question, many times in order. Only five postings were written in paragraph form, while the remaining ten responses distinguished amongst the answers through spacing or numbers despite my permission to

be “playful” or informal. Students may have been careful to provide thorough answers because my permission to give playful responses was contradicted by the reminder of their audience. Boyd stresses that instructors set the parameters for assignments (227), and I did not clearly establish the purpose of the discussion or how to respond; further, I did not anticipate how the presence of an immediate audience would affect students, encouraging students to “pay careful attention to writing” (Boyd 239).

The answers are nevertheless rich with description and detail, and I began to notice a close connection between time, place, and writing. Although I did not ask students to specifically address time, several students talked about time in reference to a particular piece of writing that they enjoyed. For example, the response from Student A13 identifies her first visit to the campus of Texas A&M University as the place and time where she begins to think of herself as a writer.

> I was so intrigued by [A&M], and it affected me so much that I decided to start expressing my feelings in words to my family. I don’t simply tell them about an event though. I surround them with it. The whole process really starts during the situation or event.

This visit, along with other significant events and places, was captured permanently in an email to her family in Tennessee. She makes a deliberate effort to choose the right word for her audience, and these words have the power to remind her of the initial experience any time she wishes.

Personal writing in this example is tied to memory, a place and time now in the past. Similar to the student who captures experiences and puts them into words, one way

this relationship manifests itself is through what students write and for what reason. Student A9 writes in a daily journal in order to get her thoughts on paper, an action that she makes sure to take time in order to do: "I mostly enjoy writing about 'theories' […] a way of putting all of my thoughts together and then leaving them on paper as a way to get away from things that might be bothering me or just thoughts and ideas that I have been thinking about for a while." Her journal records both interesting and troublesome events in her life in a way that allows her to express her true feelings. Two students describe a passion for music, and they write songs in their spare time about their own lives or the lives of others; in fact, this act of songwriting is something that Student A8 "loves" doing. She further describes her writing as "poetry put to music" so she concludes that she is a poet, while her classmate, Student A11, sees himself as a songwriter first. His poetry gets turned into song most of the time, with the topic focusing on what he "feels" about the things going on in his life. Yet another example is Student A7 who writes screenplays in his "free time." He admits writing the most recent script because of a need to "exorcise a few inner demons, but also because I'm sick of every movie dealing with high school and college kids these days being about fart jokes and beer."

From these examples, writing not only allows students to express themselves, but it is a chosen leisure activity or hobby. Student A7 carries a journal with him at "all times" in case of a brainstorm, an action that again connects writing to memory and prevents him from forgetting "that stuff." I believe his reasoning can be viewed in terms of preparation – students being ready for that moment of inspiration (in this example,

moment is a specific point in time). Given that writing is a powerful way for students to explore or capture thoughts at precise moments, the decision to write is understandable, like the student (Student A6) who spends a lot of time thinking before he can write, but also has "lots of luck writing about anything after an extreme emotional discharge."

Leisure writing often becomes a writing habit, evidenced by the five student responses out of fifteen which detail a choice to write at particular times of day. The class screenwriter does his best writing, as he reveals in his introductory statement, between midnight and three in the morning. Other students also express a preference for writing at night, usually because later hours are quiet and students can be alone. The student who records her thoughts in a daily journal prefers to write just before sleep for the reason that this particular writing is personal. In her mind, there is a relationship between the nature of the journal and the time of day: "since it is somewhat like a personal journal, I mostly take the time to write in it before I go to sleep." Bedtime is an intimate time with oneself, just before the student closes down completely to the social world. Only one preferred to write in the morning. This particular student mentions the enjoyment of writing in a "comfortable place," which in this case is his bed after he wakes up. There is an important connection present in these words between personal writing and personal preferences for both time and place. The times mentioned in this paragraph allow students to write in their bedrooms, either before or after sleep.

Why the predominance of information regarding personal writing to a question asked in an academic setting? Answers may be found by looking at the prompt itself. I asked students to introduce themselves as writers, so how do they describe themselves

and how does time fit with these descriptions? Killingsworth's chapter on narrative appeals gives us two possible author positions in storytelling: the first author position, which bears witness, and the second, making ironic and mythic connections. The first brings "information" to the reader through an association that may come with firsthand experience of actions or events, while the second relies on creativity or imagination to help the audience identify with either the author or her story's characters. In the case of my students, I have asked them to tell a story about their writing experiences. Narrative is a time-based discourse form – the story develops over time - and viewing these responses as stories may explain the inclusion of additional details such as time, since students would likely add details to reports on past writing assignments or an epideictic description of their current writing process. It is also conceivable that other students simply echoed earlier posts. The second response mentioned time, and because the assignment was completed outside of class, students had the opportunity to read each other's comments before posting their own.

By linking these introductions to the idea of storytelling, I can categorize the responses according to the author position taken by students. I return yet again to Student A13, the second to respond, for she assumes what Killingsworth identifies as the first author position. Her writing is often a reflection on personal experience for the benefit of friends and family; she writes emails to those close to her, a process that is exciting to her as she searches for the perfect way to describe each event. These reflections are an accurate portrayal or re-creation for both herself and others – telling her story allows her to capture a moment in time, to freeze time, and that ability she

describes as almost a “spiritual” thing. Other students who fall into this category also write down their thoughts and feelings for the purposes of memory and association, usually in the form of emails, journal entries, or songs/poetry. This type of writing helps them to put their thoughts together, get away from troublesome things, describe positive or negative aspects of life, or communicate with another person. As one student explains, “writing about my emotions helps me understand them, and writing them to [someone] helps her understand me.”

Time is still important, though, to those students who used the second author position (Killingsworth) to introduce themselves. Their writing is not focused on reporting actual events, but accurately representing certain feelings or creative impulses; life becomes the inspiration for songs, poetry, stories, and screenplays, and the products of their imagination are a snapshot of “whatever is on [their] mind at the time.” This type of writing was often described as a hobby, something done in spare or free time yet vitally important to the student writer.

Two closely-related patterns have emerged from this brief look at student answers to the first discussion question of the semester. First, the act of writing occurs at a specific or fixed place in time, but students also use writing to express something in reaction to a specific moment. Second, students often associate a time of day (rather than writing that occurs spontaneously) to writing, and again, most often this type of writing is habitual and personal. What is absent is the mention of writing rituals in connection with their academic requirements and responsibilities, suggesting they haven’t done enough academic writing to form habits or rituals. Seven students described their writing

rituals as part of their personal writing process or had no rituals to report. Those students who did address academic writing voiced a desire to change the way they approach assignments: one student gets off track while writing, two students tend to procrastinate and put off papers until the last minute, and two students just sit down and write until they think they are "done." Again, students exhibit a tendency to procrastinate with a class assignment, but consistently make time for the writing they are passionate about. These patterns are significant for the mere fact that time was not mentioned in the question – only the answers. Of the fourteen postings, the word "time" is present in eleven, and five use the word more than once.

Despite the lack of information on the academic writing process, all students spend time writing; however, the introductory statements tell me that not all choose to spend that time on the computer. Chapter IV will speak directly to the issue of writing medium, and I introduce the idea here only to connect time with computer use, another important element of both classroom and home. Conversations before and during class were evidence that every student spent daily time on the computer, so how do they use their personal computers? I was particularly interested in their online activities, and I asked a question that I believed would solicit interesting information: *What type of activities do you typically engage in on the computer (chat rooms, gaming, email, Internet, writing)? Elaborate.*

Time again becomes a central theme as we look at their responses. Seven of the thirteen responses mention homework as one of their activities. While the question did not require students to rank their activities, I do find it interesting that only one student

put schoolwork first in the list, while the remaining six put it near the bottom after checking email and Facebook, writing emails, chatting with friends, and surfing the Internet. Two students who provided similar lists offer additional information or commentary. Student A12 is quick to add that chatting on AIM only happens when there is *time*; she occasionally plays a game, but only if she doesn't have anything to do, again pointing out the game isn't played "very often." Her classmate A13 also mentions a fun game on her computer, one that she hasn't played in awhile "because it's addictive and it will take away from [her] studying." These statements may or may not be true, but I point them out to illustrate a certain time-consciousness among the students.

When asked how much daily time they spent on the computer, the students in ENGL 241 appeared reluctant to give such detailed information about their computer activities. Four students used the word "about" or "around" in connection with an average number of hours. Five students responded with a range or average, i.e. 3-5 hours a day, while four were vague and said they spent "enough time" on the computer or were on the computer "quite often." This trend continues in their answers about specific activities with only three listing more than a couple of activities. Two students did not answer this part of the question, and the remaining responses contained short words or phrases such as homework, email, work, and leisure. The economy in these answers may be due to the format of the questionnaire which asked ten numbered questions. Another important difference is that this questionnaire was assigned at the beginning of the semester when students were still becoming familiar with the class and each other. By contrast, ENGL 104 students answered the same question in a discussion format near

midterm. Both sections, however, emphasize the point that I've made continually in this chapter - students are protective of their time, even defensive about how they choose to use this time. I would further argue for the expansion of this trend to include anything the students perceive as an infringement on their time, and personal time outside of the computer classroom is a stark contrast to the way time operates inside its walls.

Theories of Academic Writing

Most of the previously mentioned discussion posts contain information about students' personal writing. But what about the writing students must complete for class, both inside and outside of the classroom? According to Lynn Bloom's "Freshman Composition as a Middle-Class Enterprise," writing courses have a vastly different goal than encouraging students to express themselves or find their voice. Rather, in Bloom's opinion, students are taught to "think and write in ways that will make them good citizens of the academic (and larger) community, and viable candidates for good jobs upon graduation" (655). Charles Bernstein summarizes this mindset as the argument "let them be radical in what they say but not in how they say it" (120). Academic writing, in his opinion, engages in "frame lock" or the insistence on a "univocal surface, minimal shifts of mood either within paragraphs or between paragraphs, exclusion of extraneous or contradictory material, and tone restricted to the narrow affective envelope of sobriety, neutrality, objectivity, authoritativeness, or deanimated abstraction" (121). This description of academic writing bears no resemblance to the writing frequently done by

students, writing that happens as a result of inspiration and is often a reflection of each student's life or creative imagination.

Students are definitely aware of the distinction between academic and personal writing. To return to ENGL 104, Student A15 writes fictional stories based on whatever is on his mind at the time and prefers to use his imagination; for this reason, he does not like "writing required in English class because of the restrictions placed on the assignment." Based on this comment, there is a distinction in his mind between his personal writing and required writing, with academic writing being deficient in terms of imagination, creativity, and humor. Another ENGL 104 student (A7) explicitly states that he tries to write when he can, but "when school is in session it's hard to find the time." Student A11 agrees, lamenting the lack of time to write in his weblog due to other time constraints: "I have not been able to [type] lately because I have an English paper that I am researching for, but I often like to express my feelings through this connection to the world." All three students associate academic writing, particularly writing in an English course, with restriction – either the writing itself is restrictive or the writing requires time and effort which restricts other activities.

It is important to note the lack of a connection between students and school work. For the second student, school is something that occupies time that could be better spent on his own writing, leading me to conclude that he does not see academic writing projects as writing but as assignments; likewise, the last student values weblog writing as a way to "connect" with the world, and his resentment of the time spent researching a paper indicates that he clearly does not feel the same connection to his composition

course. Academic writing is simply a requirement for these students, something that must be done properly and in a timely fashion when they would rather be doing something else with their time.

While Student A14 does not identify himself as a writer and writes only occasionally, his response reveals his dislike of chat rooms due to their level of informality, the lack of established grammar rules. He describes himself as “not very elegant” with words, yet he stopped visiting chat rooms because of a lack of “proper capitalization, proper punctuation, and a serious lack of knowledge of spelling.” Such “mistakes” as he calls them are annoying and distracting, which leads me to infer that, in his admitted absence of elegance or style, this student has learned to rely on the finite rules of academic writing to help him compose.

Most students do not share his preference for grammar rules, but instead reveal their feelings for the two types of writing in terms of time or frequency. Student A2 confesses that she writes all the time: “I write essays of course for class, but on my own I write poetry, letters, and random thoughts.” In her statement, assignments are almost an afterthought with the focus of the sentence on the writing she considers her own. On the opposite end of the writing spectrum is Student A10, who does not see herself as a writer at all, and admits to avoiding writing when she can. Because of her dislike, she only writes for required assignments, but even then, she delays starting until the last minute when she can write late at night in her room. Student A14, the “inelegant” writer from above, does not see himself as a writer because he is an engineer. He doesn’t like to take notes in class, and when he does write, he prefers the email medium for its brevity.

> No, I have no writing rituals. I sit down and write. If I don't like something, I go back and change it. That's one thing I like about computers. It's easy to go back and change something. This piece, for example. I've had to go back and change things at least a dozen times, and that's not including the typing errors.

Time has a different meaning for him. His response illustrates his need to write correctly, and this need necessitates revising his words a number of times, despite his stated familiarity with capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. Two things are noteworthy in these responses: the impression of academic writing (or in this last case, all writing) as correct or error-free and an urgent sense of time or deadline. Academic writing is viewed as time-consuming because of its difficulty, a direct result of the perceived need to always write correctly, and as busy work rather than a way to communicate.

ENGL 241 students agreed that academic writing or writing for a grade is indeed more restrictive than personal writing. As with the students in ENGL 104, I asked this class to introduce themselves by commenting in an online discussion forum. Possible topics included expectations of the class, attitudes towards computers, thoughts on the definition of "Advanced Composition" (the course title), or skills each student wanted to work on throughout the semester. Five students mentioned registering for the class because it fulfilled part of their degree requirements, and one student transferred to the university late, limiting her options for classes. In the responses, six students seem to think this class would help them improve their writing, with three specifically wanting to

"brush up" on their skills before graduate school or internships. However, they only have a vague idea of the skills they want to work on or improve; in their own words, they want to work on the following things:

- improve basic writing skills
- effectively compose an advanced composition
- expand vocabulary
- effectively convey thoughts on paper
- work on problem areas
- write grammatically "correct"

This list indicates students want to be effective, correct, logical, and improved, but demonstrate little awareness of how to accomplish this. What many *do* know is that they do not currently feel "confident" as writers, and several students took the opportunity to express their dislike of certain aspects of academic writing, specifically the time and effort it takes to write down a good idea, writing that "forces one to stick to a strict structure," and "going to the library and searching for hours for information." According to ENGL 241 students, academic writing is something they do not necessarily know much about, but should be familiar with because other classes and future jobs will likely require these skills, buying into Bloom's critique of composition as job preparation.

Halfway through the semester, though, students began to respond differently about course goals and learning objectives. Whereas students had initially seemed excited to be writing about technology rather than human rights or controversial issues

like abortion and gun control, the excitement soon dissipated. One discussion prompt was created in response to the revelation that my students were tired of talking about technology, even though the subtitle of the course was "Writings and Technologies." I asked them to consider alternatives to the learning method of immersion, or more loosely defined, working with a single topic/subject for an entire semester. One student became very passionate in her post:

> Most undergraduates are already under-skilled when it comes to good academic writing. By placing all of these restrictions (topic selection, paper format, style and documentation, number of sources. etc), instructors are actually limiting the students' ability to write freely and get their own ideas down on paper. In addition, it is hard to be passionate about your writing when you are not passionate about the topic of the paper. Therefore, I think that if students were given more freedom in their writing and allowed to take more classes pertaining to their area of interest, then writing (or just the general expression of ideas) would be easier for them.

According to her, "good academic writing" is an important skill to have, but she then qualifies her statement by defining it as restrictive. Writing should instead be interesting and passionate – characteristics generally not found in a traditional writing prompt or project, in her opinion. Other postings from this particular student complicate the definition of writing still further, as she confesses a need to work on sentence structure,

paragraph divisions, and argumentation but confides that freedom in writing allows the words to flow so much more easily.

Further reflection upon what I saw as a disconnect between my purpose in assigning various writing prompts and my students' understanding of them brought me back to Bartholomae's article "Inventing the University." He references Bizzell when he offers that the problems experienced by writers can be attributed both to "their unfamiliarity with the conventions of academic discourse and to their ignorance that there are such things as discourse communities with conventions to be mastered" (644). Also in this article is the statement of his I quoted earlier: "a writer does not write, but is, himself, written by the languages available to him" (631). I believe Student B3, who sees the parameters of each paper as restricting and possibly stifling, would undoubtedly agree with Bartholomae. This sentiment is echoed by many of her classmates. Indeed, I received many enlightening responses that convey their overall distaste at having to write on a particular subject:

- "students need to be allowed to direct their writing towards subjects that are more interesting them"
- "it is difficult to speak from a position of authority on a subject, if the writer lacks a passion for that particular subject"
- "if a person isn't interested in an assigned topic, both their attitudes and work will reflect it"

The last statement is from a student who felt the effects of "technology fatigue" after being forced to write two papers incorporating the subject. None of these comments

acknowledge my encouragement to find different or unexplored aspects of technology, including technology they used in their own lives or were familiar with from the news or other classes.

These phrases in particular, however, illustrate what I have recently seen as a personal philosophy steeped in subjective or expressionistic rhetoric (Berlin). To my students, although they would not use these words, truth resides within the individual and therefore reality is something privately constructed or maintained. It follows then that writing is a reflection of that reality for it helps to shape or discover the self, facilitates the "building of an inner world" (Berlin 149). It is perhaps this subconscious understanding of writing that motivates my students to desire topics based on interest and familiarity. My students did enjoy the chance to construct techno-biographies, but some were appalled that I would attempt to grade something so personal, grounded within opinion and experience. Allowing them to pick articles and topics, however, resulted in a new set of complaints, namely that the parameters were now TOO broad and they were unsure what I wanted or how I would grade the paper. Such feedback leads me to believe that it is their own theory of writing that cripples them in regards to academic literacy. Students definitely want freedom, not necessarily freedom in writing, such as we find in the expressionist paradigm, but freedom from writing deadlines or topic restrictions. In short, the contradiction in student behavior suggests the desire for freedom is at odds with their desire to succeed in the academic environment and to get good grades.

This failure to interpret academic discourse and conventions may also be linked to a problem of identity. If students view themselves as authorities of their own truth (Berlin), they may be unable to place themselves within other realities. As explained by Del Negro's "Identity Reconsidered, the World Doubled," there are several competing theories of identity, some of which may stand in the way of student performance. Students likely ascribe to the notion of personal identity, a theory found within the field of psychology in which the sense of self is both unique and stable across time. Del Negro also describes the idea of the *ascribed* and the *achieved* self within folklore. An ascribed identity is fixed, while an achieved identity is one allowed by society and acquired by the individual. When academic writing situations call for a different identity or require their own identity to stretch, students may and often do resist relinquishing their ascribed self. Again, this resistance comes as a result of competition, whether from different modes of writing or ways of viewing the self, and complicates the matter of what to teach.

If students are less likely to change their views of writing because they carry the culminating power of experience and knowledge, it stands to reason that resistance is compounded by the personal experiences of students. Resistance is particularly evident in student reactions to writing technologies, specifically within the computer classroom. It is a widespread assumption that current students are tech-savvy and confident, despite mounting evidence to the contrary. In the *Kairos* web-article by Austin, Bowie, and Jones, these composition teachers discovered that students can surf webtexts, but are stumped by hypertexts; similarly, students are frustrated by library homepages and

search engines, despite extreme familiarity with Google. My own students exhibit these inconsistencies: the student who requested the elimination of required blog postings yet posts to Facebook or another student that sees email as the new "letter" but does not see livejournals or Facebook notes as writing. One possible explanation offered by Lewis and Atzert is that new aspects of a class can contribute significantly to the creation of anxiety. These authors specifically look at the introduction of computers and other unfamiliar technologies into the Computer Assisted Language Learning classroom (CALL), but their findings suggest that any student, when faced with learning new discourses and technology, can experience distress.

What continues to be an issue is how to engage students and encourage them to devote time and energy to academic writing assignments when they admittedly do not feel as strong a connection to the academic environment and prefer doing almost anything else. Even when students have imminent deadlines, they continue to find time for pleasure or leisure activities. In the words of an ENGL 241 student, "I try not to [check email] because sometimes I forget that I have to be in class and I'll sit at the computer for 10 to 15 minutes when I don't have 10 or 15 minutes to spare." This student unwinds after a "long day of class" by looking at Facebook profiles, writing emails, and instant messaging friends, and she says homework takes *twice as long* due to frequent breaks for these activities. Her honesty is refreshing, not to mention illuminating, and I strongly believe she speaks for others when she says she would not necessarily get more work done without the Internet; "if I weren't on facebook or

myspace I would be wasting my time doing something else like watching tv, talking on the phone or trying to contact all of my facebook friends in some other way."

These comments reinforce the argument that students do not need practice forming personal writing habits; rather, they do need to form similar rituals or habits in relation to academic writing. Should such formation be on our agenda as writing teachers, particularly when students like the ones in my ENGL 241 course request it? I think it should be a priority, and for this reason, I assigned a particular sequence of assignments in ENGL 241. The first assignment was a technobiography (introduced in Chapter II) or an autobiography focusing on the student's experiences with technology. Such an assignment was intended to lead students into the realm of academic discourse by starting with the familiar subject of their own lives. No outside sources were required for this paper, but the third writing project prompted students to locate a sentence or paragraph in the first text that represents "deeper thinking" and develop it into a more scholarly paper with three supporting sources. In spite of the graduated sequence, students still experienced difficulties moving from the less formal technoautobiography to more traditional academic paper. Their continued struggle points to the weaknesses of the technobiography assignment, that it focuses too narrowly on what the students already know (an instrumental mentality regarding technology and personal writing) and does not help them become more familiar with what they do not know (academic writing).

The sequence of assignments is in fact representative of the disconnect between personal and academic theories of writing. During class discussion, a few students

declared it was “easier” to write their autobiography than the more scholarly paper. I asked them to explain this reaction in an online discussion forum, adding that they should include details as to why they felt a particular way. Nine of the eleven students who posted comments believed it was easier to complete the first writing project for the following reasons:

- “It was about our own lives and who is a better expert about our life than us?”
- “It cut out all of the citing, and research that is required in most scholarly reports. My argument was also much easier to defend, since few would argue that technology did not have a huge impact on my life.”
- “There is no wrong answer when writing about your feelings.”
- “I didn’t really have to do research for this paper or think too much about it before I actually started writing.”
- “Instead of being bored and just writing down a whole bunch of bull, I could expound on something I had real feelings about.”
- “For me it is not that one is harder than the other; it’s the fact that there is so much pressure when writing a scholarly paper.”

Other examples from the responses are variations of the same theme. Students enjoy writing about themselves, while they have strong feelings about being forced to research and cite secondary sources. In almost all of the responses, students equate scholarly papers with pressure, anxiety, and the potential to mess up or plagiarize. Several also stressed the time-consuming aspect of searching for sources and struggling to “smoothly

insert" them into the text. Only two students did not think the autobiography was easy. The first student felt lost because her ideas were "all over the place," making the process of starting to write more complicated. The second, however, viewed the assignment like any other paper. He still had to "think of everything which just put more pressure on me and took a lot more time."

This separation of personal and academic is evident in the ENGL 104 posts as well. To return to the computer activities prompt, the first female student revealed that she checked email, Facebook, and Instant Messenger several times during the day, but still considered herself the "worst writer in the world" due to her inability to stay on track: "Well once I start to write [on the computer], I get all off track and start saying things that come into my head that don't even fit with my outline." I did not require an outline, and I find it telling that she considers one necessary for academic writing. The very term *outline* hints at a rigidity that is obviously not present in other forms of writing, and the phrase "get all off track" implies that she attempts to use the outline to go somewhere with the paper, although she does not tell us where. Perhaps the most revealing statement comes from another student who sees classroom computers as helpful since they allowed him to view helpful or informational websites for class. Yet he also "realized that sitting in front of the computer and just trying to write a paper isn't a good idea, at least for me" – timed writing in the classroom was unsuccessful in his case, but he enjoyed participating in fun activities that were unrelated to composing. Similar statements from other students include "the Internet and other things usually get in the way [of my writing]" or "I believe technology hinders the ability to think

creatively." So the computer is advantageous to students as part of their recreation, but not when they are attempting to use it in other ways.

Part of the responsibility for this disconnect is mine. The question about online activities makes a distinction between email and writing or chat rooms and writing. It was not a deliberate distinction. I unintentionally defined writing here as personal writing that happens in a Word document without a familiar audience, separate from the acts of writing email or having an online conversation, and reinforced the very disconnect I sought to narrow. Students did not pick up on this subtlety, but instead agreed that the latter activities are not seen as writing. Online chatting and emailing, among other possibilities, are instead seen as leisurely, casual, and nonproductive, all adjectives that could not possibly describe writing within the atmosphere of a composition classroom. I would likely disagree with the student that professes to do nothing or very little on the computer, for this "nothing" includes typing, emailing, chatting, and playing.

> Generally when I'm on the computer, I'm on IM. I always check my email and facebook. I like to play the computer typer shark game. I don't really do that much on my computer, but I frequently like to stare at it blankly, hoping it will give me the answers to life. It's not quick to respond. But I'm still waiting.

Notice the words that reference time: *always*, *frequently*, *quick*, and *waiting*. This student is active in the first part of the response, checking emailing and playing games. But when the she is forced to use the computer in an academic context such as a paper or

homework assignment, she stares blankly at the screen and waits passively for an answer. The response is decidedly humorous, yet points to a mentality that equates academic time with adjectives such as tight, rigid, confining, and structured; on the other hand, personal time flies by, its passage barely registering on the conscious mind.

She is not alone in this respect. The student who believes technology stifles creative thinking offers a similar commentary. He addresses the fact that his spoken dislike of technology may have led his peers and me to believe that he did not spend much time on the computer. Appearances can be deceiving, of course, and his interest in keeping a weblog reveals that he does not believe all technology hinders creativity. In this way, using a computer to write a paper is as stifling as writing to an academic audience; they are both formal, time-intensive ways of approaching ENGL 104 that is far removed from the daily lives of my students. Note, for instance, that he does not see his English paper as a true representation of his personality or feelings, but rather an assignment that must be researched, typed, and completed for a grade. Ultimately, it bears little resemblance to his normal communication as it does not have a place outside of the classroom, nor does it reflect an interesting subject of the author's choosing.

Resistance to academic writing and technology increases when students are put into unfamiliar academic and technical situations, such as the blind writing exercise I implemented in my ENGL 104 class. When I noticed that students had trouble completing the freewrites at the beginning of the class period – when some were unable or unwilling to type continuously for five minutes, perhaps because they had nothing to say or were conscious of the students to either side of their personal space – yet

experienced little difficulty completing other tasks on the computer such as online research, I tried the exercise. Overall, eight disliked writing without the monitor, three liked the experiment, three expressed indifference, and one student was unable to participate yet still professed that it wouldn't make a difference to his writing. The students opposed to writing blind expressed distress at the disruption of their normal writing process. Many believed their thought process was interrupted by the lack of visual confirmation, as they were unable to follow their train of thought or correct grammar or spelling mistakes. One student revealed that she "feels better" when the monitor is on, while others commented on the time-consuming act of focusing on keystrokes, remembering what had been written without being able to see the words, and attempting to make the sentences "well-developed."

Student resistance to this new technique or technology was unexpected. I had anticipated the exercise as freeing; after all, if students couldn't see the monitor, they would no longer worry about typing perfectly and actually write continuously for the five minutes. Instead, students experienced distress at the possibility of posting something with misspellings and mistakes. One student wrote, "O God, now they are all gonna know I cant type. Awesome," a revelation which reinforces Boyd's argument that online discussion boards call for a higher level of writing regardless of topic. Only two students responded positively, and their reaction was relief at not having to type the correct letters or make the response a certain length in the five minutes. But the majority of the class did not feel released from this restriction of online writing that is immediately available to their classmates; instead, their words indicate their need for

visual affirmation before submitting replies. This activity highlights student perceptions of the physical experience of writing, the topic of the next chapter, and I mention it here merely as an introduction to the role of technology in student writing. From this exercise, we can see student perceptions of technology, particularly computers, as time-saving or efficient in relation to the writing process.

Another possibility for their reaction to blind writing, one that I find particularly interesting, is the idea that students fail to connect computers and composition, helping to explain why online activities are not seen as writing. Selfe and Hawisher's study of computer-based literacies reveals that students do not see computers as tools of writing and literacy, but instead view computer lab time as non-English time and vice versa despite the authors' efforts to help students embrace multiple forms of literacy. Andrea Lunsford also encountered resistance while attempting to develop a new course in the Writing and Rhetoric program at Stanford. The program focuses on the idea of "secondary literary," a term that advances a looser prose style with both visual and aural components in order to "mirror the agility and shiftiness of language filtered through and transformed by digital technologies" (Lunsford 170). Students complained that while they loved the opportunities to use new technology, they did not feel as though their writing was improving; "in other words, they knew they were learning something, but many of them wouldn't call it writing" (174). Lunsford and the committee were then forced to reevaluate their course goals, focusing on presentation (in addition to rhetoric, research, and argument) rather than media production and construction.

My students also demonstrate resistance to writing in the computer classroom, for both similar and different reasons. Their comments disprove the conclusion that students do not see computers as tool; if anything, Chapter II finds that students are reluctant to see computers as anything more complex. What these comments and responses do suggest is that computers in the classroom are used differently than students' personal computers, causing students to view them as separate or distinct. Just as the participants in Selfe and Hawisher's study do not connect computers and composition, my ENGL 241 students tend to see the two as unrelated. In their introductions, four students listed internet or computers skills separately from writing skills, focusing instead on the desire to improve their familiarity with computers due to the marketability of such skills in the job market. One student explicitly stated a concern that the class wouldn't be "too busy with other things that it will be difficult for us to really focus on improving our basic writing skills." For her, *other things* refer to internet skills and collaborative writing in a wiki, activities that may be a distraction to her real focus of improving her writing. The tendency to separate computer use into the personal and classroom parallels the disconnect between student theories of personal and academic writing. As Lunsford found, students have a very fixed definition of academic writing, as my own courses demonstrated through their expectations of the composition course to teach them valuable job-related writing skills.

Resistance to new or different computer activities speaks to Reynolds's belief that acts of composition are drawn from familiar spatial practices. Writers are so familiar with their own habits and tendencies that they may even be unaware of the impact these

practices have on the way they approach the world. New situations (whether academic writing or computers) cause us to be disoriented, leading us to rely on the spatial metaphors of frontier, alien space, borderlands and others in an attempt to regain a feeling of comfort or safety. These "mental maps," according to Reynolds, help us navigate in the unfamiliar until they are able to act as an "inhabitant" again. The concept of inhabitance or habitation is particularly important in regards to students for they may continually resist until such a state of familiarity is achieved. It is then the responsibility of the instructor or researcher to help them make new maps or *habitus*.

But just as environment shapes spatial practices, Reynolds also argues that the tools of writing shape mental processes, a concept echoed by many in the field of computers and composition including Andrea diSessa. Homicz, for example, studied student interactions with computers only to find that while many perceive technology as a benefit, they are not always comfortable with all of the computer's functions (particularly in regards to the creation and analysis of web pages and hyperlinks) – like my students that compose in Word but never with PowerPoint or Visual Knowledge Builder, a spatial hypertext software I will discuss further in Chapter IV. Kirtley's survey of a group of students enrolled in a Writing and Technology course comes to a similar conclusion, and she, like Reynolds, links their views on technology to each student's prior history with computers. While this is not necessarily a new finding (Michael Gos discovered that the quality of prior experience often determines computer anxiety), Kirtley believes that both those with and those without experience have anxiety – a clear departure from Gos. This anxiety or negative feeling can be reversed, but the

student narratives I collected reveal that while some felt an improved sense of confidence, some continued to be intimidated or resistant.

Authors such as Kirtley, Duffelmeyer, and Kitalong and her co-authors advocate the assigning of technobiographies and personal narratives as a clear first step in easing student anxiety. In their minds, it is important to encourage critical analysis of technology in order to facilitate discussion of computer culture and its influence (Lewis and Atzart agree that developing critiques of technology help place student fears in perspective), but it may not be possible to eliminate student resistance to academic writing and technology. The students in my ENGL 241 course are examples of why this assignment is largely unsuccessful, and both courses are proof of our failures to bridge the gap between home and school, personal and academic writing.

Problem of Context-Switching

Unfortunately, despite their intentions to promote good classroom management, pedagogical practices in the computer composition classroom reinforce the gap between personal and academic contexts in terms of writing and technology. Welch's article on "Technical Communication and Location," for example, focuses on physical examples of "best practices" in computers classrooms, and these practices include "turning away from the computer screens when that is pedagogically necessary" and the ability to "have enough space so that the humans control the computers" (341). The standard syllabus for ENGL 104 at Texas A&M attempts the latter through a statement prohibiting classroom disruptions or misuse of technology, while Lisette Austin's "Cell

Phones, Pagers and Computers: Where Have All Our Spaces and All Our Times Gone?" instructs teachers to "reclaim control" of their classrooms by remembering to "put machines in their place" (9). Austin practices this control in her own classroom, but the article urges her institution's policy to reflect such a stance as well. Students perceive these boundaries, however, and observations from the first day serve to give insight into student behavior throughout the semester. Behavior in turn speaks to deeper issues such as student attitudes towards writing with computers and the importance of time within the relationship of writing and technology in general.

Despite the close proximity of computers in ENGL 104, for example, (the number of computers was equal to the number of students), students very rarely started the class period at the computer, but rather congregated at the tables – a pattern established on the first day of the semester. Even though I began many class periods with electronic freewrites in the form of online discussion postings, they did not anticipate the assignment or login before I made the request. As freewrites became more frequent, I continually expected students to voluntarily turn to their computers in order to see the daily discussion question or read other student responses. This did not happen. Students knew that class would likely start with an online activity, and their behavior, at least in my class, suggests additional layers of explanation. Many admitted that this was their first class to incorporate computers that was not a typing or programming course, and they were unsure how they would be expected to act; many students were initially unaware that they had registered for a computer classroom, and were surprised upon entrance into the room for the first time. Simply put, it is possible that my students

would act more naturally with the computers if I allowed them to check their email or surf the web during the class period. Since I do not give express permission, computers in this specific environment of the classroom are in contrast with students' home computers. They perhaps wait for specific instructions within the academic context in order to answer the question, how will we use the computers in an English class?

But I must also consider their behavior as an indicator of their desire for social interaction, the norm in a small composition course. Students have ample time outside of the classroom to email or engage in other computer activities, and may want to use those brief minutes of class every week to communicate with others face-to-face, particularly in a course with a prominent online component. By prompting students to login to individual computers rather than congregate at center tables, I was actually undermining the community ideal in favor of instrumentalism.

At the end of the ENGL 104 semester, I encouraged my students to reflect on their experience in the computer classroom, talk about their expectations, and analyze their attitudes toward technology. But rather than soliciting a critical look at the placement of computers in the composition classroom, answers remained largely superficial, focusing on how technology made the class better or more fun. For example, when asked to describe her experience with technology at the end of the semester, one student replied, "I would say it has helped me become more familiar with computers and using them for assignments. I think it is *cool* that we can turn our papers in online and we have a class website"; another mentioned that she had friends in a more traditional classroom, and "their classes sounded so boring." Others offered that the computer was

helpful as it made “learning more interesting and a little easier, especially for visual people.” It is important to note here that the students refer to online or visual aspects of the computer as “cool,” but there is no mention of the classroom activities that required writing or typing. Some students, as I mentioned earlier, continued to reply that computers were helpful to them, but only when used properly. There was no attempt to explain what was meant by “properly,” only that at times technology is unreliable or prohibitive when attempting to write better.

While a couple of students mentioned that they were generally more familiar with computers due to repeated use, the consensus was that having class in a computer lab did not change their perceptions of technology, nor the way they would approach computers in the future. In fact, one student was brutally honest with his reply: “Taking this class in a computer lab did not change anything in my mind because I have seen a computer before. We didn’t do any mind-boggling technological stuff that blew me away. I have no suggestions for incorporating computers into the daily lesson plan.” Such a comment is exceedingly helpful, however, in pointing out the severe need for change, starting with the lesson plans and daily activities. Freewrites may be the first element to be eliminated since students admitted they would never do it on their own accord. They prefer to sit down and type, revising only if and when necessary. Their stated dislike of the freewriting activities is yet another potential reason for their reluctance to complete these assignments without prompt or direction, choosing instead to spend only the minimum amount of time I required. My students are both goal-oriented and product-oriented; they want efficient practice in order to achieve the desired

goal and product – an error-free, perfectly cited paper in the shortest amount of time. As one student explains, "I don't like writing and always have because its very hard for me to write down what's in my head and to write the perfect thing down on a piece of paper." In this sense, student attitudes promote the survival of current traditionalism, and these attitudes lessen the chance of successfully changing or switching from the personal into the academic context.

My use of the phrase *context-switching* is influenced by two bodies of scholarship in seemingly unrelated fields. First, context has traditionally meant both the "situated place where writing happens" and the "interrelationship between words that give meaning to text" (Dobrin 19). However, the term has been used in computer science to refer to multiple configurations of internal RAM. "Context Switching in a Run-Time Reconfigurable System" by Puttegowda and co-authors further defines context switching as the ability of devices to reconfigure themselves through the activation of a single on-chip context. Since only one on-chip context is active at a given time, multi-context devices can activate another context in as fast as one clock cycle (240). Applications should be able to context-switch quickly, lest the seamless transition between applications is disrupted. Bernstein would call this ability "consistency" or the "sticking to one frame at a time" (121). This transition or consistency is the reason I apply the term to students. They are often unable to switch contexts swiftly, if at all, and the computer classroom is the space where the transition breaks down due to the presence of two contexts – the academic and personal sides of both writing and computer use – simultaneously. Both contexts are present when I ask students to complete a timed

freewrite, a contradiction in terms and ideologies, and when I assign a grade to deeply personal technobiographies. Yet the larger writing assignments separate the contexts, confounding students even more by requiring them to inhabit first the personal then the academic context throughout the assignment sequence.

Second, I intended context-switching to mirror aspects of code-switching. The latter term obviously refers to the vast research conducted on written and oral choices of second language learners, which almost none of my students are, but it is the idea of language choices and patterns that I desire to invoke. Both context- and code-switching involve informal and formal writing (Wheeler), peer mode and school mode (Gumperz), and impression versus expression (Goffman). Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz work with bilinguals who "control two distinct languages," a native language and a second language "each with its own distinct grammatical system that is kept separate in the mind" (2), and I believe we can draw a comparison between bilinguals in possession of two languages and students with two distinct theories of writing. By doing so, I certainly do not mean to trivialize the trials of bilinguals; instead, I wish to focus on their deliberate rhetorical choices and suggest that native English-speaking students make similar decisions.

If code-switching can be seen as the "habitual substitution of one language for another" (Canizales 98), then problems in terms of context-switching can mean students who experience difficulty substituting writing theories. My students have made clear distinctions between personal and academic writing, but have not been able to move between these theories easily in the classroom. Mutnick's article "Time and Space in

Composition Studies: 'Through the Gates of the Chronotope'" identifies this entrance into academic composition as the need to "leave 'home' intellectually" in order to "participate in more complex discourses" (44). She cites Heidegger's views in her explanation of student writing difficulties as the "loss of tradition, authenticity, and 'the art of dwelling'" (qtd. in 44). Students are alienated from academic writing in the computer classroom for these very reasons, for writing that has habitually taken place at home now occurs in a classroom and the familiar topics of life events and personal feelings are replaced with time-consuming library research and public discussion postings. Mutnick concludes that students should strive for a hybrid literacy because "neither personal nor academic/critical discourse is sufficient without the other" (56). She too advocates starting with the local and slowly informing it with a more "global, critical look" (47), a sequence that takes place gradually. The more abrupt transition from the technobiography assignment to the scholarly argument requires students to substitute academic writing for personal in a few short weeks, a substitution or context-switch that often fails.

This failure can be further explained by the literature on code-switching. Canizales argues that bilinguals often code-switch for deliberate reasons: a lack of fluency in English, the desire to save time, or as a way to escape academia. In other words, speaking or writing in dual languages can be seen as easier for the student and as an "escape tactic" (112). These categories exist in my own classroom. First, my own student responses reveal that while they have an idea of academic writing, they have less experience composing it. Most students in ENGL 241 deemed the second writing project

as “harder” because it cost them more time and effort than the first paper. They were not able to translate their personal writing patterns to the stricter standards of the academic paper, and the purpose of the graduated assignment sequence was thwarted. Second, their complaints about having to write about topics they do not connect with are their own version of rebellion. Like bilingual students who resort to code-switching as a “liberation movement” away from academia and the English language that “became an obstacle which hindered their success” (Canizales 112), my students resist topic restrictions, grading rubrics, even deadlines that accompany academic writing.

Research on code-switching suggests that bilingual students make deliberate rhetorical choices; however, analysis of the online discussion postings suggest my students have less awareness of their theories regarding academic writing, and may not be wholly cognizant of their own thinking processes. Their inability to context-switch also takes many forms beyond writing. The tasks of academic writing or typing are generally not considered fun, but students do write for pleasure; students exhibit an inability to translate their ease with certain computer functions into comfort with the computer as a part of the academic environment. Searching for sources online or analyzing visual arguments were easily completed due to the classroom computers, but students struggled to write continually for five minutes on their paper topic or work on paragraph transitions with the help of Microsoft Word’s copy and paste functions. One potential cause for these contextual issues is that the part-whole relationship to technology in the classroom is vastly different from the relationship students have with technology outside of it (Ellis). Forcing students to use the classroom computers in an

unnatural way causes them to freeze, but the answer, I believe, lies in the student's ability to compartmentalize both types of writing and computer functions. Students have different uses for computers, and by extension writing, and they are more comfortable with those uses in particular contexts.

Unfortunately, these few excerpts are indicative of the rest of the class responses. Using the computer to complete assignments or papers is seen to have no connection to the "real world" (computers are no longer *cool*) and yet I continue to be amazed at the number of students who profess to be bad writers or admit that they dislike the aspects of technology used in the classroom. Their discussion responses offer linguistic clues as to how they perceive themselves as academic writers and typists, classroom identities that describe and explain their success or lack thereof throughout the semester. Seen together, the student statements tell me that the current approach to the computer classroom is not working at Texas A&M. Instead of working with the students' various ways of thinking and writing, I am perhaps stifling them by forcing them to work in a foreign environment or context without the proper training or, more importantly, the freedom they say they desire.

This link between student resistance to technology and academic writing, while perhaps tentative at present, makes me reluctant to embrace Jon Udell's call for performative literacies to become the "new freshman comp" (qtd. in Lunsford) when there is much more work to be done in understanding student reactions to traditional academic writing. Kirtley calls for further investigation into the students who describe themselves as "bad at writing and bad at computers," and I agree that there is need for a

closer look at the overall student experience in these classrooms. Certainly, it is vital to discover what connection, if any, exists between computer literacy and academic literacy, and this connection leads us to new questions – does the computer help or hinder writer's block? is computer anxiety seen as a writing problem? do feelings of technology affect student performance in composition classes? Both Kirtley's and my research questions hint at an almost physical boundary between academic and personal writing, with the computer accentuating the division, and reveal the importance of body in our investigation of time and place. Student writing practices and the physical experience of writing, with and without computers, are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

HOW WRITING HAPPENS: STUDENTS, THE WRITING PROCESS, AND THEIR CHOICE OF WRITING MEDIA

A discussion of the experience of writing would be incomplete without analyzing student responses for information about how writing happens, specifically the mental and physical practices that students employ to accomplish writing. Shifting attention to the act of composing allows us to focus on the student as writer and active user of writing technologies. How students write is no doubt influenced by their tendency to see the computer as an instrument of writing, and the discussion postings reveal vital information about the place of technology in their individual writing processes. But these processes are further complicated by the problem of context-switching or the difficulty students seem to experience when called upon to transfer successful writing processes from the personal to the academic. By context-switching, I refer to the idea that student choices about how to approach a particular writing task or what medium to use are colored by the rhetorical situation or context.

But how do they make these rhetorical choices and why do students choose particular writing media? Such choices depend on the type of writing students wish to accomplish. Students have significantly more awareness of how they write in personal contexts, and are unable to pinpoint academic writing habits or practices with the same clarity. The student comments in Chapter II, for example, reveal a tendency to see the computer as a time-saving or labor-saving instrument, and many will choose to complete

academic writing on the computer simply to get it done faster. Yet when asked about how they compose, students praise computers as helpful in the revision stages, not when they are brainstorming or drafting. Few students speak positively about computers in these early stages of composing, an indication that when they attempt to use the computer in an academic context, actually typing on a computer is often no longer faster or easier.

For these students, the idea of technology as a powerful extension of the body for making them better and faster writers is not entirely accurate, as they do not anticipate the reciprocal effect their media choices then have on their writing – especially when those choices are made without a clear, critical understanding of their own writing processes. Latour describes this phenomenon as "interobjectivity" – the theory that objects play key social roles in human life or, more specifically, when we use objects of literacy, we also get used (Brandt and Clinton 350). According to Brandt and Clinton, who rely heavily on Latour in their article "Limits of the Local: Expanding Perspectives on Literacy as a Social Practice," literacy objects should not be underestimated for they are often "resilient to our will" and "bigger than us" (345).

Students typically do not consider the power of objects due to the simplistic understanding of computers as tools. Further, unlike Latour's argument for a relationship between people and objects, students have rarely been asked to identify their own writing strategies as successful or unsuccessful, and they are not required to concentrate on the "minute details" of their own writing behaviors, such as the best ways to integrate technology into writing (Baroudy 50). Asking students to reflect on each act of writing

and use of technology as happening in very particular contexts and then analyzing the student responses on how they engage in writing uncovers still more patterns and metaphors of process. This chapter first identifies these student writing practices regarding personal and academic writing before examining the reasons students prefer to compose with a computer, a choice that can actually derail writing when made for the reasons of convenience or speed.

Context-Based Writing Practices

Just as Reynolds urges her readers to situate writing within an environment, Dobrin believes writing begins in context because "context is the situated place where writing happens" (19). This writing place is more than environment, though, and the authors of "The Phenomenology of Space in Writing Online" describe writing as "multi-aspectival" in the sense that writers need physical, mental, and temporal space conducive to the task at hand (Van Manen and Adams 12). Contrary to what some teachers may think, students have a keen sense of writing context, and to highlight student awareness of the writing environment and how their behavior adjusts accordingly, I return again to the introductory statements in ENGL 104 that asked students to focus on how they see themselves as writers.

Several students identified themselves as poets, songwriters, and screenwriters, describing how they compose journal entries, songs, and poetry; in fact, ten students out of fifteen described writing that occurs outside of the classroom. Student A11 explains his process as writing what he feels, then going back and looking for "ways to make it

flow more effectively." He is referring to his song writing, and flow is important due to his desire to "write lyrics that make a person focus on what the artist is singing." Attention to detail is a common priority in their personal writing, one that Student A2 shares. To her, "every sentence is important," and she must be satisfied with it before she moves on to the next one: "I think there is so much power in words and I guess it is thrilling to have that power […] so I suppose my only ritual is how critical I am of how the words form together." This student does not mention a particular genre of writing in direct connection with her process, but other aspects of her response focus on writing letters and emails due to their "beautiful" and artful form.

These students are not only aware of the writing context, but their awareness influences how they act in this context and attempt to create constructive writing environments. In order to complete personal writing, Student A2 from the previous paragraph sits at a desk to write emails and "there [she] goes," "pouring out everything I feel." Student A7 carries a journal on his person "at all times just in case I get a brainstorm," and Students A8, A5, and A11 prefer to write songs and letters in a prone position. Students A8 and A11 have this preference because this position is relaxing or comfortable, but Student A5 does not mention a specific reason for her writing habits. Student A11 even provides further information by expressing the need to be physically near his friends as their presence and conversation put him in a good mood before writing what he feels.

A few students demonstrated awareness of the difference between personal and academic writing, further illustrating student ability to read rhetorical situations. For

example, Student A5's response begins with "I'm not a great writer," but the very next sentence states "I love writing letters to friends and family." These two sentences are an example of context-switching; this student first answers the question from the perspective of her academic writing, writing she does not love or enjoy, before switching to her passion for writing personal letters. Clearly, the latter is a writing genre that she enjoys, yet when she switches back to academic writing later in the response, she denies having much practice with writing. She makes a clear distinction that the letters and journal entries are done on her "own accord," and these are the "extent" of her writing. It is, however, only the extent of her personal writing, since her discussion post can also be seen as writing.

If experienced writers believe identifying the context and being able to situate yourself as writer is the key to "survival" (Dobrin 20) and a hallmark of a good writer, then these students should be able to identify themselves as good writers rather than being incapable of viewing themselves as any kind of academic writer. Instead, even though students can identify the writing context, the very act of identification seems to label the student as a successful or unsuccessful writer in that context. For example, Student A14 does not "see myself as a writer" and doesn't even "like to take notes in class." A14 does write emails to friends; however, he reiterates that he hasn't written anything that would be considered "good," and does not remember any particular piece of writing from high school. Because he has this view of himself as a non-writer, or possibly a bad writer in the academic context, he is unable to see even his personal writing as something worthwhile or enjoyable.

Similarly, Student A1, the first to respond to the discussion, identifies herself in the first sentence as the "worst writer in the world" for the reason that she has the "most ADHD mind anybody ever had." She tries to think about the topic and come up with three "good points," but the actual act of writing never follows the planned outline. Knowing this about herself, she attempts to situate herself as a writer who writes while listening to music and "trying my best to focus on what I need to say." Her approach doesn't work, however, and she gets "all off track" by "saying things that come into my head that don't even fit with my outline." Because she does not think she is a good writer and cannot fulfill what she believes are the requirements of academic writing, she reveals that her preferred genre is song writing and that one of her songs won a contest. She downplays this achievement, though, refusing to label herself as a "writer" and adding the phrase "if that matters at all" to the information about winning a contest. Such a statement reveals that this student has a narrow view of academic writing, writing she believes requires the more formal writing process of an outline with three main ideas, yet she appears to value this genre more than her own song writing and. There is no description of her productive song writing process, but I believe it is more important to note that her academic writing experience is fraught with frustrated attempts rather than successes.

These comments begin to highlight a clear difference, at least in the minds of students, between the personal and academic writing contexts, a difference that has a strong influence on their level of confidence and their writing behaviors and attitudes. Students were able to provide considerably more detail about their personal writing

practices. They regularly engage in this type of writing and therefore do not have to think too deeply about their writing process, freeing them to add details such as body position or environmental preference. In contrast, students do not possess the same amount of familiarity with academic writing, and students who answered from the perspective of academic writing tended to include preferences for ways to mentally prepare themselves for writing:

- A8 must have silence to write, in a room with the door closed
- A5 "blares" music from her computer while "stuffing my face" with the available food in her room
- A1 also listens to music and focuses on what she "needs to say"
- A4 prefers soft background music to help her overcome procrastination
- A6 requires a "lot of time" to think prior to writing, and he too uses music to "start me off"

These rituals are individual, specifically tailored to each student's preferences and writing process in order to help them achieve a certain mindset. As Student A11 explains, "I find that I write better if I'm happy." More than one student believes they are more relaxed in these settings, with one student adding that being relaxed allows her to think clearly. Almost everyone mentioned the need to be alone when writing for school, as if the presence of other people would disrupt their process or the mind and body must be in isolation to accomplish writing. Despite these efforts, however, the attitude regarding academic writing remains unchanged, leading me to believe students

understand writing to be multi-aspectival yet have difficult creating conducive writing spaces.

Students and the Uncertainty of Academic Writing

These responses are further evidence for the distinction between academic and personal writing practices and for the argument that students are less cognizant of their academic writing practices. According to Nelson, students read classrooms and courses as texts and are fairly familiar with the actions required by writing and computing, which doesn't appear to be the case with my students. Reynolds believes, however, that repetitive actions slowly become habits, and habits then become embodied practices which are often invisible to the student and therefore difficult to identify or alter. Johnson suggests users of technology live in the "world of the mundane" in which daily activities are internalized and made a "part of our unconscious" (3). It is for this reason that he calls for us to rediscover the knowledge of everyday practice or the knowledge of "know-how and use" (5), and my purpose in asking students to describe their writing processes was to make these subconscious or unconscious practices visible.

Because it is vitally important to ask students to reflect on their writing processes and capture them in action, this initial discussion prompt in ENGL 104 also queried students about *how* they write and whether they had any special writing rituals. Seven students answered in terms of the writing they do for school, and most echo Student A1's response by being unsure of their identity as academic writers or of the best process for this type of writing. Student A12 says she types "until I think I am done and then go

back and re-read it" with mistakes being fixed after this "first draft." She does not explain how she knows when she is done, and this point of completion is likely uncertain for she uses the word "think" in connection with the end of writing. Also, the phrase *first draft* is in quotation marks, making me question whether she actually sees it as a draft or simply calls it by the name she heard me say in class and was required to turn in for peer review. Her classmate, Student A4, must write in a place that is not too comfortable, otherwise she will "tend to get too relaxed" and end up "taking a nap." So, for her, academic writing is the opposite of comfortable and can get in the way of sleep. But instead of talking about the writing rituals she wishes to continue, A4 specifically mentions a habit she "would like to break." She admits to saving writing assignments for the "last minute," but pledges not to do that this time. She doesn't say why she wants to change this aspect of her writing process, yet I can infer that procrastination is not a successful approach for this writer or that she assumes authority figures (like me) always disapprove of procrastination.

The earlier comments about how students mentally prepare for the daunting task of writing papers and the responses from Students A12 and A4 reveal more about their attitudes toward academic writing than about how they actually write. This pattern continues with the five students who answered with humorous rituals or admitted they did not have any established routine. Some students seemed stumped by the question or admitted they did not know how to answer by simply repeating my own words and following them with a question mark; others concocted complex tales, like the student who visits the on-campus witch doctor to "purchase magic chicken feathers to burn

ceremoniously outside my window to get rid of the evil writer's block monster." Her response may initially seem silly or facetious, but Student A10 tries to "avoid writing" when she can, except when she is forced to write for class. Knowing her almost extreme insecurity about writing offers a clue as to why she dislikes the act of writing, and she ends with "just kidding, no I don't have any 'special writing rituals,' I guess that's why I'm not very good at it!" Similarly, Student A15's ritual involves a wizard's cloak, the nectar of a rare Mexican citrus, and singing and frolicking in the manner of an ancient South American tribal dance. All this is necessary, he explains, before he feels able to "complete the task at hand."

Student A14, who doesn't identify himself as a writer, falls into the category of not having a writing ritual because he does not see the way he writes as a process: "Writing rituals? People have writing rituals? Who would've guessed? No, I have no writing rituals. I sit down and write. If I don't like something, I go back and change it." When he reveals his need to change the parts he doesn't "like," he obviously has an idea of what the writing should be and isn't, at least not in the first few attempts. His changes go beyond typing errors, and I certainly see this as a ritual or at least a particular approach to writing. He does not perceive his actions as a ritual or practice, though, because of his mindset. This student's refusal to identify himself as a writer heavily influences the way he writes and the way he understands writing.

For ENGL 104 students, feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty are closely tied to the act of writing in academic contexts. In my attempts to make student writing practices visible, almost all exhibit a fear of the unknown and a lack of confidence in

their writing, which can then lead to an inability to be as successful in the academic environment as they are outside the classroom. Attitudes like this can be better understood by Baroudy's argument that students are unaware of their own writing behaviors and are consequently unable to view their practices in terms of successful and unsuccessful, though the inability to provide an answer may also be due to my pairing of the word "ritual" with writing. In other words, students understand *ritual* in contexts other than writing, as the word connotes the religious or magical rite rather than the everyday world of habitual practice.

In an attempt to avoid the word ritual, I deliberately left the prompt for their introductions to the class in ENGL 241 more open-ended. Instead of explicitly asking about writing rituals or processes, I asked them to talk about their own understanding of "advanced composition" as a course title or expectations for the class. Most made a distinction between writing skills and computer skills by putting the things they wanted to learn in one of the two categories, but a few echoed the patterns from ENGL 104. Student B8 speaks strongly about his dislike of composition, admitting that his first impression of my course was "I'm going to die." He doesn't "like" writing and has always felt this way due to his inability to "write down what's in my head and to write the perfect thing down on a piece of paper." Like the students in ENGL 104, this student has an idea of what academic writing should be, and his own papers do not live up to his "perfect" expectations. His personality is such that his thoughts are neat and organized, and while he wants his papers to mimic this style, "they are never as good as I would like them to be." In his example, he explains that he does not write rough drafts because

he tries to make every sentence "perfect the first time around," sometimes taking three or four hours to write the introductory paragraph. But even when he admits to the disadvantages of his writing process or thinking "way too much about it," he still insists on making every assignment "one of the best papers I have ever written just to prove to myself that I am better than I think." So, in his own words, his approach to academic writing is unsuccessful, but since he continues to write papers in the same way, composition will never become easier or less work-intensive. He will continue to be uninterested in writing, dismissing it as too difficult or complex, even though he mentally defeats himself before typing a single word.

His classmates did not provide as many details while explaining their own writing processes, but several responses also expressed nervousness or a lack of confidence in the face of academic writing. Student B10, an English major, admits to being nervous about writing and the class in general because she goes off on different topics, never knowing "when to stop." She hopes that I will not require the class to write "oodles and oodles of papers that will bog us down," but at the same time, wants to progress in her own writing throughout the semester. I initially saw this as a contradiction, but Baroudy believes there is no link between an increase in the amount of writing and an improvement in writing. In his words, "those who write more do not write better and increasing writing does not result in better writing" (45). Student B2 also wrote about her apprehensions regarding the course, but was the only student to believe such feelings are necessary "if it will help improve my writing." Her statement implies that she is withholding judgment until she can better determine if my teaching strategies

or the course content as a whole benefits her and her writing. Specifically, this student wants to be able to "better organize" thoughts on paper, yet worries about the "amount of research" required by the writing assignments.

Both classes are less aware of how they approach academic writing, regardless of how I word the question designed to solicit information about writing practices. Despite their reluctance to think too much or too deeply about classroom writing, they are certainly able to express their strong feelings about writing in a variety of contexts. Ten of the ENGL 104 students said they love, like, or enjoy writing that is a reflection of their lives or enables them to communicate to and with family and friends, and the emotions are evident in the responses:

- Student A13 "can't wait" to get back to her computer to send emails
- Student A12 read an essay about her dad aloud to the class and had an "emotional outburst" due to her attachment to the subject
- Student A9 recommends that others write down their thoughts in a journal because she has enjoyed it so much
- Student A15 believes writing is "best" when writing for self or for friends with the "intention of making them laugh"
- Student A11, who said he writes better when he's happy, argues that being happy allows him to write, whether it is a "sob story or a comedy"

No one said anything particularly positive about the writing they do for school; instead, responses indicate that students critique that kind of writing in order to find mistakes or "room for improvement," something students merely complete for a grade rather than

enjoy or relish. Negative emotions are often seen in conjunction with writing that students consider an obligation and requirement, and as the prior section on writing processes indicates, students often place themselves in soothing or relaxing environments to counteract the anxiety they feel.

Students in the advanced composition course have similar feelings about academic writing. A discussion question in ENGL 241 focused on student perceptions of the first and third writing project by asking students to explain which of the two prompts was harder, and the students wrote candidly about the attitudes and emotions they experienced while completing these assignments. When asked to write about their interactions with technology for the technoautobiography, students felt a sense of excitement and freedom, and they described the prompt as real, creative, open-ended, and fun. Students spoke of their experience in glowingly positive ways, where words "flowed so much more easily" that it was difficult to limit the length. In the words of Student B11, "freedom is a generator of good ideas. More freedom in writing can be very fruitful, and I think that everybody will only benefit from that." On the other hand, the formal argument prompt, which required students to develop a sentence or idea from the first paper and add sources, was viewed in a decidedly different way. Most of the class continued to use the language of the question and label the second assignment as "harder," but for two students, the difference cannot be measured in terms of difficulty. As Student B7 explained, "it is not that one is harder than the other; it's the fact that there is so much pressure when writing a scholarly paper." Student B10 agreed and lamented the strict guidelines and grading policies for academic papers: "every minute

detail is under review and that's what leaves the student feeling anxious and that they have to spend so much time on the paper to make it right and leave no room for error – which is impossible."

All eleven responses confess to varying degrees of trepidation, either about the prompt itself or the ability of students to satisfy academic requirements. Students used a variety of adjectives to describe not only the second prompt, but also academic writing in general: tedious, structured, proper (no freedom or creativity), error-free, difficult, formal, daunting, meticulous, and correct. Student B5 liked writing about self better because most arguments are hard to "defend," and it is often difficult to "convince the audience that your thesis is correct." These words suggest this student views writing in terms of winning or losing/right or wrong, and when the prompt asks for sources, he does not see the benefit of such risk. He interprets the need for sources as a call to develop someone else's ideas since he is forced to "rely" on other's words instead of presenting his own. These responses paint a dire picture of the writing students complete for school, a picture that makes their perspective and lack of awareness regarding writing practice increasingly understandable. This view is best explained by the words used to describe their mindset while writing the second paper – pressure, apprehension, nervous, worry, anxiety, and stress. Such fears and emotions no doubt influence how students approach writing, and I further argue that the mental aspects can be detrimental to their ability to successfully complete writing assignments.

Relationship between Writing Practices and Media

Examining the responses from both classes leads me to the conclusion of a strong connection between attitudes and behaviors of writing, to the point that students choose certain media based on their understanding of and experience with the writing context. These motivations may not be readily apparent to the student, however, as students do not always mention media, either deliberately or specifically. I return yet again to the first discussion prompt in ENGL 104, for these introductions reveal information not only about how students approach both personal and academic writing but also how they choose to complete these writing activities. Media plays an important role in each student's writing process, and they instinctively use the pen or the computer to write, depending upon the writing context (personal or academic) and part of the writing process (brainstorming, drafting, or revising).

Within these stories is a preference for either the pen or the computer. Personal writing is accomplished through both media. Two students mention handwriting in connection with a journal or notebook. They are less interested in audience, and choose to focus on writing as a way of working through thoughts or emotions. For example, Student A9 writes in a daily journal to "record her thoughts and 'theories'." She likes the idea of "putting all of my thoughts together and then leaving them on paper as a way to get away from things that might be bothering me or just thoughts and ideas that I have been thinking about for awhile." For these reasons, pen and paper are important parts of her personal writing process, a medium she feels she can control and ultimately distance herself from. Responses that do not mention a specific medium instead mention

particular types of writing which are likely accomplished with the pen: Student A7 carries a journal with him "at all times" so that he can write down brainstorms and not forget, Student A5 loves writing letters in addition to journal and song writing, Student A8 writes songs and poetry, and Student A11 "doodles" with poetry that eventually becomes a song. These genres imply handwriting, and all three students' writing usually occurs while they are lying in bed, a position that lends itself to pen and paper.

Those who do mention media are noteworthy for what these responses reveal about the writing practices of students. Five students enjoy writing emails, an act that requires a computer. The writing is still personal and requires a time commitment on the part of the student, but many want to share their words with others and the Internet/computer provides them with opportunity. Student A13 prefers for her personal reflections to take the form of emails to friends and family. She will use pen and paper if nothing else is available, but only to write down "important thoughts" that will then be "pieced together" back at her computer. For her, the computer is part of the entire process from brainstorming and organizing to drafting and sending the email. She specifically mentions her desire to find the "perfect word," one that will truly capture the experience and its accompanying feelings, and computer features like an online thesaurus aid her in this search. Computers help to make these memories permanent, another layer of time as she wants to be able to "go back and feel this anytime." Students A14 and A2 also prefer the email genre and therefore use the computer to write. A14 grew up around computers and feels comfortable with them, feelings which encourage him to use computers to "write most of what I do write." As mentioned above, this

student has very little faith in his writing ability, and the opportunity to easily change things on the computer such as typing errors also influences his preference for the computer. Likewise, A2 believes in the power of words to affect emotions and thoughts. She calls emails the "most beautiful writing there is," and her computer allows her to revise and revise until the words come together in exactly the right way.

When speaking of academic writing, students mention media less often. In fact, only two make references to computers. Student A12 says her writing is simply the act of typing until she thinks she is finished, and Student A14 expresses a similar view since he sees academic writing as sitting down to write at the computer, then changing it until he "likes" what he has written: "That's one thing I like about computers. It's easy to go back and change something. This piece, for example. I've had to go back and change things at least a dozen times, and that's not including the typing errors." The remaining responses refer to writing approaches rather than its practice, providing details about the environment or sensory experience of their writing such as noise level and preferred times of day.

In an attempt to garner additional information about the choice of media in academic writing, both courses were asked whether they preferred to compose with a pen or computer as part of a questionnaire. For the ENGL 104 students, the questionnaire was a six-question survey at the end of the semester that asked them to talk about the following aspects of technology: access to a computer, formal instruction regarding computers, first experience with a computer, preferred composition methods (whether with a pen or computer), and possibility of computers in their future career.

Reviewing the questionnaire responses revealed the following patterns among the fifteen students: thirteen have easy access to a computer (86%); fourteen received some kind of formal instruction in junior high or high school (93%); average age of first computer usage was the fourth grade (most did not distinguish between playing on the computer and using the computer for work); five preferred to type rather than write (33%); all fifteen believed that computers will be a part of their future occupations (100%).

The divide amongst my students was especially evident when I asked if they prefer to compose with a pen or a computer (see Fig. 2). This question also evoked

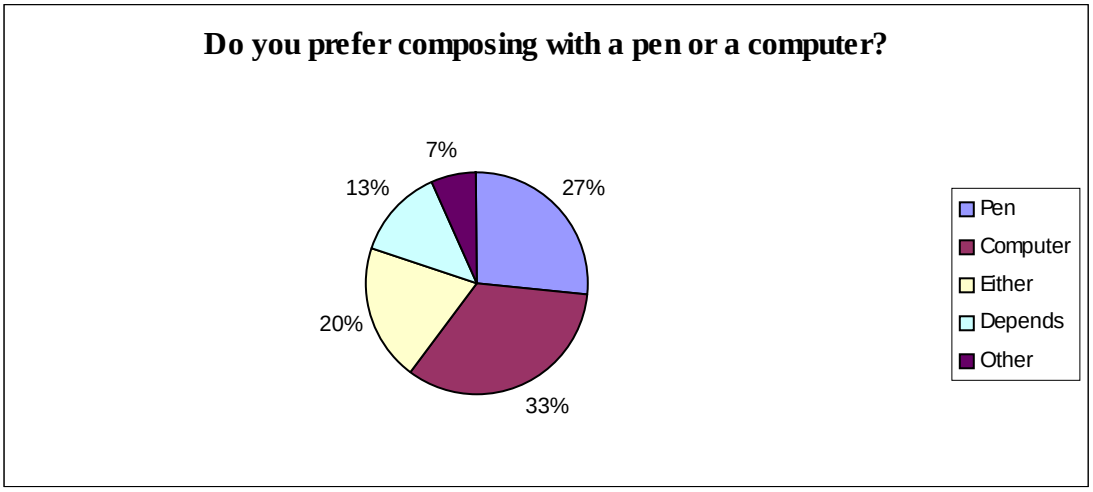

Fig. 2. Responses to the Survey Question about Composition Preferences

the most interesting comments, because many students preferred to qualify their answer rather than simply pick one or the other. Four students specifically stated that they preferred to compose with a pen (27%), while five prefer to type (33%). Of these nine, five offered reasons for their choice even though an explanation was not necessary.

Three students explained their preference for the computer in terms of speed and ease. In response to *Do you prefer composing with a pen or a computer?*, Student A2 expressed the following: "as of this year, prefer a computer. I used to not but now suddenly when I sit at a computer my ideas flow so easily probably because my words flow so fast. I can see all of my writing in a nice and organized fashion right in front of me." She uses the adjectives "fast" and "easily" to describe her typing; two other students who also preferred to use the computer compared it with the pen and decided the former was faster. Student A12 prefers the computer because it is "faster and more convenient," and Student A3 prefers the computer for getting thoughts out due to the speed of typing versus the speed of handwriting ("I can type faster than I can write generally").

Not everyone expressed this opinion, however. Student A10 had the opposite position: "I prefer a pencil and paper over a computer, but that is just because I type slow." Two things are noteworthy in her answer. First, she felt the need to expound upon her preference. She had previously alluded to issues of self-confidence or credibility in class discussions, and her answer may be the result of taking more time to respond to the questionnaire than her classmates. Given that our class met in a computer classroom and worked with the computers every class period, she may have felt uncomfortable saying something negative about the technology without justification. Second, I am interested in the phrase *just because*. The word *just* implies that her lack of typing skill is the sole reason for this response, but her confessed lack of interaction with computers seems to have created a sense of anxiety regarding their operation. Even in her explanation,

though, she too makes reference to speed by blaming herself for being unable to type more quickly.

Three categories of answers to the composition preference question have yet to be discussed, but are more difficult to label due to their qualitative nature. For example, the three students who did not demonstrate a clear preference for either choice became "Either" (20%). As Student A14 explains, "I honestly don't care much. In school, I haven't had access to a computer, so I'm familiar with writing with pen and paper. In contrast, all of my work at home has been done on computer, so I feel comfortable writing on computers as well. I guess I'm just flexible." Word choice is of interest here, specifically use of the terms "familiar," "comfortable," and "flexible." The student goes out of his way to create an identity for himself that demonstrates adaptability and competence, even going so far as to explain his experience with both pen and computer. These explanations attribute certain qualities to the author, stating not only a lack of preference but an ability to utilize both effectively in a variety of contexts. While the other two students were not as explicit in their answer, the attitude of this particular student is echoed by his classmates.

This particular student established himself as a "computer expert" within the classroom by frequently helping his fellow students with software and hardware issues, as well as using the overhead to demonstrate various shortcut techniques in Microsoft Word. Thus, I was unsurprised when he wrote the following about his first encounters with a computer:

> I have been using a computer for both learning and entertainment since was about 2 or 3. After learning to read and write, my parents introduced me to the computer, and my learning increased due to educational programs on the computer. From there writing and entertainment was a short step.

Again, certain qualities can be attached to the author – fast learner, advanced reader, bright. He does not use these specific constructions, but the qualities are implied to the students reading his response. He is also the only student to credit his parents with his educational and intellectual development.

The final two categories also offer interesting student explanations: the two who prefer to compose with a computer, but think with a pen ("Depends", 13%) and the one who prefers pen, but composes with a computer anyway ("Other", 7%). In the first category are two students, one male and one female. Student A6 mentions that "writing in pen and typing on the computer both have their ups and downs. My thoughts seem to pour better through a pen, but more comes out when I use a computer." He is alone in his mention of both drawbacks and advantages to each practice or medium of writing, or at least he was the only student to discuss both in response to this question. At first, it seems that he uses the same metaphor to describe writing and typing, but it becomes evident that he perhaps thinks "better" with a pen. The verb "pour" implies a steady flow of thoughts and ideas, perhaps initially coming more easily to mind. To use the word "more," on the other hand, puts an emphasis on length rather than quality.

Student A5 speaks similarly of her writing experience, offering that "I would rather compose with a computer, but I think I write better when I have a pen in my hand." Unfortunately, there is no mention of why she prefers to type if the quality of writing is better with pen. When seen in conjunction with her other responses, however, this statement begins to make sense. In the first discussion posting, she introduced herself as someone who loves to write letters, but is not a "great writer." This comment identifies her as an "average" writer, yet one that most likely writes frequently. Writing done of her own accord, however, is not seen as writing in the academic sense of the word. When she reveals that she writes poetry and letters in her spare time (in pen), it becomes more clear that the word "better" indicates that pen and paper allow her to write more creatively.

All of these answers suggest students are referring to academic writing, although I did not specify the type of writing in the question. Student A6 speaks of starting a paper by hand but switching to the computer after the first few paragraphs, and Student A2 enjoys being able to see her writing in a "nice and organized fashion," a description that denotes a particular writing genre. Student A1 mentions taking a course in high school that emphasized typing faster, along with learning Microsoft Office. Student A7 prefers a pen, but will compose on a computer because "I'm far too lazy to write something down and then copy it to a word processing program." Other students agree, citing that computer use is "faster and more convenient" or generally faster than writing by hand. Two of the students who prefer writing by hand hold this preference solely because their personal computer is slow (or old) or they type slowly and awkwardly. But

perhaps the question influenced the answer due to the word “compose” rather than write. For example, an earlier question posed to the class asked them to introduce themselves as writers, not composers. The writing mentioned in those responses was often very personal in the form of letters, songs, poems, or journal entries, and these descriptions of personal writing were often accompanied with mentions of pen and paper

The fact that students mention computers only when they are in particular stages of writing is not unusual. Research tells us word-processors are only used for part of the writing process, and it becomes important to determine the “part-whole relationship of the technology to the writing experience” (Ellis 372). Of the ten introductions in ENGL 241, four students prefer to use a computer for academic writing purposes. Student B7 believes she is “more successful when writing on a computer” because this technology puts a “range of knowledge” at her fingertips, suggesting she uses the computer for research or revision, and Student B8 would rather use a computer because his handwriting is hard to read. These two students emphasize the convenience of computers, with the first student praising technology’s ability to help her re-work her thoughts and be more creative and the second enjoying the speed at which the computer corrects mistakes and typos. Student B12 expresses gladness at taking class in a computer lab because “most of the composing and drafting that I do is on the computer.” She does not mention why she prefers computers, but Student B5 has a very clear reason. He uses a computer to “construct” essays from “start to finish” since it is then “much easier to edit.” For these students in the section of advanced composition and their classmates, computers are useful for internet searches and online research, and

computers possess software and keyboard shortcuts intended to make revising (or other editing activity) easier and less time-consuming. In short, the ENGL 241 students, like the ENGL 104 students, focused on computers as helpful at the end of the writing process, with little information about how students actually compose or prepare to compose their assignments.

The information in the advanced composition responses adds to the information collected from the ENGL 241 questionnaire. The same question about composing preferences was asked at the very beginning of the semester as part of a ten question questionnaire, designed to discover student experience with technology [add Kitalong quote] However, whether it was because the question was asked at the beginning of the semester or because I asked ten questions instead of six, nine of the thirteen students simply responded with their choice, without any explanation or commentary, and all nine preferred to compose with a computer. One student who also prefers the computer gave a reason: Student B10, the student who frequently goes off-topic, would rather "begin writing on a computer" because she wastes "so much paper otherwise." Student B4 states that either is "fine," while the remaining two students are more ambivalent and mention both media. Student B1 connects topic with media for her choice depends on "what I am writing about," but Student B11 prefers pen, although she also uses a computer to check her frequent grammatical mistakes.

Developing Student Awareness of the Academic Writing Process

All of the student responses are helping to prevent the knowledge of everyday writing practice from becoming "voiceless" (Johnson 5). But after asking students to reflect on their own writing practices, what we know continues to be fragmented and incomplete. Encouraged by the work of Haas in *Writing Technology: Studies on the Materiality of Literacy*, I was interested in prompting students to "look at rather than through" technology and to gain a more critical perspective; to this end, I created questions that I believed would focus on practice and help explain how students approach writing as well as technology. Most questions did not seem to promote deeper thinking, however, but instead revealed most students have only a superficial understanding of how computers impact their writing processes. In their own words, students prefer computers when writing for academic purposes because they see computers as faster than writing by hand, and they believe computers help them better complete academic-related tasks such as research or proofreading.

Computers are generally understood by students as time-saving, labor-reducing instruments that shorten the process of academic writing, and for this reason, computers are the preferred medium. It is not surprising that they would want to limit the amount of time spent writing for class when we consider the strong feelings students associate with it. Not a single student from either class identified herself as a good academic writer, but instead attached such high standards to this genre of writing that it is almost impossible to write successfully; if they cannot do well, students then spend less time and effort on the task, becoming what Susser describes as non-active participants in the writing

process. Writing is often faster with a computer for many students, so much so that many choose to forego prewriting activities, either in the more painstaking act of handwriting or typing, and simply sit down to type a draft in a single session. Or, as Student A2 explained, "I knew the obvious advantage in technology but now I have been able to experience the convenience of technology in writing personally. I type with my fingers instead of write with my hands now, and that is in any writing that I do." The speed with which they finish writing partially explains the lack of awareness regarding their own writing practices.

Not only do students think technology reduces the amount of time spent writing, but students also rely on computers to extend their own human ability to conduct research and edit or correct their papers. Students in both sections praised computers in two specific areas: the research stage of finding sources and the revision stage of writing. The computer offers an incredible number of resources to them, including a thesaurus, Google, library databases, and grammar and spell check. After reading the first chapter of Andrea Lunsford's text entitled *Everything's an Argument*, for example, I asked students in ENGL 104 to discuss the idea of technology as an argument. Nine of the twelve responses believed that technology, specifically computers, had a positive argument or message that enables them to be better or greater than they are by themselves. One student described computers as "invaluable tools," while two others said computers make life easier and more convenient: "computers themselves say, hey, I'm easier than the old-fashioned way" and "the computer is helpful and makes learning more interesting and a little easier." Other discussion questions, in both sections, elicited

similar responses. For Student A12, computers made the class "more convenient and less complicated," while Student A5 mentioned that daily writing assignments in particular were "easier" since she didn't have to do them "by hand." And in ENGL 241, Student B12 couldn't bring herself to enter the library even though those books "probably had the best research." Instead, she was "completely uninterested" unless she could access the contents from the "convenience of her own home."

The prevalence of *easier* in these responses seems to contradict Dowling's argument that students think computers merely make writing faster, not easier, but a closer look at the responses indicates that students use the adjective in connection with search engines, communication capabilities, simulations, and complex calculations rather than writing. Those who do talk about writing with computers as faster and easier tend to so in relationship with the ability to type words more quickly and make changes to text – thus isolating the act of writing from the accompanying mental process of thinking. If this is the case, computer writing habits are not simply invisible, but rather uncritical or even absent. Susser believes students are less cognizant of writing with computers due to their status as an invisible writing technology. In his article, he refers to Colford's argument that computers are an "extension" of will while writing, becoming visible only after the action or when students consciously use computers for purposes other than writing (362).

Some of my ENGL 241 students do bring up the idea of technology as connected to identity and the body, only not in terms of writing. Instead, communication was a theme throughout the semester, with one student offering that it is the most important

thing she uses her computer for. This idea was first noticeable in the responses to my question about the relationship between technology and identity. I had asked students to rhetorically analyze their social networking site, then switch computers with a classmate to think about these profiles as arguments or messages to a specific audience. In the subsequent online discussion, students spoke of being "reliant" on online communication (Student B7), using technology to "define" identity (Student B3), or keeping technology "on our body" or in front of us in order to communicate (Student B8). Students readily admitted being unable to function without technology, even seeing computers and cell phones as an extension of themselves or, in the words of Student B2, "glued to the body." Student B3 further explained this perspective by arguing that multiple outlets for communication help students feel like "part of something" by helping them stay connected and not miss "important events." This student strongly restated the point in a later post by saying technology is not an option: "if we want to stay in touch with the rest of the world, we must submit ourselves to the ever changing technology through which we communicate." Because communication is a priority, students made time for it, sometimes at the expense of their schoolwork. For as Student B1 admitted, she spends as much time on the computer now as she did before being required to use it for school-related purposes; in her own words, "I would rather handwrite a paper, submit a math paper in person, and take notes by hand in class than to lose Facebook and MySpace privileges."

The absence of writing in the discussion suggests it is Dowling rather than Susser who is right. Dowling insists we as scholars and instructors must not diminish the

difficulty of writing, and that with computers, there is an increased difficulty due to typing and a diminished sense of ownership due to the standardized appearance of text. She argues for the student perspective of computer text never feeling "done," adding yet another layer of explanation for why students are less aware of their academic writing process. And due to a general lack of awareness, students may rarely develop a more critical viewpoint of academic writing voluntarily. Even the questions designed to encourage reflection prompted students to continue to blindly praise technology for its advantages and benefits or criticize academic writing for its difficult requirements, behavioral trends Susser believes are the result of failing to use word processors in a meaningful way (351). I do not mean to imply that technology has nothing praiseworthy; instead, I wish to highlight the intent of these questions, which was to cause students to evaluate long-held practices and beliefs, and some questions were more successful than others in achieving this objective.

The questionnaire about writing and technological experience is one such example, being much more successful in ENGL 104 than ENGL 241. I believe the placement of the questionnaire at the beginning of the semester in ENGL 241 was mostly to blame for the lack of detail and information, for students did not have the benefit of an entire semester to discuss ideas, ask questions, and complete assignments before answering. Students in ENGL 104 did have this benefit, and their answers provide a tantalizing glimpse into the reasoning behind student writing practices.

More than any other question in ENGL 104, however, the blind writing activity and subsequent discussion acted as a catalyst for exploring writing and computer use. I

previously critiqued the exercise for being too instrumental and promoting the student view of a computer as simply a writing tool, but it was extremely successful in generating discussion about the practice of writing, in making the process more visible. Looking quantitatively at the student responses, six students praised technology for its ability to help them think, write, or type faster, and three students referred to computers as helpful because computers help them complete assignments in less time or allow them to save time. Not everyone agreed with these statements, yet those who voiced negative opinions of computers did not offer specific examples or reasons to support their perspectives. These opinions are largely uncritical of technology, but what they do reveal is a better understanding of student experience while writing with a computer:

- Student A6, "[not looking at the monitor] was easier because my thoughts transpired more clearly…it helped to think more about what I was going to say"
- Student A4, "I still like starting a rough draft on paper because your [sic] able to cross things out and still go back to see what you have written"
- Student A2, "I could not think without following my thoughts on paper there in front of me. I could not make sentences flow, and therefore my ideas without watching them form on paper. Watching my words unfold helps my thinking or learning process"
- Student A14, "No, I hate writing without being able to correct my grammar and spelling. I am not inclined to change what I wrote, I just don't like mistakes in my writing"

- Student A15, “I found it harder to write well developed sentences”
- Student A9, “It was basically writing exactly what I was thinking…Typing is much faster and less painful way of writing. However, it does sometimes create a writer’s block and is hard to put exactly what you are thinking into the computer”
- Student A12, “Sometimes it helps me if I reread what I had just typed because I can continue my thoughts if something distracts me”
- Student A13, “I think it was kinda cool. You weren’t looking back at your typing reading it and rereading it. I was surprised by how much I had typed. It just kinda flowed out”

Seven responses commented on the connection between sight and writing, stressing that they needed to be able to see the words and sentences on the page in order to develop their own writing, and eight revealed information about their writing practices that was unknown before this question.

Consider how Student A10 described the blind writing activity. When seen in conjunction with her responses throughout the semester, Student A10’s reaction to computers is easier to comprehend:

> I feel better when the monitor is on I think I flow faster because sometimes I forget my train of thought so with the monitor on I can just look up and read where I was. I think computers hinder my learning because I am not a fast typer and I spend more time trying to find the

> keys instead of thinking of the subject. I am defiantly a paper and pen kind of girl.

She is one of the students who relied on visual confirmation for writing, but for a different reason than her classmates – a less developed typing ability "hinders" her thinking and writing. Student A10 did mention that ENGL 104 was her first class to actively use computers, and it seems that she is reluctant or unmotivated to use a computer with any frequency due to what she perceives as slow typing. Her description of herself as a *paper and pen kind of girl* is quite remarkable in this aspect, as if her personality matches up with that media and that is just the type of person she is. These words create an identity for her within the classroom environment, and they hint at her strong reluctance to switching contexts.

Students A6 and A5 are others who offered additional information about how they write. My initial understanding of A6's answer to the question about computer verses pen ("my thoughts seem to pour better through a pen, but more comes out when I use a computer") proved to be incorrect when I reread his response to the blind writing:

> I assume computers are helpful. Right now, I'm answering these questions as I go, whereas, if the monitor was turned off, I'd think more before I typed. I do think more when I write. It takes more effort to write, therefore, I don't write ramblings like I would type on a computer. Computers remind me of Upham from Saving Private Ryan, when he tried carrying his typewriter on the mission. Captain just held up a pencil…

Now, it becomes clear that writing with a pen is a slow, but thought filled process. Not all of his thoughts find their way onto the page, however, implying that responding to my online questions does not require such deep thinking. As typing can be accomplished much more quickly, the class was privy to his stream of consciousness.

Instead of typing more like Student A6, Student A5 thinks she may actually type less with a computer. Encouraging her to think deeply about her own writing facilitated a personal insight. After the blind writing exercise, she realized "technology doesn't help my writing as much as I thought it did. The Internet and other things usually get in the way." She also admitted that she is typically concerned with length and spelling, and these anxieties frequently hamper her composition on a computer ("it might help to just be able to type and not worry about making it reach 5 pages"). Her concerns can apply to writing by pen as well, but she only expresses them in conjunction with typing.

Like the blind writing exercise, the spatial hypertext assignment in ENGL 241 was new for students and prompted a discussion about writing practice. The assignment itself required students to work in pairs to develop a spatial hypertext on the topic of their choice using the software Visual Knowledge Builder (VKB). VKB allows students to customize font, color, and document design because the initial screen is simply a limitless, blank space. Students had to take "turns" working on the hypertext – designing and creating linkable text boxes or importing graphics or hyperlinks – each day before saving the file and emailing it to their partner. Each pair had to work on the project for five sessions of one hour each, with only one partner working on the project per day. After students submitted the assignment, I asked them to describe the experience, and

students spoke openly about the perceived difference between this prompt and the first assignment, as well as the priorities they tend to place on various aspects of academic writing.

First, students felt forced out of their comfort zone, and expressed fear or anxiety at having to learn new software and consider design in addition to text. Because VKB demanded students consider visual as well as textual elements, Student B3 thought the program "distracted" her from the actual writing process so that her writing skills weren't actually used that much. Students B12 and B4 agreed with her, adding the customizable aspects almost overshadowed the "actual writing part" and "the text became secondary." All twelve responses praised the creative freedom they were given in the instructions, but all also agreed that they did not give their full attention to the text due to the time spent learning the program and designing the space. As Student B4 further explained,

> In the textboxes I wasn't worried about my grammar or technical issues as much as I was worried about the font and how I was conveying my message…I found [VKB] harder and nerve wracking to work with it and have to learn a new program while working on a project. I also did not like relying on a program to do everything.

Several things are noteworthy in these comments, and the most surprising observation is that altering assignments to more closely resemble writing outside of the classroom is met with resistance. Microsoft Word was overwhelmingly preferred over Visual Knowledge Builder due to its familiar format (standard font and a blank or white

background) and features; in fact, some students seemed lost without the "rules" of a traditional paper format or Word's margins and rulers – a contradiction to B4's reluctance to rely on a computer program to do everything. So students do indeed have writing habits, and they react strongly when required to go against those practices or alter familiar routines.

Second, while student resistance may have been somewhat motivated by the knowledge that they would be graded on their ability to navigate a new software, most were honest that the unique nature of VKB required them to adjust their writing practices to fit the demands of the prompt. Student B9 echoed his classmates' feelings by saying the first writing assignment was easier because it was more familiar. He had written "countless papers" like it before so he was able to "breeze" through, something he couldn't do with this assignment. Student B7 also felt the project required a "considerable amount of time," time she did not have to spend on the first paper because she wrote it in a single afternoon, and Student B6 admitted to a strong dislike of the extended time schedule, since he found it "more difficult to maintain focus" or report more complete thoughts. After the first session, he "began to not put as much effort into my additions to the project" due to an "interrupted thought process" that had to be continually restarted. He too wrote the first paper in "one sit-down," but for this assignment, "simply wrote down what came to mind first" rather than planning or thinking about it extensively.

While some students resisted the idea of multiple work sessions due to the time requirement, many appreciated tackling writing in smaller steps. Student B1 thought

VKB required both more time and more writing, but it didn't seem that way: "I also liked the time requirements for VKB. I worked on it for five days straight instead of waiting until the last minute." Student B5 and others did not believe the final project was as cohesive as their other papers, but these students spent more time on it, coming up with new ideas as they went along or planning each step to make the final project. Normally, B5 conceives "the whole idea" before he even begins writing the paper, and B13 knows the "general direction" of the paper without making a decision about thesis, point, or stance – practices that did not work in this writing situation. Instead, working through several smaller writing sessions appealed to students because many felt the text was easier to organize. Or, as B5 explained, thoughts were separated into spheres, which "formed breaks in the flow of the writing."

- Student B1 normally found it difficult to get started on a paper, but "answering questions gave me direction and I think VKB allowed me to elaborate more as well."
- Student B8 liked the ability to "break up the ideas in collections and then create other boxes inside that collection…I understood it and it fit into my style and type of thinking and arranging of ideas and concepts."
- Student B13 took "total control" of the topic she decided on, planning the topic and direction of the subject by "sculpting the questions we posed to achieve a desired affect."
- Student B9 thought the program could be useful for brainstorming because "it was a nice way to organize thoughts"; "I felt that organization

> was of the highest priority because even it if looks pretty a project is doomed if it can't be navigated."

Student B11, one of the few to truly enjoy VKB, benefited from being able to "see the structure" of her writing. To her, the blocks of text helped her organize her thoughts and clearly visualize how to "fit" information together. So while this assignment did not encourage students to work on such global skills as transitions and development, students benefited from being able to visualize their thoughts and organize them. Using VKB to highlight writing practices also confirmed my suspicions that students tend to write their papers in one sitting instead of approaching writing as a series of steps that occur over time, regardless of whether it is a good or successful practice for them.

Both the blind writing exercise and spatial hypertext assignment were successful in making writing practice more visible, and this is an important accomplishment due to Johnson's belief that practice defines theory: "we learn as we do within the context of know-how and use" (6). By extension, his statement implies that students first learn writing by doing, then base their theories of writing on this practical knowledge. There is some truth to his argument, especially in light of a student's dislike of academic writing for the reason that it is hard or time-consuming. The student likely based this conclusion of academic writing as difficult on a few strenuous assignments or instances of writer's block that prevented her from easily completing a paper, but there is also evidence in the student discussion postings of writing theory or attitude having a profound effect on practice, particularly regarding choice of medium.

These patterns of writing practice and process reveal that, in the same way that students think about writing differently depending on context, they accomplish these various types of writing through different practices and approaches. These practices, approaches, and responses, in turn, have a profound influence on whether students are able to write successfully in the given context and often influence their choice of media. Overall, students are much more aware of their rhetorical decisions in connection with personal writing as opposed to academic writing; they want academic writing to be completed more quickly due to the negative attitudes and feelings associated with it, and computers are preferred for their speed and correctness. In order to move students beyond these superficial reasons of convenience, it becomes necessary to do as Susser and others suggest and introduce new or unfamiliar techniques that force them to reevaluate their writing strategies in terms of successful and unsuccessful. The final chapter suggests ways to approach the computer classroom that will accomplish this.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Research on writing, whether in or out of the classroom, has increasingly concentrated on word processing and other writing technologies. Lisa Gerrard's article entitled "The Evolution of the Computers and Writing Conference" argues that, because of advances in technology, we have accepted an increasing variety of forms as writing. Despite this attempt by scholars and instructors to create a more inclusive definition, students at Texas A&M and across the nation do not appear to agree that blogging, posting on Facebook, or looking at pictures can be considered writing. It is instead the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) who recently established a National Day of Writing to capture writing in its many forms due to the revelation that student writing for school rarely connects to student writing in life, a gap reinforced by students who do not want, or do not understand, a connection between these distinct contexts.

In their own words, writing practices and theories are fragmented for students. Student responses like "I'm not a great writer, I love writing letters to family and friends and writing in my journal" or "I try to write when I can but when school is in session its hard to find the time" suggest writing that occurs on personal time has no connection to classroom activities; similarly, online activities such as typing, emailing, and chatting are not seen as "writing." As one student who admits to frequent, daily emails and IMs states, "I don't really do that much on my computer." So, in the previous chapters, I have

looked at the following questions: according to students, what is writing and how does writing happen?

My own experience as an instructor in the computer composition classroom tells me that students are resistant to both the content of the course (academic writing) and its location (computer classroom), and this resistance may well be the key to the disconnect between personal and academic writing. For example, many of my students commented on the regimented nature of academic writing, which for them often means narrow parameters for writing assignments. I received many responses from my ENGL 241 class that convey their overall distaste at having to write on a particular subject for an entire semester, and several students in ENGL 104 expressed their frustration with what they considered to be a lack of creativity and flexibility in the writing assignments. When given more freedom, however, students in both sections did not really prefer open-ended prompts either. Instead of pursuing their own lines of inquiry or areas of interest, students repeatedly emailed me to ask permission to explore a particular topic, and many wanted me to give them examples from prior semesters or asked questions about the grading rubric for that particular assignment. In the words of one student, "what was I [as the instructor] looking for?"

Resistance is also evident in student reactions to writing technologies, specifically within the computer classroom. Resistance towards technology generally occurs when students are asked to use computers in an academic context, for example, the student who requested the elimination of required blog postings yet posts to Facebook or the student who sees email as the new "letter" but did not want to analyze

livejournals or text messages as writing. This resistance exists in reverse as well – the introduction of personal or leisure computer activities into the daily lesson plan was met with suspicion and uncertainty.

I initially viewed these behaviors as inconsistent until I realized they point to the idea of student theories of writing as context-based. This is not a new idea, as Deborah Brandt's *Literacy in American Lives* identifies over twenty years of research efforts to "treat literacy 'in context'" (3). But while she and other scholars argue that literacy abilities are "nested in and sustained by larger social and cultural activity" (3), my study contributes to composition scholarship by highlighting student resistance to a culture that increasingly blends and combines contexts. Their reluctance, or in some cases refusal, to modify their individual models of academic writing suggests behavioral motivations much more complex than what we teacher-researchers have previously identified as students simply feeling less connected to writing in the classroom.

Despite this gap in knowledge regarding academic literacy, many literacy narrative assignments (including the technoautobiography prompt) reflect the existing scholarship and focus on how students acquire personal literacy and computer skills rather than how students learn to adapt to classroom literacy demands. The discussion postings of my students are a strong indicator for why the latter should be emphasized, and I argue that my findings in this dissertation should urge us as scholars and teachers to research this area in more depth.

Summary of Findings

Throughout this dissertation, I use the term *context-based* to refer to how students define writing and technology in different ways, and these definitions depend on whether the writing/technology use takes place in an academic or personal context. I am making the distinction between writing, writing with computers, and computer use because my students separate the three in their responses. “Writing” is most often used to refer to their personal writing or writing that occurs outside classroom walls. This writing may or may not make use of the computer as a medium. On the other hand, “writing with computers” is a unique category generally reserved for writing in or for class, what students categorize as academic writing.

This division or gap between academic and personal writing helps to explain scholarly observations that students fail to connect computers and composition, instead viewing writing with computers as fun and the composition activities as school work. But these theories extend beyond writing to include computer use, separating the latter into academic and personal contexts as well. Consider student resistance to the second writing project in ENGL 241, the collaboration within Visual Knowledge Builder (spatial hypertext similar to a wiki). The responses indicate rigid expectations regarding writing and technology, expectations that are disrupted by an assignment that forces students to look at both writing and computers differently. As the remark about the amount of time needed to visually design the text says, “a lot of time was spent trying to make the project look good. And that’s what it was, a PROJECT, not a paper. I don’t really feel like my writing skills were used very much” (student emphasis).

Context-based theories of writing and technology are then followed by context-based writing practices, the physical experience of writing and the role of technology in the writing process. Personal writing, along with personal computer use, is something students are much more familiar with, and as a result, students have a better awareness of how writing happens in the personal context. From their own comments, students have this awareness and familiarity of personal pursuits for these are activities they deem worthy of their time and energy; however, students do not practice academic writing or computing in the same way, resulting in less awareness of how to best accomplish it. The majority of student responses indicate academic writing occurs in a single typing session with little or no prewriting. Instead, efficiency is a priority, and the computer is the medium of choice due to its ability to reduce the amount of time spent writing and correcting text. The desire to complete academic writing quickly and painlessly adversely affects students' ability to write well, but their negative attitudes about and experiences with this particular context can further prevent them from transferring the success they experience in their personal habits into the academic arena. I identify this trend as a problem of context-switching, drawing from both the idea of context-switching within computer science and the body of scholarship on code-switching in my call for a new approach to composition classrooms that will allow students to be equally successful in personal and academic contexts.

Implications for Teaching

Based on the information above, it is unsurprising that a program on National Public Radio titled "Testing Computer Literacy" expressed a concern that deep learning is not occurring in the computer classroom. While universities and colleges may be increasing access, the depth of learning has remained alarmingly shallow. My own observations have reinforced that using computers in an academic context can indeed be divisive – those with ability and skill are more likely to succeed, while those with "mental blocks" or less experience with classroom computers often lag behind. But learning objectives in this type of classroom involve more than the computers; they often emphasize personal and academic writing as well. I have often required both an autobiographical assignment and a rhetorical analysis of a primary source, but the sequence of these prompts is not often successful for two reasons. First, I did not take into account the distinct theories of writing students already possess, and second, the assignments met with resistance from students who prefer to keep the contexts separate. Starting with the technoautobiography did indeed introduce students to writing, but students did not view the prompt as academic, nor did they believe I would be able to critically evaluate their writing because they were a source of authority regarding their own technology use. Asking students to find sources to support this first assignment drastically reduced the "fun" element, and students were unsure how to search for and integrate sources into such a personal topic (one student admitted to finding sources first, then articulating an argument). Unfortunately, the reality is that these limited views of

technology and writing as either work or play restrict both my ability to teach and student ability to learn.

Students are no doubt reluctant to change because change is perceived as involving difficulty (Dowling 234), and as Baron argues in *A Better Pencil*, writers take writing personally and possess strong preferences (51). Baron adds, however, that students will adapt when it is to their advantage, and he points to how the computer replaced the pencil when it became more convenient to write with. If it is not currently advantageous for students to change, then students must perceive a benefit to resisting change. And as suggested in Chapter II, the opposing pairs of public and private, personal and academic continue to exist and act to influence students. Students already do see writing and technology in such a dual fashion, and they distinguish between computer use that is fun and computer use that is work, between computer time and class time in a computer classroom. To them, the classroom door physically marks the boundary between personal and academic; or, within the walls of the classroom, the syllabi for ENGL 241 assignments lists creative and scholarly writing as separate in the course's learning objectives: "write essays that involve rhetorical and cultural analysis and papers that involve creative nonfiction." It is a separation Concannon believes must be actively undermined where the "line of separation" becomes the "space of merging" (431).

Such movement may begin to happen naturally, as explained by Brandt's definition of literate ability as an ability to "position and reposition oneself" within a larger literacy in constant flux (104). Because these changes depend on time, place, and

literacy materials, it is not surprising that my students would discuss their theories and practices in relationship to time and place; in fact, student appeals to time and place, along with their willingness to adapt to literacy's fluctuations, often divide the contexts of personal and academic. Personal writing certainly occurs on a different timetable and in a different environment than academic writing, and students indicate confusion, even frustration, when assignments blur the traditionally accepted boundary between each context, forcing students to adapt or reposition themselves. These emotional and mental patterns seem rooted in two things: the continual treatment of academic literacy as an important and valuable resource, one privileged above personal literacy, and a growing need to cling to the familiar when confronted by Brandt's literacy flux and Concannon's hybrid identity.

Changing the Approach to the Computer Classroom

Merely discussing these issues bring them out into the open. Rather than abstract ideas, we now have concrete examples from students, evidence that the current approach to the computer classroom is not successful in reaching all participants. Overall, by focusing on their answers regarding computer usage and writing experience, it becomes evident that perhaps neither they nor I were quite prepared to successfully work with computers as an integral part of the writing process; not that these classes should be considered a failure, by any means, but the analysis reveals only simplistic notions of why students believe computers are helpful during the academic writing process. One student, for example, responded that "depending on the circumstances, technology has

both advantages and disadvantages." Other students believe that typing is a faster, perhaps easier, alternative to writing (not all, I should point out), but they also emphasize what I can only describe as the technologically motivated concern with error and correctness – writing papers in Microsoft Word or WordPerfect is fraught with the dreaded red and green underlines, often slowing or prohibiting the creative aspect of the writing process. In other words, the vague notion of "academic" or "right" writing is often magnified by the computer, rather than liberated.

These statements and their subsequent analysis led to a discovery that not all students are aware of the complexities of the computer classroom, even though most are what Grabill calls "technorich." Students expressing an anxiety about the integration of computers into the composition classroom had a difficult time moving past issues of correctness, typing speed, and creativity. Conversely, those who conveyed a flexible attitude, at times bordering on nonchalance or indifference, were better able to respond to the demands of a computer classroom. The two distinct groups use different vocabulary to describe their experience throughout the semester, but the end result is the same with students restricting writing and technology into the categories of either work or play. This restriction is the reason the student view of technology as a tool is troubling, for it is a direct result of the theory of academic writing as hard work, and any attempt to alter these counterproductive attitudes must address both writing and technology in multiple contexts.

The student examples in this study are important because they make it possible to map out alternatives to the typical lesson plans. The students themselves offered

suggestions for a better incorporation of the computers into daily activities including online postings of power point lectures and homework assignments – suggestions that continue to identify the computer as an academic tool. It is instead the activities and discussion questions which made the students uncomfortable or prompted them to view things differently (like the blind writing activity or the spatial hypertext prompt) that should be the focus of this new approach: identifying successful and unsuccessful writing behaviors, working with multiple contexts, and engaging in new writing or technological practices.

Almost a decade ago, Goddard provided eight practical strategies for the integration of technology: "strive for consistency, enable frequent users to use shortcuts, offer informative feedback, design dialogue to yield closure, offer error prevention and simple error correction, permit easy reversal of action, support internal locus of control, and reduce short-term memory load" (24). While the situation has become infinitely more complex, the basis for these strategies is still sound and can be executed through feedback, communication, and respect – all necessary in order to create a comfortable environment. Education is perhaps the most powerful tool we possess in reducing discomfort, apathy, and stereotypes associated with writing and technology in the classroom, and everyone can benefit from such education, as access does little good if users remain ignorant of or resistant to the many possibilities offered by the computer composition classroom. In this classroom, however, it is the teachers who must first be educated about their own students and student theories and practices of writing before educating students regarding the processes of writing and learning.

Developing Rhetorical Flexibility

Recalling Deemer's idea of the classroom as a joint learning experience, I too must have a familiarity with multiple contexts and with technology and successful strategies for its implementation in order to have a productive learning environment. As Duffelmeyer proposes, administrators should provide extensive training in the same workshop intended to acclimate new lecturers: "[computer training] must exist organically with other composition pedagogy issues or it will continue to be seen as the arbitrary add-on" (307). My teaching strategies should question students about their fears regarding writing and computers in order to open a dialogue, and above all, I must attempt to define and carefully explain all terms – technical or otherwise, everything from writing and revision to blogs and hypertexts. If I encourage students to have a relationship with academic writing and its technology, one that is positive, fears or misgivings can often be placed in perspective, particularly when students are able to gain a critical distance and evaluate their own progress.

Specifically, I need to more aggressively target students' attitudes by reorienting students within the context of the computer classroom. I do not want to reinforce classroom boundaries, however, but find ways to integrate the personal with the academic in terms of writing and computer use in order to challenge students' preconceived notions and embodied habits. One way to accomplish this is by being more conscious of my reading assignments and daily activities. Chapter II points to the problems with some of the teaching resources for the computer classroom, but the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts has a training module intended to achieve

this goal of hybrid literacy by prompting students to develop a skill they identify as rhetorical flexibility. The downloadable presentation defines rhetorical flexibility as the ability to "produce multiple kinds of texts for multiple contexts," and this ability has the following components: 1) view each writing situation as a new problem to solve, 2) draw on past experience with similar writing tasks, 3) analyze the current rhetorical situation, 4) approach a writing task as a recursive process, and 5) expect to engage in substantive revision (Leverenz and Richardson). In other words, students should be able to approach each new writing task with confidence based on what they have already learned, demonstrating what Smit calls "rhetorical maturity" (157). He believes this can be accomplished when teachers "teach to the transfer" by building on the "previous experience of students" and making learning transferable to new contexts (193).

My pedagogical approach partially follows these guidelines, but I need to be more explicit with students both about my reasons for emphasizing certain learning objectives and about how to apply their writing strategies to different genres and contexts (Smit 158). I further need to implement a series of activities that combine the personal and academic contexts, rather than segregating them in distinct assignments, and highlight student theories and practices by identifying them as successful or unsuccessful. Most classroom activities with the computer, for example, focus on its function as a tool or instrument, and this notion should be complicated by introducing new perspectives of technology. The final assignment that requires students to re-envision a prior paper by using a new writing technology to transform a Word document into a blog, PowerPoint presentation or other genre accomplished just that, but other

assignments did not. As a result, I intend to make the following changes to my syllabus and lesson plans, changes I am hopeful can act as a model for other instructors in the computer classroom:

- Complicate student notions of the computer as an academic tool by consciously offering alternatives such as portal, mirror, or extension of the body. Theorize with students about how the tool metaphor limits our understanding of the computer, and discuss how to create new ones in the various contexts of personal, public, and academic (see Killingsworth or Richards).
- Instead of using the technoautobiography as a major writing assignment, introduce it as "writing-to-think" activity that induces a critical perspective about student approaches to technology. This activity can then lead to a discussion of scholarly research and how sources can supplement an original argument (combination of personal and academic writing).
- Offer more than one method of accomplishing writing, and practice various writing techniques rather than merely talking about them. When discussing methods of pre-writing or brainstorming, for example, examples of blind writing, freewriting, and mind-mapping methods should be given, while prompting students to find a method that works for them. I used blind or tactile writing only once in a particular semester, but Akers has had great success with this technique as a way of addressing

"writer's anxiety" (59) throughout an entire semester, citing that practice is key.

- Encourage students to import strategies from their personal writing into the classroom. Collier and Werier argue that "good writers are good writers […] no matter what they say or feel about computers or about writing by hand" (56), but I want to draw attention to the differences in writing approaches by requiring students to identify their own practices.
- "Bridge the gap" (Smit 177) between genres inside and outside of the classroom in two ways. First, I will provide opportunities for students to investigate writing in their individual majors; second, I will liken the work we complete in my classroom to writing they will encounter in other courses. For example, a rhetorical analysis can and should be compared to a literary critique, movie review, or book report in order to help students develop rhetorical flexibility and maturity.

Based on my research and my analysis of student responses, these changes are necessary for not only offering a wide range of writing experience, but also showing how writing happens in a variety of contexts.

Future Research Questions and Trends

Changing our approach will only be partially successful until we have more information regarding student writing practices. While student theories of writing appeal to time and place, the body is an essential aspect of the student writing experience

surprisingly absent in the online discussion postings. Killingsworth cites Nancy Mairs when he writes of prose as the "creature of the body that produces it" (79), and Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* explains orientational metaphors as ones that can be understood in relation to the body. Those metaphors are largely spatial (up/down, over/under, etc.), but the metaphor of voice from Chapter II also has its roots in the body since the mind actively works with and through the body to accomplish writing. Scholarship on the physical impact of writing on the body has dramatically increased as evidenced by articles such as "Writing Bodies," and authors like Robert Johnson argue for a technological perspective that focuses on the user's body. His "user-centered" perspective values the person more than the technology, and strives to understand users' successful and unsuccessful attempts to interact with technology. In the computer classroom, however, a user-centered perspective must also attach importance to student approaches to writing, both productive and unproductive, as student writing processes are often closely linked with their technological interactions. Because this perspective highlights the individual, it is imperative to study the body and its role in the theory and practice of student writing.

Currently, there is not enough information within the data from these two courses to draw solid conclusions regarding the body, making this an important area for future studies. What the student responses do indicate is a relationship between the level of familiarity with a particular writing context and the level of awareness of how the body acts in that context. Students can explain how personal writing occurs, including details about body position or music and medium preference; however, when asked about

academic writing, students mention the body and the computer much less often in their descriptions of composition, and instead focus on their mental preparation for academic writing or their reliance on the computer for revision help – the first and final steps of writing with little information regarding how words appear on the computer screen.

The responses also suggest that many of the students appear to give credence to a mind/body dualism, dividing thinking from writing rather than merging the two into a single process or practice as many writing theorists and successful writers seem to do. This separation of mind from body – an alienation Killingsworth believes is part of Western culture (79) – is predominately within the academic context, where students most often experience mental difficulties, as opposed to the personal context where students profess to be more comfortable. For example, when speaking about how they write in personal environments, students mentioned "pouring out" feelings or carrying journals in case of a "brainstorm." For these students, the mind is perceived in very physical or emotional terms, with a connection between mind and body. But the connection is severed when students refer to academic writing, and most mentions of the body or sensory experience of writing vanish; instead, academic writing occurs only in the mind, expressed by certain thoughts or emotions.

Again, it is difficult to argue conclusively without further research, but I see two possible explanations for the separation. First, there is no longer a connection between mind and body because students rarely feel a connection to this type of writing, often revealing their lack of motivation in the discussion postings. Second, a related possibility, the separation of thinking from writing or mind from body allows students to

believe that academic writing is something outside of themselves and their most immediate experience. The latter effectively alienates students from academic writing while simultaneously easing them away from the responsibility of failure (it is the instructor's fault, the computer's fault, etc). Both explanations are variations of alienation, which are extremely difficult to correct by simply introducing a new practice or habit, but both explanations also have roots in the idea that students lose an important sense of audience in academic writing, a connection to the outside world which exists in personal writing through feedback or two-way communication.

In this scenario, the computer is more than simply a tool. It is now, literally and figuratively, a mirror that reflects back on the author rather than an extension of self through which to communicate, and as a mirror, the computer contains the student attempting to write for class. Lunsford's project called the Stanford Study of Writing finds that 38% of student writing occurs outside of the classroom, what Lunsford calls "life writing" (Thompson), and because of this experience, students now excel at kairos or the act of adapting writing to audience. This writing is a sharp contrast to academic writing, where Lunsford found that students were "less than enthusiastic" because there was no audience outside of the professor (qtd. in Thompson). According to these students, the task served no purpose other than to get them a grade.

Kevin Concannon speaks to the contradictory idea of freedom achieved in "terms of containment" in his article "The contemporary space of the border: Gloria Anzaldua's Borderlands and William Gibson's Neuromancer." While describing the fugitive flight

of Charles Edwards and his passenger in 1992, Concannon argues that there is a fluid side of control,

> one that actually allows him the physical freedom to move to the left or the right, but still not allowing him the freedom to escape. It seems that no matter how fast Edwards drives, there is no space beyond for him to go where the police cannot; he is forced to try to escape within the police perimeter rather than trying to find a space beyond. (430)

Sanctuary is an illusion for Edwards, and Concannon speculates that freedom can only be found within "the space of capture" itself, by being controlled (431). I see many parallels between this argument and the experience of student writers in my classroom. Students can search the web for resources or solicit help from friends and family, but according to them, the act of academic writing is a solitary, isolated one with nothing but a blank computer screen or Word document for company. In most cases, they are only freed by the deadline, when they are forced to turn in an assignment which may or may not be complete.

If students experience a sense of confined freedom in the academic context, then the body's disappearance is understandable in a place where unrestricted movement is an illusion. My encouragement to explore this environment can be likened to telling children to play in the backyard or a young driver to stay in the parking lot for practice – in their minds, there is nowhere to *go*, nothing to learn. The same can be said for classroom computers, literacy objects meant to "hold you in place" (Brandt and Clinton 344). Brandt and Clinton echo Latour with these words, recalling his concept of "folding

in" as an expression of the relationship between people and things. Similar to Latour's example of the shepherd who builds a fence to immobilize his flock while he sleeps, the classroom and its computers can be perceived by students to be an extension of a teacher's authority. However, while this may paint a picture of technology or the classroom as controlling, even limiting, Zuboff believes the situation is much more complicated. She advocates the "human activity of choice" in terms of technology: "though it redefines the possible, it cannot determine which choices are taken up and to what purpose" (388). It is the topic of choice – student decisions in the writing process – and how these choices involve the body that should be investigated more fully.

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APPENDIX

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Spring 2005: ENGL 104

1. Write an introduction of yourself to the class, focusing on how you see yourself as a writer. This text should represent you, so feel free to be as formal or playful as you wish in how you write it, but remember that it will be sent to everyone. Use the prompts below to help you get started.

    *What kinds of things do you write?

    * What is the best thing you have ever written? Tell us a little about what it is and why you wrote it.

    * What is your favorite place to write?

    * Do you have any special writing rituals?

2. Was it easier for you to freewrite without looking at the monitor? Why or why not? Do you see computers as helping your thinking or learning process? Or does technology (typing, computer software, the Internet, etc) hinder this process?
3. What type of activities do you typically engage in on the computer (chat rooms, gaming, email, Internet, writing)? Elaborate.
4. Questionnaire

    *Do you have unlimited or easy access to a computer? If so, what type of computer is it?

*Have you ever taken a course in computers or received any kind of formal instruction?

*Did you have a computer in your house or school while you were growing up?

*At what age did you first start using a computer for writing? For entertainment purposes?

*Do you prefer composing with a pen or a computer?

*Do you assume that computers will be a part of your future occupation/career?

5. Can technology be seen as an argument? On the other hand, what is your argument/attitude about technology, particularly computers?
6. Talk briefly about your experience in this class. Was it what you expected? What will you take with you from this semester? Did taking the class in a computer lab change any of your attitudes toward technology? Explain. What suggestions do you have for incorporating the computers into the daily lesson plan?

Fall 2006: ENGL 241

1. Questionnaire

*Do you have easy access to a computer? What type of computer is it?

*Have you ever taken a computer course or had class in a computer lab?

*Do you prefer composing with a pen or computer?

*What programs/software are you familiar with?

*Have you designed a website (personal or other)?

*Have you used Turnitin before?

*Do you have experience with wikis?

*Are you comfortable with email?

*Can you upload documents and/or attach them to emails?

*How much daily time do you spend on the computer? What activities do you participate in?

2. Use this first response as a way to introduce yourself to the class. Possible topics include your expectations of the class, attitude towards computers, or thoughts on "advanced composition." If you have ideas or skills you would like the class to focus on, you can list them here.
3. Now that we are moving into new material, what have you noticed about the connection between technology and identity? If you have noticed other things of interest, feel free to talk about them instead.
4. Brainstorm about how you might start WP#1. Try to write continuously for five minutes, just getting your thoughts down on paper.
5. We have spent a great deal of class time discussing the rhetorical situations present within technologies. Knowing that technology can act as an "advertisement," how does this apply to your own life? Who are what are you an advertisement for by your use of these gadgets or websites? In your honest opinion, do we need to be aware of these messages?
6. Pick one of the following questions and write a response:

*During class discussion, a few students mentioned that it was “easier” to write their autobiography than a more scholarly paper. Why do you think this is true? Are you still learning the same things about writing or do the assignments require different skills?

*Did you use pictures, clip art, or other illustrations in WP#1? Would illustrations have added to the paper? Explain your rhetorical choices.

7. For this response, I want you to consider the writing process for both WP #1 and 2. One student even mentioned that the VKB assignment was a project, not a paper. What is the difference? How did planning for the visual influence how you approached the textual? Did you spend more time on one or the other? Most importantly, was it easier or harder to compose with VKB? If you felt that it was neither, explain why it was similar to writing other papers.
8. Has technology been in the news? Do you want to expand upon a class discussion? Is there a topic you want to introduce into discussion? Have you noticed something interesting about your research for WP#3?

VITA

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