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## IN THE DISRUPTIONS: HOW UNDERGRADUATE WRITERS CONCEPTUALIZE VOICE

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IN THE DISRUPTIONS: HOW UNDERGRADUATE WRITERS CONCEPTUALIZE VOICE

by

Andrea Stark Bishop

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: English

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my parents, Jim and Linda Stark, who gave me no other option but to believe I was the smartest little girl in the world. My mom *oooohed* and *ahhhed* over every scrap of writing I ever produced, and my dad challenged me to always reach a little higher, to glow a little brighter. They raised me to be strong, smart, compassionate, and independent. I'm forever grateful to them. Their voices are interwoven with my own, and their fingerprints are all over this text.

I also dedicate the research involved to Dr. Peter Elbow. His influence cannot be overstated.

## Acknowledgements

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me to new scholars in written texts, and then he introduced them in person at conferences. He was never more than a quick text, email, or office visit away, and his mentorship during the writing of this dissertation was nothing short of perfect. Will Duffy, you always made me feel like your equal, and that fact is a rather miraculous thing. Drs. Jones and Duffy, you are the reasons this thing is finally finished, and I can't thank you enough.

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## **Abstract**

This project investigates how undergraduates conceptualize writerly voice, questioning what student writers think “voice” means and how they identify voice in their own writing. A connection between voiced writing and good writing is part of the fabric of the discipline of composition studies; however, for the students in this study and for their writing, such a connection does not exist. According to these students, voiced writing is not necessarily good writing.

This project details three separate case studies focused on asking undergraduate writers to define voice and to identify their own voices in their own writing. Over a period of two years, a total of 239 student participants and 10 faculty member participants were involved in these studies. Guided by constructivist grounded theory, the research included approximately 300 surveys, 9 interviews with students, 12 hours of classroom observation, and roughly 1700 pages of student work for analysis. The results suggest that students see voice differently from how writing professionals and writing teachers conceive of voice. Students identified their own voices in their own flawed writing, often pointing to the flaws themselves as evidence of their voice. They identified their voices in writing that was biased, overly personal, emotional, and grammatically or mechanically deficient. Composition studies theorist Peter Elbow has suggested that voice is actually located in the cracks or deficiencies of student writing, and these case studies seem to support his claim. This is a very different view of voice than what many writing scholars and writing teachers hold.

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## Introduction

I want to tell a story about voice.

My dad was the son of a Cherokee girl who was not yet a teen when she witnessed the brutal attack and murder of her mother and aunt by Comancheros. The young girl who would become my Granny Stark became the woman of the household, expected to cook and clean for her father, brothers, and uncles. Her formal schooling ended when her mother died. This is not fiction. It is truth. Her name was Bertie, but she was definitely much more of a *Birdie* with a songbird voice, and I've always wondered if the illiteracy in her family history resulted in what I consider to be the misspelling of her name.

Here is another truth. My dad was the son of a man who fought in World War II, who joined the 66<sup>th</sup> infantry division and eventually boarded the USS Leopoldville for Sherborg, France, on December 24, 1944. On their way to relieve soldiers at the Battle of the Bulge, my grandfather's division and the ship on which they sailed was torpedoed. More than 750 soldiers went into icy waters and did not survive, but my grandfather was not one of them. He went into the water, and a lifetime later his voice described the ice that clung to his eyelashes and the bone-deep cold that took months to leave, but he emerged. He made it home. His name was William, which came down to him from Scottish ancestors and has now been passed to two new generations.

My dad came from a long line of storytellers; my granny told the stories in the native tradition with her soft, feathery voice and fluid arms and hands. Dark eyes, dark hair, small and plump, she told stories with her cooking and with her sad eyes. My grandpa, whose own grandparents immigrated from Scotland in 1881, spun yarns in a voice filled with mirth but sanded into scratchiness by tobacco and coal dust. Bright blue eyes sketched with laugh lines, he told tall tales about fishing, and he re-narrated stories he had read. Newspapers, dime store

novels, westerns, magazines—he read for himself and he read to her. Together they raised five children in eastern Oklahoma in what was little more than a shack with dirt floors that my granny kept immaculately swept. She grew the fruits and vegetables that kept them fed, and he raised the chickens and fished the streams.

Dad, the middle child, was stationed in Korea during the Vietnam conflict. His older brother Bill was stationed in Chulai, Vietnam, as an artillery specialist who meticulously engineered the when, where, and at what precise angle artillery was deployed. He is now a professor of the study of bugs at a private university in Mississippi, and while he's lived outside of Oklahoma longer than he ever lived in it, his voice still holds Oklahoma vowels. Since Uncle Bill was essentially in the thickest of the thick Vietnam jungle, my dad and the youngest Stark boy John were both given safer posts during the war. John served as a munitions expert in Hawaii, and he lost the hearing in one ear because of it. His voice was always loud and blustery as a result. My dad—a man of letters and science, a man from a storytelling family—served as the postmaster's assistant in Korea. This position in the post office was crucial for his story and for my own because in his postman role he was allowed to frequently send letters and audio recordings home to my mom.

In 2012, after my parents had both passed away with only 14 months separating their departures, I found a treasure box containing stacks of love letters and tiny audio cassettes, along with an ancient cassette player. Those letters, so tender and achingly sweet, were written in his bold, familiar scrawl and spoke of a commitment to our mother that I never had cause to doubt. *To Linda, all my love, Jim.* I knew that voice. It was strong and witty, succinct but sincere. I knew that man.

I turned on the recorder and listened to the tapes.

I cannot begin to describe how I felt, with my heart still so steeped in the grief of losing him, in that moment of hearing my father's tinny voice coming through those vintage speakers. The voice of the man I loved was so youthful and earnest, so homesick for the girl he'd adored since they were barely teens. His voice was familiar, yet somehow foreign. The voice I heard belonged to a man only 23 years old, a man telling his new wife and the mother of his baby boy how much he loved and missed, how much he ached. He sent those tapes so that Mom could play them for my brother, a chubby little dumpling born while his daddy was serving his country in a foreign land. Dad sent those tapes so his boy would know the voice of his father, so his love would not forget him.

The voice captured in the recordings belonged to my dad, and yet the voice was a version of him I never really knew. I was the baby of the family—the surprising blond-ringleted girl who came along later. By the time I entered the picture, he was back home in Oklahoma, master's degree hanging on the farmhouse wall, teaching high school science and building a life with his small family on a nice plot of land, cows and chickens dotting that landscape. By the time I came along, the homesick 23-year-old version of Dad was gone. His topography had changed. His voice had deepened with age and responsibility.

I still hear him sometimes, especially in dreams or in moments of frustration or anxiety (like during the writing of, oh I don't know, a dissertation). "Andra (Ann-drah)," he'd say because that extra vowel just never seemed quite natural in his mouth, "Just keep things in perspective. It'll all work out." As he aged, his voice grew a little more gravelly, but even toward the end when his body was ravaged with disease he sang with a lovely baritone, and he never forgot how to tell a story. His quill and parchment were his quietly sonorous voice, along with strategic pauses and silences, inflection and laughter, the expected and the unexpected he used in

the telling; he was the keeper and sharer of the family tales. When I read through those old letters, I knew him, somehow. When I listened to those love notes recorded on audio cassettes, I knew him there too. But somehow, well, I also *didn't* know the *him* that was then. He was still *becoming*—coming into the man he would be. His life experiences provoked changes in him. The man in the Vietnam letter era was just the start of the man he later became, and as he lived, his voice—both written and aural—shifted and changed as well. While always compelling and always *him*, the voice shifted, grew, aged, deepened.

This is the reason why the voice metaphor is so strong: *Voice speaks of life*. This is the reason why a metaphor of voice remains seductive even after so many scholars have studied, written, and argued it. *Voice hints at pieces of selfhood*. Those tinny recordings of my father are pieces of the man I loved. Voice hints at passions and quirkiness and presence. I have a memory of Dad providing an energetic narration of the homerun he'd pounded at a baseball game held on the military base. A high school baseball star, Dad studied and loved the game his entire life. *Voice hints at life itself*. The voice of the author proves somehow that a life is being lived, that a heart beats, that a breath is taken. The voice of the man in those letters spoke of longing and love, frustration and joy, impatience and presence. *Life*. Toby Fulwiler says that we are “shaped by life-changing experiences” and that our many selves “coexist” within us (43). Dad's selves coexisted, and he and Mom recognized all of those selves, while my brother and I only really knew the ones that became after we came along. Fulwiler says that his own writerly voice is a “juxtaposition of the full professor to the first-year student, both of whom vie for attention” (46) and adds that he often writes to that 18-year-old self he once knew. I wish, more than just about any of my many wishes, I could ask my dad to listen to those old recordings and reflect on that

23-year-old-self, to tell me how much of that man changed and how much remained. I wish that he could tell me about the voice of that young man.

I am a storyteller, like my father and his father before him. I tell stories with my voice, with my words. I tell the stories of my childhood. I tell the stories of my classrooms. I tell the stories of my family and friends. I am the keeper of the family memories and the weaver of the family lore. I know the value of my own voice, and I want my students to know the value of their voices as well. I want them to be able to tell their own stories. In her 2012 Chair's Address at CCCC, Malea Powell spoke about stories and the importance they hold in how we conduct ourselves, our research, and our pedagogy in academia. She said, "When I say 'story,' I don't mean for you to think 'easy.' Stories are anything but easy. When I say story, I mean an event in which I try to hold some of the complex shimmering strands of a constellative, epistemological space long enough to share them with you. When I say 'story,' I mean 'theory'" (384). The stories I share in this project become the data which become the theory. The stories are where the important information resides.

Timothy Pollock and Joyce Bono, researchers in the field of business management, believe that "interesting ideas and findings" get "buried under a desert of barren prose" when writers lose sight of the story they are trying to tell (630). Pollock and Bono state, "We have two jobs as scholars: Answering interesting questions and telling the story" (629). While Pollock and Bono never refer to voice, I would argue that their metaphor of a "human face" (629) serves in the same capacity as our voice metaphor. They highlight the importance of the human face in a written narrative, saying such a face imbues human emotion and human action; they ultimately posit that "the lack of a human face" (629) impedes effective storytelling and deadens academic writing. They advocate for including this human face, or voice, when we write in order to



establish veracity and create connections between the text and the readers. Good storytelling, and therefore good writing, is dependent upon investment in crafting the narrative, and, while they never use the word *voice*, they most definitely apply the idea to their argument for the usefulness of storytelling in academic writing. Sounding like Expressivists, they describe faceless prose as bloodless and bland (629) and call for what sounds like voice to narrate the stories of academic reporting.

I will not argue against Pollock and Bono's valuing of the "human face" because I also believe in the value of the human face, in the value of voice; however, I realize the crafting of voice for a particular writing task is no simple endeavor. As I have written myself into and through this project, I have come to realize that construction of voice is often at odds with the expectations of the audience. Pollock and Bono write for business managers, people who likely value numbers and data over narrative. I generally write for composition and rhetoric colleagues, many of whom found their places of belonging within departments of English known for valuing the storytelling art of narrative, the nuances of tone, and the subtleties of syntax. Throughout the multiple drafts of this project, something has become clear to me: when the topic of a research study is voice, traditional reporting of research data becomes cumbersome. There exists an uncomfortable—though arguably productive—tension between the topic and the method of reporting.

When the topic is voice, numbers and percentages seem somehow wrong, difficult to process. When the topic is voice, charts and graphs seem rather antithetical. Perhaps because of this tension, I've struggled to write in a way that values both the data and the voice, unsure of how to present evidence untampered by my voice—or even if I *should* present evidence in such a way. My own voice hubris has been shaken in disconcerting ways. This project has shown me

that research on voice seems to simultaneously require and resist voice. I've learned that determining exactly how much of my human face is appropriate for any given writing project is no simple task.

For this project, rather than trying to smooth over moments of tension, those cracks in how data should be reported, I've attempted to pry them open and put the tension on display. In moments when I felt pulled between two types of reporting, I tried to utilize the method that best illuminated the voices of the study. There are instances when the tension may seem off-putting—too much data or too much voice. I make no apologies for those moments because the theory of voice that has developed throughout this project is this: *voice is not always synonymous with our expectations of "good writing."* We do not live in a world with absolutes, so why would voice be any different? Elbow says that voice simply can't be viewed in binary terms ("What is Voice" 184). There is no either/or with voice. There is no binary. Instead there is something more like an either/and/all/some/few/most/one/*sometimes* situation happening when voice is happening. There are multiple voice truths to behold and believe, and those multiple truths make voice an even more fascinating aspect of writing.

Voice is often found within the cracks, located within sources of tension. This is true for my writing and for the writing of the student participants in the three studies reported upon in this dissertation. While all three studies are broadly focused on how undergraduates conceptualize voice and how they identify their own voices in writing, each individual study concentrates on voice in distinct ways. The studies—their foci, their populations, and their methodologies—vary, which means that my reporting of each study varies a little as well. However, I have attempted to organize each study around what the scholars say about voice,

what the students say about voice, and the key findings from each study. Data abounds, voices speak, and cracks in the writing exist throughout.

In Chapter 1, I offer the definitions and explanations of voice as conceptualized by writing scholars. I also preview the three unique case studies that comprise this project. In Chapter 2, I attempt to determine a baseline understanding of how undergraduates conceive of writerly voice and how they determine their own voices in their own writing. In Chapter 3, I build on that baseline knowledge and examine whether first-year writing students find the specific teaching of voice valuable in the writing of researched arguments—most specifically in using the lens of voice as a method for incorporating source citations. In Chapter 4, I enter a writing space where voice is often avoided rather than taught. A technical and professional writing class serves as the site for investigating what can be learned about voice when it is intentionally *not* constructed. Finally, in Chapter 5, I offer storytelling of voice as a method for weaving together the various threads from all three studies; I also make suggestions for the teaching of voice.

My goal for this project has always been to learn what students believe about their own writerly voices. I hope my efforts will construct something like a voice multi-tool to add to the writing teacher's toolbox—useful knowledge that will enrich how we as a discipline conceive of voice and how we determine the best ways to teach voice in our writing classes. As will be made perfectly clear throughout the entirety of this dissertation, I fully believe voice should be taught because voice offers so many ways to engage students. Voice should be taught in the same way that citation should be taught, with the same emphasis that organization is taught. Voice should be taught to help students identify ways to write themselves into their texts, but it should also be

taught as a way to value revision because it is within revision where we fine tune our constructed voices. I do not believe that we *find* voices; instead, we *craft*, *construct*, and *create* them.

While voice is often found in the cracks, our business as writing professors should not be to eradicate those cracks; rather, we should help our students pry open those places and investigate what is valuable and reflect upon how to make it better. Like laugh-lines, the voices in student writing can be both flawed and beautiful. Voice can be both unsophisticated and insightful. We have the fantastic responsibility of helping students use those attributes of their writing in meaningful and powerful ways.

## Chapter 1

### Voice: A Metaphor with Staying Power

#### The Elbow Effect

In *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*, Robert Connors writes that Barrett Wendell, credited with providing the field of composition its three pillars of style—Unity, Coherence, and Emphasis—was “horrified at what he had wrought” (286). Quoting a 1909 report by Oscar Campbell, Connors reports that Wendell “used to exclaim that he had exerted a more baleful influence upon college education in America than any other man in his profession” because Wendell’s plans for educational reform and progress had been “stupidly perverted by the mechanically minded men who formed the rank and file of his profession” (286). I often wonder if Peter Elbow has the same regrets about voice. It seems to me that Elbow’s best ideas are so often twisted or abused by the uniformed and overeager, or the erudite and hyper critical, that the crux of those ideas no longer resembles what Elbow intended.

In *Writing Without Teachers*, first published in 1973, Elbow invites his readers to write expressively and to be better readers as well as better writers. The activities and language Elbow introduces in that text have become interwoven into the fabric of our discipline’s discourse, and the concept of voice is a central theme. In *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow argues that “the habit of compulsive, premature editing doesn’t just make writing hard. It also makes writing dead. Your voice is damped out by all the introductions, changes, and hesitations between the consciousness and the page” (6). This was our first introduction to voice by Elbow, and it was an introduction that seemed to truly capture the attention of those who read the book. When Elbow discusses the “natural way of producing words” as having “a sound, a texture, a rhythm—a voice—which is the main source of power” (6) in writing, he tells his audience that voice is

power. Adding to this, he admits, “I don’t know how it works, but this voice is the force that will make a reader listen to you, the energy that drives the meanings through his thick skull” (6). Essentially, Elbow tells his readers that their voice(s) are their “only source of power” (7). The *only* source of power. Voice.

I wonder if Elbow has ever regretted this introduction and emphasis on voice. He could not have known when he penned his empowering and seemingly harmless idea the impact his words would have upon writers, writing teachers, and the emerging field of composition and rhetoric.

For more than twenty years, the first edition of *Writing Without Teachers* sold widely, and it went on to sell widely again when its twenty-fifth anniversary edition was released. It became what Wendy Bishop called “the little trade book that could” (240). In 2010, NCTE conducted a survey asking members to state the “most influential books” of their profession. Elbow’s *Writing Without Teachers* was prominently featured on that list (“Then and Now”). *Writing Without Teachers* was read by people from all walks of life, including writers with no interest in academia and teachers at the K-12 level. Elbow’s ideas became effectively interwoven into the culture of writing. Middle school English teachers frustrated with the prescriptive nature of writing instruction began to include freewriting exercises in their classes, and they began to write comments about voice on student papers. By the time I was a middle schooler in the late 1980s, freewriting and discussions of voice were standard conventions. My sons’ middle and high school language arts teachers have often commented on their strong writerly voices. For good or ill, voice has become a metaphor that is stitched into our concept of what makes writing good.

This brings me to an account I stumbled across of a veteran high school English teacher in Massachusetts. Susanne Rubenstein recently told interviewer Paul Barnwell that her students' writing was missing a "spark" and she equated that missing spark to "writer's voice," which she defined as "an elusive blend of an author's personality and style" (19). Blaming strict curricular demands and standardized testing, Rubenstein argued that the personalities of her students had been eradicated from their writing. Throughout the interview, published in 2019—not in 1971—Rubenstein casually uses terms that have been highly incendiary over the last forty years of composition scholarship. She mentions "showing students how written language encapsulates a *writer's unique voice*" (21, my emphasis) and she says that the trick to helping a student find her "authentic voice" is little more than providing "a green light [from the teacher] and a supportive classroom culture" (21). Her subject position for voice, a position that must influence her students, is one of the embattled English teacher fighting against the regime of standardized testing, hoping to allow her students some measure of individualism and self-expression.

Admittedly, I rather like the grit and optimistic eagerness of Ms. Rubenstein and see quite a bit of myself in her, yet I see her use of such terminology as problematic because a writer often has multiple voices that may or may not be authentic or unique and may or may not be effective. I realize that her subject position does not reflect all high school English teachers, though I do suspect that she represents many of our colleagues at the middle and high school levels. The influence of Peter Elbow's earliest and most widely read scholarship on writerly voice is much more likely to be known among the English teachers chatting over their quickly consumed lunches in teachers' lounges than is the critical scholarship that later emerged in reaction to Expressivist pedagogies associated with Elbow. Elbow's later wrestlings with voice are far less known than his little tradebook that broke such ground, *Writing Without Teachers*.

In fact, Christine Tardy says that teachers and writers of all levels have a commonly held belief that voice is synonymous with individual expression. She says, “Despite a general move in scholarship toward social constructionist” understandings of voice “in which voice is both social and individual, several studies have demonstrated that an expressivist view of voice as a unique property of the writer [...] remains prevalent” (356). In other words, regardless of the strides that have been made in voice scholarship, Peter Elbow’s first explanation of the unique voice is still the predominant understanding of the term.

About a decade after *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow revisited the metaphor of voice in *Writing With Power* (1981). In that publication, Elbow says, “The underlying metaphor is that we all have a chest cavity unique in size and shape so that each of us naturally resonates to one pitch alone” (281–82). According to Elbow’s 1981-era explanation, a natural resonance unique to a writer—a voice—is what offers writers their unique sound, the quality that sets one writer apart from another. Joseph Harris explains that, for Elbow, “voice often refers to something like style or tone,” yet Harris adds that the complication with voice as it has been ascribed to Elbow is that “while such terms [style or tone] suggest that the problem facing the writer is a technical one, a question of phrasing or diction, voice hints that matters of selfhood are also at stake. It implies breath, spirit, presence, what comes before words and gives them life. And so it becomes both the most vital and mysterious part of writing” (33). Here Harris seems to suggest that scholars who write so passionately about voice imply that a writer’s voice is much more than the style of crafted, effective prose. Instead, those who may equate voice with selfhood stand on shaky ground because to equate a strong voice with a strong self is to also equate a weak or nonexistent voice with a weak or nonexistent self. To believe that voice is *mysteriously* vital



means that those writers who seem unable to write with voice are somehow unworthy of that gift. This seems wrong.

### **The Metaphor Issue**

Additionally, it seems that while voice has become part of the fabric of writing instruction, it is not actually included in the lore of writing instruction. We talk about it. We refer to it. We exalt it, complain about it, avoid it, rename it, but we don't actually *teach* it. This is where voice becomes problematic for writing teachers. This is where voice is problematic for me: there appears to be an assumption among teachers of writing at various levels, secondary through graduate, that voice is a concept embraced and understood by students—that invoking a phrase like, “Just write in your own voice” somehow has meaning for students. And perhaps, for some students, it does have meaning. Perhaps. Yet for others, I wonder if voice holds any significance at all. I wonder if the elusiveness of the word, a mere metaphor for an idea, keeps it firmly out of reach of many students. I also wonder if the very culture of the writing class has created a convoluted, fun-house mirror in which teachers see one thing while students see something quite different.

Kenneth Burke says that a metaphor “is a device for seeing something *in terms of* something else” (“Irony” 247, emphasis in original). The metaphor of voice is likely too wrought with what Burke deems the “thisness of a that, or the thatness of a this” (247). In other words, the metaphor has too much “thisness” and not enough exact meaning. Burke adds that “metaphor tells us something about one character as considered from the point of view of another character” (248), noting that the word “character” is just a placeholder for other distinct entities such as a person, process, or situation. If the metaphor itself reflects something about the teacher or

student employing the metaphor, then this helps to explain why the metaphor of voice is so frustratingly tricky for students and teachers alike.

Additionally, the term voice would not fall into Burke's category of "positive" terms. A Burkian positive term names the tangible, the experienced, the thing that "can be located in time and place" ("Terms" 192). This certainly does not describe voice. Instead, voice would be classified by Burke as an "ultimate" term. Burke admits that he'd considered naming this category the "mystical," but feared such a category name would be too divisive—and obviously Burke was not wrong. We can see quite clearly that the mystical nature of voice has caused some scholars to embrace it, while others reject the validity of the term. Instead, Burke chose "ultimate" to name words that hold "the realm of ideas or principles" (195), admitting that when conflicts arise about the meanings of these ultimate words, there likely is no clear winner—no precise answer. Because ultimate words arise from, and are defined by, their users or "spokesmen," such words rarely hold compromise or uniformity. For Burke-minded writers, perhaps this term "voice"—an *ultimate* word, a metaphor of *thisness*—simply holds too much of its speaker to ever be demystified. From classroom to classroom, from year to year, students experience the metaphor of voice in ways that shift, change, and contradict according to the *thisness* positioning of one teacher or the *thatness* testimony of another.

### **The Subjective Position of Voice**

Subjectivity seems to be at the heart of how writers conceive of voice, which means subjectivity must be addressed. In Jacqueline Jones Royster's "When the Voice You Hear is Not Your Own," her pivotal argument, one that complements Burke's, is that subject position determines everything. Royster argues that that "the notion of 'voice'" is "a central manifestation of subjectivity" (30). If one's way of knowing and understanding voice is located within one's subject position, it seems even more important that we investigate the subject positions of

students, instructors, and scholars of voice. Elbow's subjectivity, my subjectivity, a first-year writer's subjectivity, an L2 writer's subjectivity—all are significant for understanding how and why voice is important for writing instruction.

Acknowledging my own subject position became integral to how I conceived of and completed this research. I found myself continually processing information through my own subjectivity while also attempting to pay attention to what Royster calls the “context, ways of knowing, language abilities, and experience” (29) of my participants. Royster suggests that acknowledging our own subjectivity enables us “to reconsider the beliefs and values which inevitably permit our attitudes and actions” (30) in a particular community or situation.

When I situate Royster alongside Burke, I see a similarity in how they both insist that subject position matters. Burke calls it the terministic screen. Royster calls it “home training” (32), but they both show that “point of view matters” and that “what we think we see in places that we do not really know very well may not actually be what is there at all” (Royster 32). Burke says that, depending on the user, “any nomenclature necessarily directs the attention into some channels rather than others” (“Language” 115). Depending on the user, the word “voice” is directed in one way while it may be propelled another direction by a different speaker. Burke explains this by giving the analogy of several photographs of the same object with the only difference residing in the color of the filter used for the photo (116). Each photo shows reality, but that reality is colored by the filter. Each use of voice shows a reality, but that reality is colored by the user of that word. Royster and Burke both emphasize the importance of acknowledging the subjectivity of voice as metaphor because the metaphor is filtered by the subject using it. My own filter is that of the composition-rhetoric community, a faux-dignified sepia tone layered with caution, wit, and plenty of subtlety, but the filter for undergraduate

writers is much different, often straightforward and brightly colored like the Snapchat filters that I can't seem to understand.

Quite possibly the least surprising point I'll write for this entire project is this: *First-year writers come to the college classroom with diverse backgrounds and subject positions*. Yes, this is Captain Obvious-quality work; however, such a statement must be made. Students have been taught writing by varied methods and by teachers with their own proclivities surrounding how voice is conceived. Because of these layers of subjectivity, it should come as no surprise that undergraduates arrive in our classrooms with confusion about what voice is and what it means for their writing.

In spite of the layers of subjectivity and confusion associated with the term, *I believe in the value of voice*. Yes, I fully admit to waving the big foam finger of an Expressivist fan; however, I also appreciate the concerns associated with assigning a single unique or authentic voice to any writer. I understand that voice is troublesome. I know that many of my peers steer clear of voice because the word, the voice metaphor, is subjective and shifty. I also know, because of the research completed for this dissertation, that my own terministic screen has a tendency to filter, reflect, and reward voices that I understand—voices that actually sound a lot like my own. I'm aware this is a problem. And still I believe in the value of voice because voice offers a pathway to the heart of the student writer while also emphasizing the importance of taking care with diction, with investing in revision, and with reflecting on whether the meaning of a written text actually means something to the student writer. For the instructor, voice offers access to the interests of the writer; for the student, voice offers access to agency. For these reasons as well as many more I will highlight in later chapters, I believe we need to identify better ways of incorporating voice into composition pedagogy.

And so this brings me to why I chose to spend the last few years studying a concept that has been studied by so very many scholars before me. My brazen assertion is this: *I'm not convinced my predecessors have been asking the right questions of the right people.* No one has asked undergraduate student writers how they conceive of voice. No one has asked first-year writers what their subject positions show them about voice. No one has asked them if a better understanding of voice helps them become better writers. When student writers teach us what they know about voice—how they use it, how they understand it, how their subject positions determine if voice is or is not useful—then maybe we will be in a position to ask better questions and to devise better ways of teaching writing.

### **Three Studies that Comprise this Project**

Before our field will ever reach a somewhat stable, common ground regarding voice—a ground that will likely always be a bit rocky—we need to know what our students know. We need to better understand what they think and believe to be true. This is where I hope my project can enter the conversation. This dissertation explores voice through three case studies focused on asking undergraduates to explain what they understand voice to mean.

This project examines 1) how first-year, first-semester composition students conceptualize voice in their own writing, 2) how first-year, second-semester composition students understand and use voice for academic arguments, and 3) how upper-level undergraduate students understand and negotiate voice in professional and technical writing situations.

### **The Literature that Guides this Work**

The scholarship on voice is diverse, illuminative, and extensive. Unfortunately, the scholarship on voice is also quite discordant. Frankly, no one agrees. Consistent with Burke's explanation of metaphor, voice is tagged in adjectives and adverbs, categorized by what it is not

and what it seems to be. With each scholar, personal ideals are stitched into the metaphor until the next scholar comes along to rip it out and sew on another. Some composition scholars speak of voice as elegant and mystical while others consider the metaphor of voice vague and unhelpful. Darsie Bowden gets to the heart of the issue by saying that the metaphor of voice is often “more confusing than illuminating” (187); nevertheless, this voice metaphor remains steadfast in the scholarship of our discipline.

Any review of voice scholarship would be incomplete without a nod to the overanalyzed, often-vilified, and overblown concept of authentic voice. Authentic voice has come to represent all that is combative and confounding in voice scholarship. Peter Elbow calls authenticity of voice “the trouble—the swamp” (*Landmark* xxxiii) in discussions on voice. He writes that the idea of authenticity “has made voice such a disputed term” including the terms “‘presence,’ ‘sincerity, identity, self, and what [he calls] ‘real voice’” as synonyms to the troublesome authenticity. Authentic voice has become the touchstone of the voice debate. It is the line in the sand where people gather on one side or the other, for or against a belief in self or identity, for or against whether a text can or cannot represent a person, for or against truth or authenticity as something that can even potentially exist.

Lester Faigley asserts that authentic voice is one of those unspecific, inconsistent terms that writing teachers use to determine Good Writing. Citing the research of Michael Adelstein and Jean Pival, Faigley explains that many teachers define good writing as “‘clear,’ ‘concise,’ ‘effective,’ ‘interesting,’ and projecting ‘the authentic voice of the writer’” (107). He compares terms like authentic voice with guidelines for assigning grades, saying that at the universities where he has taught, “An ‘A’ paper is one that ‘displays unusual competence’; hence, an ‘A’ paper is an ‘A’ paper” (108). An authentic voice is authentic. In other words, like most circular

terminology associated with the teaching and assessing of writing, subjectivity and interpretability are the key components. In this way, voice becomes just another undefined word, another catch-all concept that students are supposed to understand. Voice resides within the Stephen North House of Lore with little regard for clarity.

Authentic voice has been noted as problematic for many reasons, including the idea that authentic voice implies a static, one-dimensional understanding of the writer. Author bell hooks recounts experiences in her undergraduate creative writing classes where she first became unsettled with the idea of an authentic voice. She writes, “I learned a notion of ‘voice’ as embodying the distinctive expression of an individual writer” (52). As the only black student in her writing classes, she was praised “for using my ‘true,’ authentic voice,” and encouraged to further “develop this ‘voice’” (52). Hooks admits that the comments immediately troubled her because racial bias seemed poorly concealed behind the idea that she had only one authentic voice. Arguing that no single voice can be more or less true than others, hooks writes, “The insistence on finding one voice, one definitive style of writing [...] fit all too neatly with a static notion of self and identity that was pervasive in university settings” (52). Hooks points out that many people of color and people who have multiple languages resist choosing one language over another, resist privileging one culture over another. Instead of an authentic voice, she argues that constructing and holding multiple voices is a more accurate representation of any writer.

Additionally, Faigley notes that authentic voice is entangled with concepts of empowerment. Faigley says, “It is the notion of the student writer as a developing rational consciousness that makes most talk of empowerment so confused,” adding that regardless of how “well we teach our students, we cannot confer power as an essential quality of their makeup” (119). This calls to mind Harris’ position that when voice hints at matters of selfhood, the

implication is that writing without an “authentic” or powerful or even an *appealing* voice represents a writer who is inauthentic, weak, or unappealing. Essentially, when teachers of writing equate an authentic voice with a voice of power, such teachers are privileging a specific type of voice, one that is *not* necessarily authentic. Rather, teachers are privileging a voice they find appealing—a voice that holds power because it holds the admiration of the instructor. Like Faigley, Bartholomae discusses the privileging of specific voices in “Inventing the University.” He writes that when students compose for university professors, “The student, in effect, has to assume privilege without having any,” further explaining that when students attempt to assume such a privilege, what we end up with is “imitation or parody” (47). We tell students to write what is within them, to write who they are, but we privilege the confident voice and admonish the uncertain one. We privilege the self-effacing humor and vilify the hatefully angry when the uncertain and angry are likely much more “authentic” than the confident or self-effacing.

To privilege a voice that *we simply like*, a voice that sounds powerful and “authentic,” is to restrict or hinder the voices that we don’t like. Clearly, this is problematic. Faigley notes that because instructors imbue such value in the powerful voice, it is little wonder that the voices our students attempt are so often “voices of authority,” and when their authority fails, students devolve into “a parental voice making cliched pronouncements where we expect ideas to be extended” (117). It is the privileging of the empowered voice that turns our students into bad preachers when they write.

Toby Fulwiler points out that a social constructivist view of the writer limits how uniquely authentic a writer’s voice can actually be. For Fulwiler, subject position cannot exist within a vacuum. Fulwiler says that “our voices are determined largely outside of our selves, according to where we live and work, what we read, and with whom we interact (157). And



Randall Freisinger adds that “individuals are an assemblage of voices” (196) constructed by the world in which they inhabit. If we believe that we are a product of the world in which we live, then our understanding of voice must broaden to accept that voice is a fluid, multi-faceted construction rather than a static representation of one’s true or authentic self.

In spite of the problems inherent in this idea of authentic voice, Randall Freisinger argues that we need to borrow the best parts of the concept of authenticity, to essentially rescue the positive elements of teaching authentic voice as empowerment in order to renegotiate a better way to teach voice. Freisinger requests that writing instructors avoid tossing out the entire concept of authenticity and, instead, suggests that we keep what is useful. He argues there is value in offering students praise when they manage to write an essay that embodies something of themselves, something worthwhile and meaningful. I must admit that I, like Freisinger, dearly want to retain the value of authenticity. Additionally, based on what I’ve learned over the course of this project, students find value in authenticity as well.

When I think of empowering my own students via writing, I am thinking in terms of helping them see value in their own writing and achieving confidence and agency as they improve. However, I am not so naïve that I cannot see the potential problems of ascribing power and authenticity to voice. While my heart wants to agree with Freisinger, my head fully agrees with Fulweiler, who says, “If there is such a thing as an authentic voice, it is protean and shifty. Even the most authentic voice—if it is mature—clearly changes so much, according to who is listening and why, that ‘authenticity’ is hard to establish” (162). Fulweiler gets to the heart of the authentic voice problem: our voice is always dependent upon a variety of ever changing factors, and what is authentic in one moment will likely be inauthentic the next. This circles us back to the significance of the subject position, the notion shared by Royster and Burke.

Peter Elbow argues that authenticity is not really the issue. Instead of words like authentic or sincere, Elbow says we should ask students “How much of yourself did you manage to get behind the words?” (*Landmark* xxxvi). He offers the term “resonant” as more helpful than the battle worn “authentic.” He believes resonant voice is more descriptive “because it connotes the ‘resounding’ or ‘sounding-again’ that is involved when distinct parts can echo each other” (xxxvi). Elbow puts forth the resonant voice term as a replacement for the authentic voice, saying that “a resonant voice in writing is not a picture of the self, but it has the self’s resources behind or underneath it” (xxxvi). While I am ever an Elbow fan, I must admit that this replacement term is perhaps a bit of classic Elbow-wordsmithing. While resonant voice does not seem to hold all of the negative associations that authentic voice holds, Elbow’s explanation of resonant voice remains murkier than I would like, murkier than scholars such as Carl Leggo likes. Leggo questions the pedagogical value of teaching voice and seems frustrated with scholars who assign significance to voice. Leggo argues that “voice cannot be conceptualized, schematized, and classified any more than beachstones can be categorized and labeled” (143), and urges scholars to simply stop trying. Yet few scholars seem to be willing to simply stop wrestling with voice. In fact, voice seems to draw the attention of academics and nonacademics alike.

Somehow this omnipresent nature of voice continues to draw the attention of scholars. How to define it, how to name it, how to explain it—the voice concept gets plenty of press and plenty of attempts at definition. Christine Tardy calls voice “polysemous” in nature and says its “definitional ambiguity” is the root of voice-based scholarly disputes (34). Jane Danielewicz says voice has an “omnibus of meanings,” explaining that “voice is one of those concepts in composition that seems to resist definition” (422). Voice has been described as a “floating

signifier” (Yancey vii), as a “key term” in composition (Harris ix), and as a “lightning rod” for political debate (Elbow, *Landmark Essays* xlvii)” (421). Elbow also labels voice “a pebble in the shoe” in the field of writing studies, indicating its niggling nature (“Freewriting” 13). Yancey says voice means different things at different times to different people (*Voices*). Yet Danielewicz maintains that even when “the validity and nature of related concepts such as identity, self, and subjectivity on which many assumptions about voice are based” (422) have been fully debated, we composition scholars simply refuse to let voice go. Almost impossible to define, certainly difficult to explain, voice stumps us and seduces us at the same time. Nevertheless, in spite of the ambiguities, voice does have what Yancey terms as “points of agreement” (viii).

### **The Points of Agreement on Voice**

It becomes pretty clear pretty quickly that our points of *disagreement* far outnumber our points of agreement. For the most part, writing scholars *agree* that voice somehow makes writing better. Even if we can’t agree on a definition of voice, we seem to know voice when we see (hear) it. We agree that some authors have distinctive, persuasive voices we can recognize without other identifying features. We agree that voice is somehow—though we might not be exactly sure how—a product of the combination of style and tone that writers create. And regardless of whether a compositionist fancies herself an expressivist or not, we understand that voice scholarship emerged from expressivist scholars like Peter Elbow, Ken Macrorie, and Donald Murray who offered voice as a way for writing teachers to engage with their students. These are our meeting places, our points of agreement. Another point of agreement comes from the work of Paul Diederich.

One of the most significant research studies in composition history was published in 1974. *Measuring Growth in English*, by Paul Diederich, details the results of research aimed at

discovering better ways of evaluating writing by determining what makes writing effective. While his research design was admittedly flawed, Diederich's results show that readers of writing value different elements found in the text. Five main categories of valuable writing components emerged from the study: ideas, mechanics, organization, wording, and *flavor*. Though these categories were important to scorers in different ways and for different reasons, the categories themselves remain relevant for scoring writing. Though Diederich never uses the word "voice," his explanation of "flavor" sounds very much like voice to me. Diederich describes flavor as "personal qualities revealed by the writing" (8) and explains that flavor is closely related to style. Using Mark Twain and Edgar Allan Poe as his examples, he argues their work would never be mistaken for any other writers'. He defines the personality revealed by the writing as flavor. Diederich calls it flavor, Elbow calls it a "magic potion," (*Writing with Power*, 286) yet both are referencing that element of writing best known as voice.

Diederich's flavor can still be found in contemporary explanations of voice. A 2011 National Writing Project (NWP) report by DiPardo, Storms, and Selland details the process by which the NWP scorers designed a rubric to use specifically for assessing voice in student essays. One instructive aspect of this report was the authors' account of the difficulty among NWP members in determining exactly what constitutes voice and how it can be defined in measurable ways. A second instructive part of the report is the definition of voice the NWP provided. Not only does this definition allude to Diederich's "flavor," but it also reflects the dominant understanding of voice among secondary writing teachers. I provide the definition in its entirety:

Voice is the personality of the writer coming through on the page. It is what gives the writing a sense of flavor, a uniqueness, and gives the reader the feeling that

the writer is talking directly to her. A strong sense of voice demands that the writer make a commitment to the writing and write honestly with conviction. In a paper with strong voice, the reader will get a sense that someone real is there on the page, whether the reader knows the writer or not. (174)

Quite obvious in this definition is that Diederich's flavor has had a lasting impression and has provided us with a foundation for our conception of voice. Equally obvious is the conflation of voice with a perceived authorial conviction or honesty, as well as a perception of strength and authority that still echoes from those original expressivists like Macrorie, Murray, and Elbow. Such a definition exemplifies why voice is troublesome—it often becomes the dumping ground for ideologies and unfounded assumptions. Such a definition also exemplifies how even the common spaces of voice studies are often troubled.

### **The Empirical Research on Voice**

While Carol Gilligan's research did not emerge from composition studies, her 1982 book called *In a Different Voice* opened the door to research on the importance of women's voices in all manner of qualitative research. Her groundbreaking feminist work influenced the research that followed, much of which focused on the written products of professional or academic writers. Gilligan's research helped pave the way for others such as Jacqueline Jones Royster who investigated how student identity might be culturally determined. Royster's accounts of the marginalized, lived experiences of African American female students at Spellman provide insight into the Self and Identity of students, paving the way for research on voice, but not quite inquiring how the students themselves perceive of their own identities or voices in writing.

The concepts of self, identity, voice, and culture are intertwined in ways that make one seem difficult to separate from another. Research on voice is often focused on identity

construction and how a community might affect such construction. John Albertinti recounts a study involving the autoethnographies of four “working class women in college” who explained that “doing school” essentially meant “using the voice or discourse” required to “get the grade” (477). This project was most concerned with the disconnect between academic identity and racial, ethnic, or socio-cultural identity. Similarly researcher Anne Dyson’s work with school age children focused on what she termed “social voice.” Essentially she studied how children constructed their writerly personas as reflections of classroom discussions and expectations. Expectations of community, academic identity—these are concepts that affect voice construction, but it is important to remember that such influence need not be negative. In a classroom where voice is valued and taught, where writers are treated as writers, positive voice construction and writerly identity are much more likely to occur.

From community to comma usage, other researchers have examined the role of grammar and punctuation in the construction of voice. Greg Myers, Ken Hyland, and Arthur Palacas have all separately examined sentence level mechanics and the role punctuation or grammar might have on the writerly voice. Arthur Palacas’s analysis of the use of parentheticals in the construction of voice was especially useful for this dissertation. Palacas argues that parentheticals “project a reflective voice, the voice of a reflecting self, the author, reflecting on what he is saying. Each italicized portion has a recognizably self-editing function” (125). His analysis includes other stylistic elements of writing and helps set a standard for writing researchers to analyze the presence of voice in writing; such information was helpful for me as I conducted rhetorical analyses of student writing for this project. Additionally, David Bartholomae offers useful insight that pairs nicely with Palacas. Bartholomae claims that he likes to teach the parenthesis. In an interview with John Boe and Eric Schroeder, Bartholomae says,

“If we taught the parenthesis with the same vigor as a nation that we teach the topic sentence, we'd have a whole different world; our children would be different. They'd be able to say something in their funny voice as well as their serious voice, or think of a qualification while they were thinking of the assertion. So I like to teach the parenthesis” (20). Bartholomae adds credence to Palacas’s point that parentheticals often signal voice in writing, but more importantly for this project, the lens of the reflective parenthetical was an idea I kept in mind throughout this study. In many ways, I found that the voice of the writer emerges in moments of reflection or explanation, and such moments often appear in between commas or emdashes, which are more commonly taught and accepted than the parentheses.

## **L2 Voice Scholarship**

L2 voice scholarship exists just a touch outside of composition studies, but which brings much to the communal table of teaching writing. Second language (L2) writing scholarship is rich in studies of voice, and more specifically, in studies focused on students and voice. The voice scholarship of L2 writing is quite broad in its scope, investigating a variety of foreign languages in a variety of contexts, only a portion of which is situated within the American schooling experience. Because of this, I’ve chosen to privilege the work of Paul Kai Matsuda and Christine Tardy as representatives of the field of L2 writing instruction and research. Both Matsuda and Tardy focus their research projects primarily on studies in American educational settings, and their scholarship successfully bridges the two fields of composition and L2 writing.

Matsuda’s work tends to focus on L2 writing in higher education in the United States, which means his scholarship is well suited to this discussion. He argues that “As the linguistic diversity of the student population has become undeniably clear, and as the institutional urge for globalization continues to grow, second language writing is beginning to gain recognition as a

concern for everyone involved in the field of composition studies” (“Teaching” 37). Yet Matsuda notes that while some composition studies scholars are now recognizing the impact of language learning in their classrooms, the unique issues found in second language writing have not quite found their way into the purview of every writing program administrator and have certainly not become common knowledge for every writing instructor.

Matsuda also notes that “The myth of linguistic homogeneity—the assumption that college students are by default native speakers of a privileged variety of English—is seriously out of sync with the sociolinguistic reality of today’s U.S. higher education as well as the U.S. society at large” (“Myth” 85). Matsuda argues that this myth is to blame for the field of composition studies historically silencing L2 writing students’ language differences in the discipline’s scholarship. I’ll admit that in my own practice as a writing instructor, I have not been as aware as I should be of the needs of my L2 writers, and that in the past I have operated unknowingly under this myth of linguistic homogeneity. I need to do better. I suspect that many composition instructors need to do better in this area.

In a collection called *Handbook of Second and Foreign Language Writing* edited by Matsuda and Rosa Manchón, Diane Pecorari highlights a link between textual plagiarism and L2 writers’ voice. More specifically, she notes that the lack of “a strong writerly voice and a sense of authority over their own texts” (340) is connected to plagiarism among L2 writers. She states that an important factor in plagiarism among L2 writers is a lack of authority or ownership of the writing, which she connects to voice. In the same edited collection, Christine Tardy contributes a chapter called “Voice and Identity.” Tardy dates the L2 field of scholarship’s interest in voice and identity to the mid-1990s and examines the scholarship that emerged during that time period. Tardy specifically points to research by Ramanathan and Kaplan who analyzed 10 college-level



composition textbooks for “voice” and “audience,” finding that “these terms drew on cultural assumptions that can easily exclude L2 writers” (350). Tardy explains that Ramanathan continued this research and later determined voice to be a culturally biased concept. Tardy argues that the voice described in L1 scholarship, associated as it is with ideals of individuality, authority, agency, and selfhood, has been “far more problematic when applied to the culturally and linguistically diverse population of L2 writers” (350). Tardy explains that the Elbowian description of voice—a quality of the writing unique to an individual writer—is especially problematic with L2 writers since individuality is understood in vastly different ways across cultures.

Tardy credits Matsuda with helping the L2 discipline move past this individualistic conception of voice. In 2001, Matsuda offered a definition of voice that was a departure from the individual. In that article, he explains voice as “the amalgamative effect of the use of discursive and nondiscursive features that language users choose, deliberately or otherwise, from socially available yet ever-changing repertoires” (“Voice in Japanese” 40). Tardy says that Matsuda’s revised definition of voice changed the trajectory of L2 scholarship (Tardy 351). Since Matsuda’s definition was published in 2001, L2 studies on voice have unilaterally argued that writerly voice is socially constructed, and, as such, voice is “*crafted, constructed, built, carved, created, found, projected, expressed, adopted, and taken on*” (Tardy 352, emphasis in original). I am especially enamored with this insistence that voice does not just exist but must be created, that voice does not simply emerge but must be crafted. I see this approach to voice as evidence that we writing instructors need to be providing our students with tools for voice construction. We need to be teaching students to craft, construct, and create voice.

Tardy also points the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu and his notion of habitus as instrumental in helping the L2 writing discipline wrestle with concepts of voice. Bourdieu's habitus provides insight into the needs and experiences of L2 writing students who find themselves in the scholastic foreign territory of the composition class. Habitus represents the way one's history, culture, dispositions, and ingrained knowledges inform the moves people make in social situations. In an interview with Kevin Ovenden of the *Socialist Review*, Bourdieu says that "people are structured by society," arguing that individuals are not isolated or free from the expectations of the society in which they live. Bourdieu explains,

I developed the concept of 'habitus' to incorporate the objective structures of society and the subjective role of agents within it. The habitus is a set of dispositions, reflexes and forms of behaviour people acquire through acting in society. It reflects the different positions people have in society, for example, whether they are brought up in a middle class environment or in a working class suburb.

Additionally, Bourdieu clarifies that the value of his work is to present education and culture as vitally important in affirming differences among various groups. Habitus wrestles with notions of space—both the social spaces we inhabit and the physical spaces in which our bodies are located—and capital—including the social, economic, and cultural assets we have at our disposal. These are notions that L2 writing scholars have adopted in their studies of voice. Bourdieu suggests that we are constantly traversing various expectations in social and academic situations and that, for good or ill, our personal histories act as our guides. The histories we hold, the dispositions we own—these direct the academic moves we make and the identities we shape. Using habitus, L2 writing researchers have argued that the norms and practices of a culture

indelibly affect a student's understandings of identity in person as well as identity or voice on the page.

Tardy offers evidence of specific empirical research methods employed by L2 writing researchers in their exploration of voice. Explaining textual analysis as “a prominent method on its own for studying identity and voice through lexicogrammatical features” (353), Tardy points to two specific textual analysis studies by Hyland (2010, 2012) which analyzed “academic texts in terms of features such as self-mention, keywords, hedging, metadiscourse, and rhetorical features” to determine how voice and identity are built within the writing (Tardy 353). Tardy also mentions a 2012 document analysis study by Matsuda which examines how assessment rubrics quantify and determine the importance of voice. Additional research on the assessment of voice by Sara Cushing Weigle highlights how writing assessment deals with concepts of originality and voice in L2 writing. Weigle points out that two significant writing rubrics — the 6-trait “commonly used in middle and secondary schools in the US” and the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) required for “students wishing to study in the UK or Australia” (474) — focus on very different writing traits.

In the United States, voice has a prominent space on the 6-trait rubric, but in the UK and Australia, voice is not mentioned at all on the IELTS rubric. Weigle explains, “One difference between these two ways of conceptualizing the construct of writing is that the former emphasizes authorial identity in terms of ideas and voice, whereas the latter tends to emphasize the communicative effect and linguistic characteristics of the written response” (475). This divergence highlights one possible reason why so many L2 writers struggle with concepts of voice in their writing. In essence, which traits have been ingrained as more important?

Additionally, Weigle explains that many L2 writers are more concerned with textual features of writing, and that concepts of passive or active voice outweigh any significance for writerly voice.

Various studies have highlighted that L2 writers often feel a disconnect between how they view themselves and how they are labeled in an educational setting or in their writing. Ultimately, L2 writing research focusing on voice has determined that “the labels ascribed to second language writers are often limiting and not reflective of students’ self-perceptions of identity” (Tardy 355). Such a disconnect has an impact on how students construct their writerly voices. Dwight Atkinson discusses one Chinese L2 writer, Shen, who experienced difficulties in developing a voice in his English writing. Shen was flummoxed by “university writing teachers’ encouragement to ‘be yourself’ and ‘just write what you think’ because the individualist ideology behind it was unknown to Shen, who conceptualized himself in terms of a Chinese and Marxist collective self” (Atkinson 549). Atkinson suggests that culture “has often been used to mark non-Western groups as different, and thus at least by implication, deficient” (560). In this way, voice continues to be problematic for many L2 writers in composition classes.

When I consider voice through the various lenses utilized by Royster and Burke, by Bourdieu and Matsuda, by Tardy and students like Shen, it becomes clear to me that when the dominant culture of the writing classroom defines voice, the non-dominant cultures are often deemed as somehow *less than*. I’ve stated before that it seems we writing professors have a tendency to privilege the voices of our students who sound much like we sound. Whether those similarities are in confidence, witticism, self-deprecation... or culture, we must take care to listen for other voices as well. More importantly, we need to take care to not dismiss the voices that sound different from our own.

And so this is where we stand with voice scholarship: it illuminates problematic ideals, it points out the importance of subject position, it offers agency (though with complications), and it reveals a troublesome placement of students pushed to the fringe; nevertheless, voice scholarship still manages to engage. In spite of the disagreements, or perhaps because of them, voice remains relevant. Additionally, despite the abundance of voice scholarship, there remains a gap that I believe my research helps to fill.

### **The Gap in Voice Scholarship**

While the literature on voice can be overwhelming in its depth and breadth, few scholars have been concerned with how students perceive voice. To my knowledge, no other scholar in the field of composition studies has focused a voice study exclusively on how undergraduates conceptualize, define, and identify voice in their own writing. This gap is where I have situated my study. With undergraduate student writers at the heart of this project, I have explored how undergraduates think of voice, how they explain voice, and how they define voice, but I have also sought to better understand how they connect voice and agency, how they understand voice and power. This project has intentionally made space for the voices of undergraduates to speak so that the composition and rhetoric community can listen and learn.

### **The Approaches and Epistemologies I Bring**

Before going any further, I should acknowledge my own ideologies and epistemologies as these ways of knowing were certainly at work in this research. Sandra Harding suggests that epistemology works as a guide for choosing a methodology for research, which in turn works to guide the methods chosen for research. In this way, one's epistemological position, or her constructed way of knowing knowledge, affects all aspects of research. Carol Grbich defines epistemology by using the Greek root words: knowledge (episteme) plus theory (ology or logos)

(3). She explains the significance of epistemology as the way in which we deal with and manipulate what we “know” as “truth.” Grbich suggests the heart of a research project is determined by the epistemological traditions claimed by researchers. In other words, the epistemology of the researcher influences how research is constructed, conducted, and categorized. It seems prudent, therefore, to discuss my own epistemology before explaining the theoretical framework and methodology for this project.

I approach all projects through the lens of a teacher-practitioner mightily influenced by the work and theories of John Dewey and Peter Elbow. Much of my identity as a compositionist is grounded in the social role of intellectual inquiry, based in large part on John Dewey’s educational ideologies. Additionally, the impact of Peter Elbow on my own composition pedagogy must be acknowledged because each time I facilitate a class on writing, I include Elbow’s techniques for helping writers write. I must acknowledge the ideological impact of these scholars because, like many writing researchers, my research interests are ever influenced by my teaching interests.

Douglas Simpson, Michael J.B. Jackson, and Judy Aycocock explain Dewey’s philosophies of teaching by categorizing the many different roles of the instructor in the classroom, roles such as the social engineer, the builder, the physician, and the leader. Additionally, they highlight the significance of collaborative and social learning as posited by Dewey in saying that “when we use the lenses of others to look for and at facts and their meanings, we are intentionally trying to see through another interpretative framework” (180). This thoughtful exploration through multiple lenses of knowing is an important aspect of my own epistemological framework and is one that naturally affects—in fact it *shapes*—this research study. It also falls in line with how I perceive voice—through the various lenses of my personal and scholastic history.

Ultimately, I believe we construct ourselves through writing. I believe we create a persona, a self, a voice for each context, assignment, email, or text message. But I also believe that the selves we construct are influenced by our cultures, our interests, our peers, and our classrooms. Tony Scott argues that writing cannot be separated from culture, that writers cannot be separated from their ideologies. I agree. He states that writing is “always in some way involved in the negotiation of identities and ideologies in specific social situations” (48). Scott claims that through writing, we are “socialized, changed” and such changes affect the *who* that we are. So when I talk of voice, I am *also* talking of self, and of agency. I believe the agency of self, the agency of voice, the agency of peers, the agency of the very classroom itself all hold powerful sway in the making of a writer. I believe such agency must be considered in a project devoted to the study of student writing, and so while agency was not the focus of this study, agency was certainly in the framework.

### **The Theory Guiding This Project: Constructivist Grounded Theory**

An underlying goal for this project has been to lay a foundation for a tangible and teachable theory of voice—a theory grounded in how students conceptualize their own voices and, building on that knowledge, a theory concerned with helping students intentionally construct more effective and powerful writerly voices. Because of this, I have employed constructivist grounded theory because I wanted the data in this study to drive the theory. Constructivist grounded theory is a way for researchers *to determine or discover a theory* by gathering and analyzing data (Charmaz). Constructivist grounded theory (CGT) is often used to study social processes, helping the researcher identify connections among the data. A theory that seems more method than theory, CGT allows researchers to use their interpretations of data to focus further data collection, “which they use in turn to inform and refine their developing

theoretical analyses (Charmaz 250). In other words, the data collected helps researchers determine the next steps and how to better focus the study.

Antony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz explain that CGT “is designed to encourage researchers’ persistent interaction with their data” and that both data collection and analysis “informs and streamlines the other” (1). The tenets of grounded theory include simultaneously collecting and analyzing data, utilizing a detailed coding process, emphasizing comparative methods, emphasizing memo writing as a method of discovering categories, and integrating the new data into the emerging theoretical framework.

Ultimately, I chose this theory because I wanted to allow the data to drive the research and to allow the data to develop a theory for how students conceptualize voice, for how they identify it, and for how they can learn to write with it. Bryant and Charmaz argue that this approach to research is both “simple and straightforward” (16) and that it is “based around heuristics and guidelines rather than rules and prescriptions” (17). As a writing instructor who prefers heuristic teaching methods over prescriptive methods, I saw CGT as a way to maintain this element of my teaching persona as I ventured into the role of the writing researcher. The use of constructivist ground theory allowed me to write my way into a tangible, teachable theory of voice, a theory grounded in the construction of voice achieved through an emphasis on revision and attention to the stylistic elements of writing.

### **The Methodology for Exploring Voice: Case Study**

Pamela Baxter and Susan Jack submit that case studies are best used to answer how and why questions while examining how something happens within a specific context. They say case studies are useful in all types of situations, from the simple to the complex. Researchers can use case studies when using a variety of data sources (interviews, observation, archival sources,



physical artifacts). Baxter and Jack maintain that researchers who use a case study model “can collect and integrate quantitative survey data, which facilitates reaching a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied” (554). In other words, with case study, every type of data available becomes a puzzle piece “contributing to the researcher’s understanding” (554). This approach partners beautifully with constructivist grounded theory.

Baxter and Jack state that the qualitative case study can be used to examine a person, an account, an occurrence, or a phenomenon within its specific context using various types of data sources. The approach is beneficial when researchers wish to apply multiple perspectives in an attempt to reach a richer, more comprehensive understanding of the case. A case study approach is most effective when the researcher cannot or will not influence or control the subject’s behavior, when a researcher wants to focus on contextual conditions that may affect the phenomenon under investigation, and when the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and the context (545). A case study involving multiple perspectives seemed like the best approach for a study investigating how voice is conceptualized among a diverse group of writers.

According to Baxter and Jack, choosing the correct type of case study is important. Among the various types of case studies available, I chose to employ an instrumental, collective case study model, which is essentially a study exploring three different cases while also attempting to provide insight into the concept of voice. The instrumental lens allowed me to view the cases individually while acknowledging each was a small part of a bigger whole. The collective lens allowed me to examine the collection of cases as a whole.

The three cases which made up this collective are outlined in the second, third, and fourth chapters. Chapter 2 focuses on how first-year writers conceptualize voice in their own writing.

Chapter 3 focuses on how first-year writers understand and utilize voice in researched arguments. Chapter 4 focuses on how undergraduates conceptualize and negotiate voice in technical writing. The final chapter of this dissertation, Chapter 5, utilizes storytelling to establish synthesis among the three studies while also proposing how to best incorporate voice pedagogy into the classroom.

### **Data Gathering Procedures and Representation of Results**

In order to fully explore how voice is conceptualized by student writers, the methods for gathering this research include the following: surveys, reflective writing, document analysis, participant observation, and interview. Additionally, my results are written in a modified traditional format. Sharan Merriam explains that the traditional written report has several common components: introduction, literature review, methodology, charts or graphs, and discussion. My report certainly includes these components, but it also highlights the voices of the student participants. These voices come from excerpts of student writing, student reflections, and interviews. In addition, since the topic of this study is the writerly voice, I have infused my own voice with the voices of my participants rather than compose in the detached style most common in traditional report writing. Because I include so many student voices, I attempt to group their responses together in ways that make the most sense to me – generally around a common theme.

### **Preview of Chapter 2**

#### *Cracks in the Writing: How First-year Writers Conceptualize Voice*

The 162 participants for the study detailed in Chapter 2 came from eleven different sections of English 1010 (first-year, first-semester composition) taught by eight different instructors during the fall of 2017 and the fall of 2018. While there may not have been a dramatic *aha!* moment in which I learned *all the things* I wanted to learn, I did discover that a majority of the incoming first-year writing students in the study had never received instruction on writing

with voice in either middle or high school and that a very small percentage of first-year writing participants were taught to write with voice in their first-year, first-semester writing courses. Additionally, the results indicate that participants believe voice is what makes their writing sound like them, but their concept of voice has nothing to do with the quality of their writing. In other words, for our student writers, voiced writing is not necessarily good writing.

### **Preview of Chapter 3**

#### *Connecting Voice with Citation: How First-year Writers Utilize Voice in Researched Arguments*

Chapter 3 explores the results of a study investigating how first-year writing students in their second-semester composition course understand and use voice in their researched arguments. For this project, participants included 60 students from three sections (two standard, one honors) of English 1020. This study included a more intentional attempt to see if student perceptions would change if voice was taught. The results supported the findings from the previous study: students have heard of voice but cannot truly define or explain it, and only about half of them have ever had a previous teacher give explicit lessons on voice in writing. The voice lessons provided by their textbooks and the in-class discussion and activities resulted in richer conceptualizations of voice by the participants.

### **Preview of Chapter 4**

#### *Disrupting Expectations: How Undergraduates Conceptualize and Negotiate Voice in Technical Writing*

Chapter 4 focuses on one section of an upper-level professional and technical writing course. Participants included 17 students who were either juniors or seniors, 5 of whom were L2 writers. While a variety of interesting themes arose from this study, three are worth noting here: 1) the L2 students in this course had very different understandings of voice than did their L1 counterparts, 2) the few students in the class who were English majors had what I have

determined to be a literature-based understanding of voice that did not actually benefit them when asked to identify their own voices, and 3) for some students, including one participant on the autism spectrum, the writerly voice is completely divorced from personality or spoken voice.

## **Preview of Chapter 5**

### *Stories of Voice—Personal and Pedagogical*

Chapter 5 interweaves narratives on voice that have arisen from the studies and from my own personal history. Here is where I attempt to bring everything full circle, including a synthesis of the major findings and justifications for the intentional teaching of voice in the writing classroom. Chapter 5 does not focus on numbers or percentages; rather, it tells the stories of the students, highlighting how concepts such as agency, investment, reflection, and negotiation are important to how our students write and how they understand voice. Additionally, after Chapter 5, I offer two appendices with specific pedagogical suggestions for the teaching of voice.

## **Final Thoughts**

Scholarship on voice runs the gambit with scholars equating voice as a vehicle for turbulence, power, anxiety, mystery, agency, disillusionment, and even hope. Perhaps the potential of such a vehicle is why voice captivates me. These three distinct but connected studies that comprise this project illuminate voice in ways that are insightful and knowledge-producing. In *Vernacular Eloquence*, Peter Elbow writes, “As John Dewey insisted, the mere possession of knowledge or experience is not enough; we have to reflect on it—work with it and exploit it” (6). This is what I’ve tried to accomplish with my dissertation—reflection on, immersion in, and employment of voice. Ultimately, I want to give voice to the potential and power of the authorial voice. Additionally, I am so pleased to be able to share the voices of these undergraduate writers.

Whether my participants were assured in their understanding of voice or not, they were generous with what they knew. And because of that generosity, I am able to share their words and ideas. Their generosity will enrich and complicate the field's understanding of voice by highlighting students' conceptions and misconceptions which have not heretofore been included in scholarship. Such knowledge can only improve writing pedagogy and help instructors as they strive to meet the needs of their writing students.

Because of the work that has become this dissertation, there are four things about voice that I know for sure. First, while voice is familiar to many undergraduate writers, it is understood by few. Second, when undergraduates talk or write about voice, they imply a connection between voice and agency, but they see no strong connection between voice and "good writing." Third, for many students who struggle with writing—including L2 writers and writers who have been classified as developmental—voice is foreign and useless when presented as some ephemeral quality. Fourth, voice is pedagogically useful and needs to be systematically and intentionally taught.

Finally, I end this chapter and begin the rest of this work with my own definition of voice, one developed over the course of this research. Voice is a crafted, constructed personae—a version of the author—that enlivens writing through the author's intentional curation of stylistic elements such as diction, details, syntax, imagery, and tone. Voice is built by carefully tending to the details of the text and revising for the sound of the words as well as for their meaning. Voice is fluid and multifaceted. Voice is *not* singular or stagnant or sibylline (prophetic/mysterious/puzzling). Voice is *not found* by an author; rather, the author *constructs* a voice appropriate for the setting, audience, and genre. As in most examples of construction, some

voices are built better than others. Revision, attention, and intentionality can improve the writer's voice(s).

## Chapter 2

### Cracks in the Writing: How FYW Students Conceptualize Voice in their Own Writing

#### Foreword

Determining the most effective way to present the results of this research on voice has been much more challenging than I anticipated. In my earliest attempts, I followed a strict social science approach, but the end results were drafts that fell flat and came off as inherently *unvoiced*—not exactly what I wanted from a project about voiced writing. As I pointed out in my introduction, I’ve learned that this research topic – *voice* – directly affects how the research is presented and understood. Two years of continuous data collection, analysis, and coding means that I have more numbers than I ever thought possible for a bibliophile like myself to gather. I know *words*, not numbers. I am much more comfortable with stories than with statistics, yet I have *so many* figures, percentages, and charts. Determining how to best present such information has been tricky.

Ultimately, after several failed attempts at adhering to an IMRAD structure, the only structure with which I was familiar for writing up empirical research, I elected to modify the traditional IMRAD format. Realizing that the expectations of a social science genre were in many ways restricting my writing, I sought a method that worked a little better with the topic. I’ve structured each chapter with storytelling, in the beginning and ending, and interwoven throughout. While not incredibly inventive, this organizational strategy helped me feel comfortable moving into my own reporting style—a style that relies on storytelling and voice as much as it relies on clarity, insight, or organization. Headings are intended to serve as transitions to help move both writer and reader from one idea to the next.

I constantly question whether too much (or not enough) of my voice is constructed and grafted into this project. I'm attempting to write about the topic of voice *with voice* while also treating voice like the research topic it is. The balancing act is tricky.

## **Introduction**

I have an academic crush on the scholarship of Peter Elbow. While I occasionally disagree with some of what Elbow professes, I have always loved his voice when he writes about voice. Unlike the writing put forth by so many academics, Elbow's scholarship has always felt like it was meant *for me* (yes, *me!*) to read, and, more importantly, it was meant for me to understand. Perhaps this is why I have felt an affinity for Elbow for so long.

A few years back, I met Professor Emeritus Elbow at a 4Cs conference, and I can unequivocally say that he did not disappoint me or my high expectations. The kind gentleman I spoke with was just as forthright, just as genial, just as *Elbow* as the author's words have always been in print. His personae in his published writing matched the man I talked to for thirty minutes at a corner table in the convention center in Portland. The voice of the man who later sent me several email messages was also that of the energetic teacher so generous with his knowledge and years of expertise.

In one email from Elbow dated March 20, 2017, he provided a personal and detailed explanation of why he prefers the term "resonance" when considering a student writer's voice. He considers resonance to be found in places where "the writer has gotten a bit more of his or her self behind or underneath the words. Often these are little changes of tone or eruptions or asides or digressions—even lapses of a sort." He added that such changes seemed to provide "added weight, richness, resonance, or presence." However, he was careful to warn that such places of resonance are *not* always "good writing." Instead, he said, "They may even be places



where the writing breaks down. That is—except for exceptionally skilled writers—resonant passages are often holes or cracks or disjunctures” from what the author may have been attempting to do. This emphasis on disjunctures and cracks disrupts how we generally think about “good writing.” If a resonant voice is divorced from what we label good writing—i.e. polished, error-free writing with interesting ideas, logical organization, and a sophisticated approach to diction and syntax—then how can we mediate or even understand that break? I have generally lumped together the twin ideals of “good writing” and “voice,” and I seriously doubt I am alone in this. Writing that is clear, persuasive, organized, and voiced is writing that I want to read. I’d be willing to bet this is the writing most of us want to read. However, this new wrinkle in my understanding of voice, one that disrupts the expectation that voiced writing is also good writing, has created interesting tension in this chapter. This disruption is something I’ll circle back to later as I analyze student responses. For now, I’ll explain the purpose of this chapter before discussing procedures.

### **Purpose**

Like many writing studies folk, I gained insight on composition instruction by working in a university writing center. Writing center consulting experiences have enriched my teacherly personae and have provided understanding about how students approach writing and how they (mis)understand writing assignments and instructor feedback. Several years ago, I had a student client visit the writing center with a paper clutched in her hand. She walked through the door because she’d received feedback on an essay written for a literature course, and she didn’t understand what the professor wanted from her. Red ink was scrawled across the top of her paper: “I can’t hear *your voice* in this paper. Where is the REAL you?” The student was baffled and asked me what her instructor meant and how to “fix” her paper. Even then, before a

dissertation topic was much more than a distant possibility for me, I was already interested in voice studies, which is probably why I remember the student and our shared consultation so well.

Her paper had a solid thesis, a fairly strong organizational method, and plenty of good ideas. The area where she needed improvement was in the integration of her secondary sources. Like many student writers, she was not adept at introducing or incorporating source citations, yet the instructor didn't comment on anything but the lack of her "real" voice. My writing center client didn't understand what her professor meant in those scrawled words on her paper even though the professor certainly seemed to expect the student to know what to do with such terminology and feedback. Admittedly, there's a second dissertation in the feedback the instructor did and did not provide, but that discussion is for another day.

The writing center encounter has stuck with me for years and was instrumental in how I approached this study centered on first-year writers in their first semester of English 1010, as well as the study I'll discuss in Chapter 3. Quite simply, I wanted to know *what students know* about voice. The study revolves around three primary questions:

- 1) How do FYW students conceptualize voice?
- 2) What do these writers select when asked to identify parts of their own writing that is voiced?
- 3) What justification do these writers provide when identifying voice in their own writing?

In addition, I hoped to learn more about whether students had received instruction on writing with voice from high school teachers or from their current college-level writing instructors.

Essentially, the purpose of this study was to better understand how first-year writing students

understand the concept of voice in writing. If a professor were to ask where their “real” voices were, would they comprehend what such a question even meant?

## **Procedures**

The participants for the study came from eleven different sections of English 1010 (first-year, first-semester composition) taught by eight different instructors during the fall of 2017 and the fall of 2018 at the University of Memphis. The classes included four developmental writing sections, two honors sections, and five standard sections. Like many universities, UofM requires, at minimum, a master’s degree with at least 18 credit hours in English for those who wish to teach English 1010. The professors participating in the study included both full time faculty and graduate assistant teachers; they were fairly representative of the range of interests and areas of expertise of those who teach English 1010 at this university. Included among those areas of departmental expertise were: developmental writing, creative nonfiction, composition and rhetoric, professional and technical writing, applied linguistics, and literature. As for student participants, a total of 162 first-year, first-semester writing students contributed to this study. The study did not specifically ask for demographic information from students. In order to protect the identities of both students and professors, I assigned pseudonyms when needed.

Part of the First-Year Writing (FYW) program, the English 1010 course is described in the university catalog as one designed “to help each student develop into a more thoughtful reader and more effective writer, one who understands how writers make meaning through language.” English 1010, generally taken by first-year writers in their first semester at the university, is intended to help writers better comprehend the intricacies of writing—focusing on instruction, practice, and strategies for drafting and revision. In addition, among the learning outcomes listed for the course, students are to develop and demonstrate how to “adopt

appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality” in their own writing. This learning outcome and the course’s status as a requirement for first-year students were both important reasons why English 1010 was chosen as the site of this study. As part of the normal coursework in English 1010, students are required to write a variety of essays, including a literacy narrative, a discourse community analysis, and a writing research paper. The assignments in the course were ideal for the study because I did not need to incorporate additional writing assignments for analysis. I was able to use the written work students had already produced and submitted for class.

To determine how students in English 1010 conceptualize voice and how they determine their voice(s) in their own compositions, I employed a survey, along with students’ self-analysis and reflection of their previous writing. I also completed follow-up interviews with three participants. The survey instrument included four multiple-choice questions designed to uncover the participants’ general understanding of voice. Two questions asked students to consider any specific lessons on voice in their current class as well as lessons on voice in previous classes. A third question asked participants to choose from a list of options to answer “What is voice?” The fourth question asked students what they “hear” when they encounter voice in writing. The survey can be seen in Table 1.

In addition to those four multiple-choice questions, I asked students to analyze their own essays and attempt to identify any section of their own writing that sounded particularly voiced by circling or underlining those sections of their papers. Students were then asked to explain *why* they chose those particular segments of writing as voiced. The prompt read, “Please try to explain your choices by offering a general explanation about how you identified your voice in your writing. Write reflectively and thoughtfully about the choices you made when you were asked to identify voice in your own writing.” While the multiple-choice questions were designed

to help establish a baseline of information for students' previous and current conceptualizations of voice, I hoped that having students identify and reflect upon their own voices would provide context and richness with which to better understand the survey data. I was not disappointed.

Table 1	English 1010 Survey Instrument Questions
Question	Answer Options
1) Please circle the answer that best reflects your experiences in this class (English 1010) this semester. (Choose 1 answer.)	a) We have had specific lesson(s) on writing with voice. b) My instructor has briefly mentioned how to write with voice. c) We have not had any lessons on voice d) I do not remember any lessons on voice.
2) In your past learning experiences (NOT in English 1010), have any of your previous teachers taught lessons on voice in writing? (Choose 1 answer.)	a) Yes. More than one teacher taught me how to write with voice. b) Yes. One teacher taught me about using my voice in my writing. c) No. Teachers have <i>mentioned</i> voice, but no one has taught me how to write with it. d) No. I don't know what you mean by voice. <i>No one has ever told me about this.</i>
3) What is voice?  (Choose 1-3 answers.)	a) Voice is what makes my writing sound powerful. b) Voice is what makes my writing sound like me. c) Voice is something that can't be taught: you either have it or you don't. d) Voice is a combination of different elements of writing. e) Voice is basically the style a writer uses. f) Voice is basically the tone a writer uses. g) I don't know what voice is. h) I can see/hear voice in others' writing, but I don't know how to write with it.
4) When you "hear" voice in writing, what do you hear?  (Choose 1-3 answers.)	a) I hear the writer's attitude about the subject. b) I hear the writer's confidence—or lack of confidence—about writing or the topic. c) I hear the writer's level of formality d) I hear the writer's respect for her audience—her understanding that she needs the audience to understand her intentions. e) I hear a liveliness or energy in the writing. f) I hear something like an accent in the writing. g) I don't hear anything.

In addition to the survey and document analysis, I conducted interviews for the study. Toward the end of each fall semester of study (Fall 2017, Fall 2018), I asked several students if they would be amenable to brief interviews as follow up to their specific answers on the open-ended portion of the survey. While some elected to not participate in these interviews or simply did not show up for appointments, three students agreed to participate. As I said, the interviews were brief, no more than ten to fifteen minutes in length, and took place on campus. The interviews followed an open-dialogue method. More information about the interviewees will be provided later in the chapter.

### **Key Findings**

The survey was intended to serve as a starting place for building a foundation of knowledge about how first-year writers conceptualize voice; therefore, I'll begin with the findings from the survey. As previously seen, Table 1 shows the specific multiple-choice questions and answers. Tables 2 - 5 offer student answers. As I move through the information from the survey, these tables may offer insight. After sharing the survey findings, I will tease out some of the developing themes about voice that emerged when students identified their own voices in their own writing. Next I will share the voices of my three interviewees because their responses help bring the far-ranging and varied information back into focus. Altogether, this section of the chapter will offer a baseline of information on how students conceptualize voice including their perceptions on voice instruction, identity, "good writing," authenticity, agency, and power.

#### *Survey Key Findings*

The first thing I learned from the survey responses is that participants were largely in classes taught by professors who were *not* including any specific lessons on writing with voice.

Only 14% of the participants in the study stated their English 1010 professor had specifically offered instruction on writing with voice (see Table 2). Since one of the learning outcomes for English 1010 states that students should be learning how to “adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality” in their own writing, the lack of instruction on voice seems noteworthy.

Table 2	Voice instruction in this English 1010 class.
% of students	Answers
14%	We have had specific lesson(s) on writing with voice.
28%	My instructor has briefly mentioned writing with voice.
28%	We have not had any lessons on voice.
30%	I do not remember any lessons on voice.

Additionally, when I examined the results by sorting answers for individual professors, the data provided more insight:

- 93% of students taught by an instructor with an MFA background report specific lessons on writing with voice
- 0% of students in developmental writing courses report specific lessons on writing with voice
- 4% of students taught by instructor(s) with writing studies background report specific lessons on writing with voice

From all eleven sections of English 1010 included in this study, one specific class stood apart for this question. The Excel document I used for tracking data included each class organized side-by-side in tidy columns, and for the most part, those columns shared similarities with other

columns. Except for *this* class. *The column for this class simply did not look like any of the others.* This section, taught by an instructor in the late stages of an MFA program in poetry, was the anomaly. For this group, 93% of participants reported their instructor had taught how to write with voice. In fact, every student participant from this section of English 1010 was familiar with the voice term itself. No other class had such numbers.

Of course, the pendulum must swing. Developmental writing participants in the four sections of developmental writing English 1010 reported no instruction on voice (0%). Students in the four sections of developmental writing, taught by two full time instructors, indicated that voice was not taught and was, in fact, rarely mentioned. Only a quarter of the developmental writing students across all four sections indicated that their professor had *mentioned* voice in class. At the University of Memphis, curriculum for developmental writing sections of English 1010 is intended to be consistent with standard and honors sections. The primary difference is that developmental writing classes meet an additional day each week. The course goals and learning outcomes are the same, which means developmental writing English 1010 sections are also expected to include instruction on appropriate voice, tone, and levels of formality in writing instruction. While developmental writing pedagogy has improved dramatically since the so-called Bonehead English courses of the 1970s, the history of basic or developmental writing casts a long shadow, one that perhaps still darkens developmental writing classrooms. I suspect that just as the common understanding of voice still holds a lot of Elbow's original descriptions, basic writing is still considered among many to be a gatekeeper in which students are not expected to achieve much more than minimal improvement in writing skill and drill.

In "The Tidy House," David Bartholomae argues that "basic writing programs have become expressions of our desire to produce basic writers, to maintain the course,[...] to



maintain the distinction (basic/normal) we have learned to think through and by” (8). Even in improved writing programs where developmental writing is a credit bearing course, the expectation still persists that the students within such classes should maintain their basic or developmental status. Laying much of the blame for the continued state of problems in basic writing at the feet of the academy, Bartholomae says, “Basic writers may be ready for a different curriculum, for the contact zone and the writing it will produce, but the institution is not. And it is not, I would argue, because of those of us who work in basic writing, who preserve rather than question the existing order of things” (15). Of course, I am making assumptions with no data from the participant instructors to back me up, but I wonder if voice wasn’t offered in these sections of developmental writing because instructors consider voice too ephemeral to teach or if voice might be conceptualized by some writing teachers as part-and-parcel with “good writing” – meaning that voice might be considered too much to ask from developmental writing students.

Nevertheless, the developmental writing numbers don’t exactly surprise me, and the numbers from the professor with the creative writing background didn’t surprise me either. However, I admit to a bit of righteous indignation that only 4% of participants taught by professors with backgrounds in composition and rhetoric or professional writing indicated they’d received lessons on how to write with voice. It seems odd to me that writing studies specialists are *not* teaching students how to write with voice. Perhaps the answer is simply that professors are labeling voice something else; perhaps they use a different metaphor or consider voice to be a synonym of style. However, if this is the case, then the learning outcome for the course needs to reflect such terminology. Again, if the learning outcome about developing and demonstrating voice is to be taken seriously, then these results might suggest students are not receiving instruction necessary for meeting that goal.

Since so many participants had not experienced specific instruction on how to compose with voice in their English 1010 courses, the logical next question was whether these students had received voice instruction in their high school classes. See Table 3 for results. Just over a third of the participants (37%) reported that at least one previous teacher had taught how to write with voice.

Table 3	In your past learning experiences, have any of your previous teachers taught lessons on voice in writing?
% of students	Answers
14%	Yes. More than one teacher taught me how to write with voice.
23%	Yes. One teacher taught me how to write with voice.
49%	No. Teachers have <i>mentioned</i> voice, but no one has taught me how to write with it.
14%	No. I don't know what you mean by voice. No one has ever told me about this.

Approximately half of the participants (49%) indicated their high school teachers had *mentioned* the concept of voice at some point, but no teacher had specifically taught how to write with it. This indicates that voice is *talked about* more frequently than it is actually *taught*—something I find a little problematic. These results seem to support the idea that teachers, especially language arts teachers in the middle and high school classes, likely talk about voice in the same way that they talk about some of the other more ephemeral aspects of writing. Students have heard about voice from teachers who also talk about “flow,” but these results support the idea that voice is not taught as part of a writing process. Another possibility is that voice terminology is used when students are studying literature, which provides students with familiarity about what voice means but does not provide instruction on how to write with it.

Additionally, I want to further discuss the results that showed 14% of participants reporting an unfamiliarity with the term “voice.” When I view the population as a whole (162 students in 11 different sections), I’m not terribly concerned that 14% of the students haven’t had any exposure to the concept of voice. Fourteen is not a huge number, right? But when I look a little closer, I realize that 75% of the participants who indicated no knowledge of voice were in developmental writing classes. This is upsetting; however, I must keep in mind that these numbers are coming from students alone and not from their professors who might argue they have indeed taught voice. It would likely be quite illuminative to ask their professors the same question. Regardless, the fact that so few developmental writing participants in this study were familiar with voice is important as this key finding raises some concerns about the equity of instruction for our developmental writers.

When we put together the results for these first two questions and specifically consider the developmental writing students, the data clearly suggests that the developmental writers in this study were not receiving instruction similar to their peers. For developmental writing students, regardless of whether they are reporting experiences from high school or from college composition, their exposure to the concept of voice is significantly lower than their peers in standard or honors sections. Since I cannot provide demographic information for these classes, I’m unsure of how many participants in the developmental writing sections of English 1010 are non-native speakers; however, one of the developmental writing instructors in this study told me she would estimate at least fifty percent of her students are L2 writers. Additional studies might explicitly explore race, gender, and language learning as they relate to voice instruction.

The other two questions on the survey were designed to learn how students conceptualize voice. What do they think the word means—how would they define voice? What do they think

voice sounds like? Tables 4 and 5 illustrate their answers. Students were allowed more than 1 answer for these questions.

Table 4	What is voice?
% of students	Answers
80%	Voice is what makes my writing sound like me.
54%	Voice is basically the tone a writer uses.
40%	Voice is what makes my writing sound powerful.
33%	Voice is basically the style a writer uses.
16%	I can see/hear voice in others' writing, but I don't know how to write with it.
14%	I don't know what voice is.
13%	Voice is something that can't be taught: you either have it or you don't.
9%	Voice is a combination of different elements of writing.

Table 5	When you "hear" voice in writing, what do you hear?
% of students	Answers
76%	I hear the writer's attitude about the subject
57%	I hear the writer's confidence--or lack of confidence--about writing or the topic
38%	I hear a liveliness or energy in the writing
36%	I hear the writer's level of formality
25%	I hear the writer's respect for her audience--her understanding that she needs the audience to understand her intentions
14%	I hear something like an accent in the writing
10%	I don't hear anything

The results indicate that an overwhelming majority of students in the study (80%) believe voice is what makes their writing sound like them. Additionally, a good portion of participants equate voice with tone (54%) and with style (33%). These findings are in line with how voice is often portrayed as “something like style or tone” (Harris 33). As Jill Jeffery argues, state writing assessment rubrics often conflate these writing concepts. She says that “state rubrics frequently list voice alongside related terms that suggest functionalist voice definitions—such as tone, style, and diction. These juxtapositions further confuse the issue of how voice criteria are defined” (39-40). It makes perfect sense that students would envision voice as synonymous with tone or style since all three concepts are wrapped up within one another and are often conflated by teachers and state tests alike.

Moreover, many participants (40%) connected voice with power. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, there are some concerns with locating voice inside of a power structure designed by the teachers and evaluators of writing. Lester Faigley comments on the connection between power and voice, noting that because we teachers of writing place so much stress and significance on the value of a powerful voice, we inadvertently train students to mime-write attempts at “voices of authority” (117). Yet such attempts so often are one-dimensional and ineffective. For the students who know about voice, who have listened to their teachers talk about it, they’ve heard voice makes their writing powerful. Elbow himself proclaimed it in that little book that started it all in 1971. Voice is power, right? But here’s where things get tricky and where I see a point of concern: almost a third of participants indicated they either don’t know what voice is or don’t know how to write with it. If voice is connected with power, then it would seem unacceptable that almost a third of the participants did not know how to access such power.

Also, fewer than ten percent of participants see voice as a combination of different elements of writing. Since I am convinced voice can, and *should*, be crafted by combining different rhetorical and stylistic strategies, this small number definitely caught my attention. I will spend more time on this idea in Chapter 3.

When participants were asked to explain what they “hear” in voiced writing, their answers indicate that they primarily hear the writer’s attitude and the writer’s confidence level when they hear voice. Only 25% of participants indicated that they hear the writer’s respect for her audience, or an understanding that she needs the audience to understand her intentions. Additionally, it is worth noting that 10% of students reported they don’t hear anything when they hear voice. This number is consistent with data from previous questions: approximately 14% of participants stated they did not know what voice means. If students don’t know what voice means, then it certainly makes sense that they might not “hear” voice in writing.

In order to wrap up the survey’s key findings, I offer the following points as the foundation for the remainder of this study:

- According to student participants, their teachers at both high school and college level *mentioned* voice much more often than they actually taught it.
- Approximately 63% of the first-year writing participants were *not* taught how to write with voice in their previous educational experiences.
- Only 14% of participants received any instruction on voice in their college classrooms in spite of a learning outcome stating they should receive instruction on voice, tone, and levels of formality. Additionally, results suggest that the expertise of the writing instructor affects how, or if, voice is taught in the course.

- Developmental writing participants received no lessons on voice (0%) and were generally less familiar with the term.
- In attempting to define voice, 80% of first-year writing participants believe that voice is what makes their writing sound like them and 40% believe voice makes their writing powerful.
- Student participants tend to conflate style and tone with voice.
- Only 9% of first-year writing participants believe that voice is the result of several intentional rhetorical strategies for writing.
- When asked what they hear in voiced writing, the two primary answers were that students hear the writer's attitude and confidence.

#### *Students' Analyses of Their Own Voices Key Findings*

I explained earlier that part of this project required that participants analyze their own writing, attempt to identify any part of their writing that holds their voice, and then explain why or how they found voice in those areas. The results for such a task were more difficult to quantify or catalogue as 162 students provided a variety of answers. For the purposes of coding, I chose to combine *in vivo* coding, or coding that emphasizes the actual words of participants, with open coding, which takes the phrases provided by a participant and summarizes those phrases into a single word or idea. From there, I was able to use a form of selective coding to narrow down my primary categories.

Because I wasn't exactly sure what types of categories I might find, I began by looking for *in vivo* codes, words that I could lift from the student samples and use verbatim to help me get started. As categories began to emerge, I grouped responses in the way that best made sense to me. I then attempted to classify their answers into the emerging categories. My first round of

categories included 21 tags. As I continued to work with the samples, I combined some tags and eventually landed on seven primary categories. Those are listed below:

- I. passages that sound like something the writer has said or would say
- II. passages containing personal information (including background, opinion, emotion)
- III. passages which show personality or a reflection of author
- IV. passages that were “not academic” or passages where the writer was “not fake” or intending to impress the reader
- V. passages containing specific vocabulary: diction
- VI. passages where the author felt confident/sounded like wanted to sound/wrote like wanted to write/
- VII. passages containing first person usage

I want to note that the students’ explanations of voice in their writing often included more than one of the codes. For example, Trang’s response was coded with three different tags. His response read:

I have a strong type of funny-ish, sarcastic voice if the writing prompt allows me to roam. Words with personality. You can see it clearly in the lit narrative where I used a lot of strong words and different sentence lengths to mimic my speaking style. In addition I used a lot of curse words as I think that makes the reader feel a little bit more open when reading my stuff.

I coded his response with: 1) passages containing specific vocabulary, 2) passages that sound like something the writer would say or has said, 3) passages which show personality or reflection of the author. This was the method I used for all participant answers. The coding of



student responses can be seen in Table 6. For each category, I provide student responses to offer context and to attempt to establish connections with existing scholarship and with previous findings from survey questions.

Table 6	Emerging Categories for Short Answer Responses for Question 5
% of students	
48%	passages that sound like something the writer has said or would say
46%	passages containing personal information, including background, opinion, emotion
26%	passages which show personality or a reflection of author
23%	passages that were informal/not “academic” or passages where the writer was not “fake” or intending to impress the reader
17%	no answer/illegible/didn't make sense
17%	passages where the author felt confident/sounded like wanted to sound/wrote like wanted to write/
14%	passages containing specific vocabulary: Diction
5%	passages containing first-person pronouns

*Short Answer Reflection Key Findings*

**“Sounds like something I’d say.”**

About half of the participants indicated that they chose specific passages in their own writing as being voiced because those passages sounded like something they would say, or the writer could hear himself or herself speaking those words. Such responses indicate a strong connection between how a writer conceptualizes herself as both a speaker and a writer; such responses are also connected to the Elbowian ideal of speaking onto the page.

Elbow taps into the connection between speech and writing, advocating for “speaking onto the page” (“Freewriting”; *Vernacular Eloquence*) as a strategy for empowering student writers to overcome writer’s block and to liven up their discourse. Elbow believes, “It is very helpful for Freshmen, and I think for all writers too, to get some of that oral language into an

academic essay, because the [oral] language itself is more full of life” (“Freewriting” 23). Elbow brings the spoken language into the written, and once again, we see that Elbow’s influential shadow covers a lot of ground.

For the participants in this study who indicated that their writerly voice could be found in passages of writing that sounded like something they might say, or that they could “hear” themselves speaking a specific passage, the connection between spoken and written voice becomes intertwined. Elbow might say that such writing is inherently livelier because the addition of spoken voice creates energy in the writerly voice. Examples of student responses for this “Sounds like something I’d say” category are:

- It was words I typically use in normal conversations. I identified it as kind of informal and some of my regular way of talking. I could hear myself talk in my way of talking to another person. I could hear the way I easily talk without as much formality.
- I mainly viewed myself talking in front of a group of people and chose what sentences would sound like me the most in my everyday speech.

Included in this category were students who were more specific in why their chosen passages sounded like something they would actually say. One student actually selected a passage as sounding like her because of an error. She explained, “I selected one sentence because I made a grammatical mistake that I literally use all the time when speaking (me and my mom).” The responses for this category were fairly diverse, but each student did make a connection between that spoken part of themselves and their written voices.

**“My opinion on things and my feelings. My personal bio. Basically me.”**

Another large group of students (46%) selected passages of their own writing as voiced because those passages included personal information, background or history, or their opinions or feelings. This category, and the responses students provided, reminded me very much of Bourdieu’s suggestion that our personal histories and backgrounds constantly direct us as scholars and writers. Conceptualizations of the personal—including background, opinion, and sentiment—are closely connected to voice. In Chapter 1, I referred to Paul Diederich who describes “flavor,” which I argue is a synonym for voice, as “personal qualities revealed by the writing” (8). Additionally, Joseph Harris insists there is a connection between voice and what he terms “matters of selfhood” (33). Essentially, I see this “personal” emergent category in line with the voice scholarship.

One student identified the passages of his writing that detailed his interests in how gadgets work and how he has long enjoyed building things as voiced. Each selection he identified was about some device that he once took apart or put back together or how much enjoyment he gained from working with his hands. His selected passages seemed no different from others in the paper with the exception that they specifically mentioned a piece of his personal history, like the time he took apart a computer for the first time. Justifying his selected passages, he wrote, “I mostly chose phrases that reflected my background and my personal desire to create. Everyone has a different background, and only my voice can reveal my personal history and my views.”

Another student also chose passages that included personal information, including his opinions and feelings. He explained, “It was just places where I included my opinion on things

and my feelings. My personal bio. Basically me.” This student selected passages about struggles with reading in elementary school and passages that mentioned his grandmother.

Another student from this category was Clara. She chose certain passages because, she says, “I put a lot of energy and myself into that that, my feelings.” However, Clara’s description didn’t fully capture what she actually wrote and selected as voiced. Her identified passages included tone, inflection, and the energy she mentions, each of which were created through the use of italics, punctuation, and specific expressions like “wooed me.” Her narrative, a reflection of herself becoming a writer, tells the story of a girl remembering how and why she began to journal because a boy once broke her heart. Her selected passages include, “Looking back now, yeah, I was a hot ass mess” which was quickly followed by, “He was so fine to me. I mean...he was so *dreamy* and sixteen for God's sake!” The italics and ellipses were in the original, and both were used to affect a rhythm and quality that the author identified as sounding voiced.

Clara’s passage brings to mind a text focused on the utility of punctuation by Richard Lauchman. Lauchman states that a primary task for punctuation “is to supply the various signals given by the voice” (25). His book, a primer of sorts for achieving clarity through the use of punctuation, argues that while the audience for a speaker can “hear the many stops, pauses, and nuances” provided by the spoken voice, the silent voice of a text must rely on punctuation. Lauchman says punctuation is used to demonstrate authorial intent and create voice. He writes, “I said earlier that text is silent. Let me now qualify that. Text is silent in the way sheet music is silent: one who can read music notation can easily imagine—in effect, can ‘hear’—the notes, the tempo, and the volume. Punctuation provides such signals too.” He concludes that the emphasis offered by punctuation effectively provides the clarity for a writer’s audience that comes so easily to a speaker’s audience. Clara’s use of punctuation and italics helped her create the

emphasis mentioned by Lauchman; those stylistics elements also helped her create the liveliness and energy of a speaker.

**“I truly hear my personality coming out.”**

About a quarter of the participants chose passages that they believe reflected some aspect of their personality. The belief that personality is intertwined with voice is certainly not a new one. In 1981, Carol Emerson and Michael Holquist translated Mikhail Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. In the afternotes, they explain that, for Bakhtin, the term “voice” describes “the speaking personality, the speaking consciousness” (434) and add that voice holds the will of the writer. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I provided a definition of voice created by members of the National Writing Project (NWP) who were designing a rubric to be used for scoring student essays. Part of their definition included this statement, “Voice is the personality of the writer coming through on the page.” At its heart, the very idea of voice is wrapped up nice and tight with ideas of personality and character.

The email that I received from Peter Elbow on March 20, 2017, included his take on the connection between voice and personality. First, I want to point out that Elbow uses the term “character” as a synonym for personality. In the email, he writes that he finds it “useful to try to read character or personality in a textual voice—as long as we call it implied author, or ethos, or persona.” He suggests that attempting to find a connection between personality and voice is second nature for readers. He writes, “Reading character in spoken language? People do it all the time. It’s hard to disguise our mood and even our character in our speech.” He then adds, “Reading character in written language? Habit and conditioning being what they are, it would be peculiar if people didn’t try to hear character in written texts since they so habitually do this with

speech.” This connection that Elbow, Bakhtin, and the National Writing Project all make between personality and voice is also present in the responses of the participants in this study.

As I stated earlier, 26% of the participants explained that they chose specific passages as voiced because their personalities came through the writing. One student identified portions of her literacy narrative where she recounted her fear of public speaking—a fear that emerged in elementary school when she was forced to read aloud. Brenda’s explanation of the passages she selected said, “I chose these certain sentences because those are the ones where I truly hear my personality coming out.” The selections she underlined included a portion where she self-quoted some rather colorful language. Another student, Maggie, wrote this about her selected passages:

When I read my article it was very familiar to me because I can see how dramatic I am! It was like I was agreeing with myself when I read it again today, like yes, I'm dramatic but I'm also right. I laughed a little because I think "Wow, this really is me." [underlined words were underlined in original]

The selected portions of Maggie’s narrative included the following, which may help explain why she identifies herself and her voice as dramatic: “I don't know what the hell I am reading, excuse my French but it's true!” and “Why was this happening to me? I’m not a bad person.” Her narrative was an energetic, and yes, dramatic, explanation of struggling with her reading comprehension in her English 1010 course.

The connection between personality and voice is one that students and scholars alike have recognized, and I do see how some of Brenda’s and Maggie’s personalities seem to have made it onto the pages of their texts.

### **“Not just fake on paper to get a good grade”**

A quarter of the participants selected passages in their own writing as voiced because they saw such passages as informal, not academic, or as one student put it, “not fake.” Emmy wrote, “The reason I chose what I did in my papers is because that is what sounds most like me in person, not just fake on paper to get a good grade. It sounds strong, intelligent, and has a hint of my southern drawl in it as well [sic].” Emmy was one of many students who mentioned that when they see or hear their voice in writing, they are not being “fake” or especially focused on the grade.

I believe there is a critical difference between these students’ conceptualizations of “not fake” and the scholarly concept of “authentic” voice. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, criticism abounds for the concept of authentic voice. Much of that criticism focuses on what bell hooks and others have termed as static, one-dimensional glimpses of a writer. Hooks explains, “The insistence on finding one voice, one definitive style of writing [...] fit all too neatly with a static notion of self and identity that was pervasive in university settings” (52). Faigley and Bartholomae add that the authentic voices of student writers are generally not polished or self-assured, but rather, they are stumbling and insecure. Yet we do not privilege the *insecure* “authentic” voice, choosing instead to privilege the voice of the *confident*, regardless of authenticity. Perhaps Carl Klaus best explains the problem inherent with the concept of an authentic voice when he writes that in order to truly determine whether an author’s voice is authentic, “one would, after all, have to know as much about that essayist’s inner life, public behavior, and personal experience as the essayist herself” (113). We cannot assign authenticity to that which we do not truly know.

While there are obvious similarities in these concepts of authenticity and not-fakeness, I hesitate to equate the student perspective with the scholarly one. I think students are identifying something more than authenticity when they write about being not fake. In fact, I see something about agency in their assertions of not-fakeness. Take, for example, James's explanation for the passages he chose to identify as voiced. He notes that those sections of writing "didn't sound as academic or explained. The lines which are more simple and consise are how I would write or talk if it wasn't for an English class" [sic]. When we add the context of his statement, namely that James selected passages detailing how his discourse community uses Snapchat for communication purposes, it is a simple hop to reach the conclusion that the composing he does for social media feels more empowering than the composing he does in academic situations. On Snapchat, he has the freedom and power to write in whatever way seems most effective to him. *He chooses*. He writes. He doesn't make compromises the way he must when writing for academic purposes.

This calls to mind research by Jabari Mahiri and Soraya Sablo. Mahiri and Sablo investigated the non-school sponsored writing undertaken by urban African American youth in the San Francisco area. In their research, they determined that their high school participants were heavily involved in a wide range of literacy practices including composing poetry, rap lyrics, spoken word, fiction, and even plays. They learned that while most of these students were almost combative in their disdain for school sponsored writing, "these same students clearly valued the out-of-school writing" for and by their peers. They add, "Thus, it is erroneous to conclude that writing, in and of itself, was unimportant or 'uncool' to these students; rather, they resisted what they viewed as the unauthentic nature of many of their experiences with academic writing" (147). In the face of what is so often seen as the inauthenticity of the essay, a fabricated genre



seemingly out to get the student writer, the voluntary writing that students choose for themselves often provides them with ways to interact with the world in which they live. Mahari and Sablo are convinced that for their participants, writing “helped them make sense of both their lives and social worlds, and provided them with a partial refuge from the harsh realities of their everyday experiences” (147). The authors asserted that writing was instrumental in the identity construction of their participants, adding that their “literacy activities gave these youths a sense of personal status as well as personal satisfaction” (147). That sense of satisfaction, along with the ability to *choose*, seems relevant and connected to my own participants’ assertions about the not-fakeness of their own writing.

Along the same lines of agency and not-fakeness, Lizzy explains that she had a hard time identifying anything in her own writing as voiced because she was too concerned with the grade to worry about sounding original. She said, “Sadly I didn't see much of myself in my writing. I find that I'm more concerned with a grade than wanting to make my writing unique to me. When writing I often use words or tones that I wouldn't normally use. I try to expand my vocabulary and make myself sound more educated. Not really me.” Lizzy underlined only two sentences in her two documents, and they did not stand out as especially different in tone, punctuation, style, or personal information from any of her other sentences. Her writing was clear and precise if not especially memorable. Her two underlined sentences were, 1) “When I got to high school my love for reading got tested because high school reading wasn't about what I wanted to read anymore.” 2) “I chose to read Zora Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.”

While she does not state this, my guess is that Lizzy chose these two lines because one held something personal—something she loved suddenly changed—and the other held a moment of power—she *chose* to read something. Even in this example of not-fakeness, I see agency.

Jabiri and Sablo call on Mike Rose to explain how students are so often trained to think of school sponsored writing as focused primarily on correctness rather than content. They quote Rose as saying that writing instruction often teaches students that “that the most important thing about writing—the very essence of writing—is grammatical correctness, not the communication of something meaningful” (149), which might help explain why Lizzy was too concerned with the grade to worry about originality or creativity or even the communication of something meaningful.

**“I was the most confident.”**

About seventeen percent of these participants chose specific elements of their writing as voiced because they felt confident about that part of their writing, because they came across as confident in that section, or because they sounded exactly the way they wanted to sound.

Students in this category wrote reflections like:

- I identified my voice with sentences that I was the most confident with in writing. I mainly viewed myself talking in front of a group of people and what sentences would sound like me the most in my everyday speech.
- I picked that part because I sounded like I knew what I was talking about.
- I was able to defend myself there and express myself in a way that made all those adults that belittled me feel as small as they made me feel.

Another student stated that she chose specific passages because they showed her confidence and her identity as a poet. She writes, “I felt confident in that part. I think you can see in my papers that I am a poet. The way that I utilize my words shows passion and personal feelings. These are places where I felt that.” She underlined the following separate passages in her literacy narrative:

“I am that black diamond in the rough, been through so much life, been tough.”

“I was never encouraged to read, just how to react to the sound of gunshots on the block.”

“I come from sodas, fritos, and Cheetos.”

There is certainly a rhythm and nuance to her writing that does suggest poetry, but her explanation also points back to this idea of agency. As a poet, she asserts her control over the language, she feels powerful and heard. In her moments of confidence, she sees and hears her own voice.

### **“Words with Personality”**

About 14% of participants selected parts of their writing as voiced because of specific words or phrases. Early in my coding, I’d grouped together this “diction” category with the category for “personality.” Ultimately, I chose to separate them because the students who made specific reference to word choice seemed to be focusing more on diction itself and less on the more intangible “personality.” I liked that these students selected something more perceptible, so I separated them into their own category. However, I feel obliged to note that there *is* overlap between choosing specific diction and the ways that personality emerges in those words. The use of specific vocabulary and the personality of the writer seem very much intertwined for most students.

Sociolinguist Peter Stockwell offers insight on diction and voice in his article “Atmosphere and Tone” where he analyzes the literary features and effects found in a variety of genres. He argues that “*atmosphere* pertains to the perceived quality” of the text from the perspective of the reader while “*tone* pertains to the quality of the meditating authorial voice” [emphasis in original] (2). With those terms as his cornerstone, Stockwell examines a variety of texts, focusing on diction as the vehicle for effectively creating an appropriate atmosphere. He says, “Atmosphere and tone are collectively a matter not so much of denotational semantic value

as connotative or associative effects.” The diction chosen for a poem, a literature review, or a news article creates the atmosphere for the reader. Those word choices are often important because of the connotation rather than the denotation. He writes that diction has the potential to create fragility or imbue strength. In analyzing a poem, Stockwell illustrates how the vehicle for meaning resides in the denotational word choices while the atmosphere and tone are driven by the connotations that create richness and voice. He asserts, “It is obvious, then, that atmosphere and tone are matters primarily of diction” (4). I appreciate Stockwell’s emphasis on the connotations of diction because this distinction helped situate the responses provided by the participants in this study.

For some students, like Daisy, identifying her voice meant choosing passages that were especially descriptive or passages that included colloquial phrases she often uses. She said, “I picked these certain sentences because when I talk I use descriptive words. Those sentences are phrases I would say on a regular basis.” An example of a phrase that came from her paper included a description of a teacher in high school who was “funny as all get out.”

For other students, like Trang who was mentioned earlier, his passages had what he termed “words with personality.” He chose his writing as voiced when passages included a very specific type of diction: curse words. Trang’s literacy narrative was a veritable rant against the ESL classes he was forced to take in middle school and the stereotypes that are associated with those of his Asian heritage. Along with a sampling of stand-alone curse words, Trang also selected several phrases that were certainly less about denotation than connotation. They included:

- slacking off and falling asleep
- the witch, a.k.a. teacher

- what the actual heck
- *I think not*
- such a pain in the ass
- teachers say whatever the hell they want
- That's all. Peace out.

Through his use of strategic cursing and the phrases he says come from his everyday spoken language, Trang's "words with personality" helped imbue a speaking voice in his writing, but the writing itself is not what might be commonly considered "good writing." Instead, his words with personality—his diction—are more like cracks or disruptions.

Earlier in this chapter I mentioned that Elbow believes a resonant voice often appears when there are "eruptions or asides or digressions—even lapses of a sort" or even "places where the writing breaks down." Elbow argues that resonant passages where the author manages to get something of herself into her writing might not be especially good passages; in fact, the *something* she manages to get into the writing could very well reside within a crack or "disjuncture" in the writing. That crack where the writer peeks through certainly does show the reader a glimpse of personality, of liveliness, of not-fakeness, but such a disjuncture often disrupts what we might consider good writing. These cracks hold the writer, but the writing is often flawed, awkward, short-sighted, incomplete—much like the writer herself.

When I read the work of Trang and Daisy, paying close attention to the diction they identify as having their voices, I see those cracks Elbow mentions. The cracks show snapshots of student agency, moments in the writing where the student actually writes what he wants to write, like when Trang writes that "teachers say whatever the hell they want." I can imagine that Trang felt some power in typing those words, in reading over them, and then choosing to leave them be.

Unfortunately, while such disruptions—such resonance—in student writing offer the writer agency and allow the reader glimpses of the writer, *there is a problem*. Without proper instruction, without intentional lessons on smoothing out those cracks, the paper itself just becomes another example of writing that needs extensive revision. Again, Elbow is correct when he warns that these moments of resonance, of voice, of presence—even of student agency—do not necessarily correspond with moments of good writing.

Of course, this leads me to wonder how to keep the agency, to retain those insightful cracks of resonance, while *also* making such writing good. James Raymond makes a solid point when he says that writing has the ability to select those aspects of speech that might happen “naturally and spontaneously,” but that *good* writing “organizes” and it also “cultivates, refines, and repeats in pleasing ways.” Raymond argues that most of the “moves writers make occur (or could occur) in speech; but in writing it is possible to develop, extend, and arrange these moves deliberately and with forethought” (1-2). Raymond’s point is valid because to encourage a student to write with voice is not useful if we do not *also teach* a student to develop, extend, and deliberately arrange that voice. If the voice only comes through in moments of disjuncture, then we have not yet taught a student how to cultivate or refine. This is where the real teaching begins.

#### **“When I used the word ‘I’”**

Every participant in this study, all 162 of them, selected at least one passage in their writing that included first-person pronouns. *Every. Single. One.* Actually, this should not be surprising because, as Ken Hyland explains in “Options of Identity in Academic Writing,” the use of the first-person pronoun is the “most visible expression of a writer’s presence in a text” (351). Hyland states that while the use of the first-person pronoun “I” can be a powerfully

effective approach for creating a strong authorial voice, both L1 and L2 writers are often taught to avoid first-person pronouns. When students are allowed to use those pronouns, or when they *choose* to use them, it just makes sense that they would identify the usage with their own identity—or their voice. So, the surprising part of this category is *not* that 100% of participants identified their voice in portions of their writing that included first-person pronouns; rather, the surprising thing is that a mere 5% of them recognized that the very use of the “I” was *why* it felt voiced.

Only a handful of participants realized they were identifying passages that were, in fact, written in first person. Brody is one of those students. He writes, “I noticed that in both papers, when I used the word ‘I’ in sentences they obviously seemed to sound more like me.” He uses the word “obviously,” which seems both fitting and not. As someone who writes about writing and who explores concepts of identity and voice in writing, it *is* obvious to me that writing in first person means I’m tapping into the “I” who is Andrea-the-Author. However, I think it shows unusually astute self-reflection for a first-year writer to make the connection that Brody made.

At the end of this section on how students identify and explain their own voices in their own writing, I see the following points as significant for better understanding how students conceptualize voice. Additionally, these points are in many ways echoed by the experiences of the interviewees who will round out this section of Key Findings.

- Student participants believe that voice reflects their opinions, personal information, personalities, interests, and confidence. They believe that their writing has voice when it sounds like them and when they are “not fake” on the page just to get a good grade. This tells me that offering writing assignments that allow students to write from their personal

histories and personal interests encourages more opportunities for voiced, “not fake” writing.

- Student participants believe that specific words hold voice. This tells me their “words with personality” are important in understanding their construction of voice, and teaching diction is one way to improve voice construction.
- Student participants believe that first-person pronouns indicate voiced writing—100% of first-year writing participants selected writing that included first-person pronouns when they selected passages of their writing that was voiced, but only 5% of them are aware that they are choosing passages with those first-person pronouns. This tells me that specific instruction on writing with voice would offer students a deeper understanding of voiced writing, one that rests on much more than the use of a personal pronoun.
- Student participants believe that voiced writing is powerful and interesting. This tells me that teaching them how to construct voice in their writing offers them access to agency and power.
- The data that emerged from their self-analyses of their writing tells me that not-fakeness is a way to think about agency. My idea of agency is different from theirs, which is an important finding. We talk about offering our students agency, yet the word “agency” seems to be a lot like the word “voice”—our students don’t really know what we mean when we use it. Not-fakeness has a little bit of authenticity wrapped up with a lot of agency. This is useful information.

### *Interview Key Findings*

This study relied on narrative, or storytelling, as much as it relied on survey data. Asking students to explain why they chose certain parts of their writing as voiced offered snatches of



story—vignettes of student writers reflecting upon their own writing. Qualitative research methodology often includes narrative inquiry as a way to explore the different realities and experiences of research participants. Sheila Trahar explains that narrative inquiry does not privilege one type of data gathering method over any other, and that while the interview is a common method, narrative inquiry can also use reflective writing, textual analysis, observation, and even quick “conversations in the corridor.” The storytelling of narrative inquiry, including my corridor conversations with Mackenzie, Canaan, and Emir, offer yet another layer to deepen our understanding of how FYW students conceptualize voice. *Here is a moment when I feel the tension of deciding how to best report findings for this voice topic.* I have three stories to tell. Three stories about voice from three different participants. These stories are insightful and informative, yet they are also somewhat resistant to being plugged into any formula for reporting. Rather than weaving their interviews together or attempting to lift out pertinent parts and place them elsewhere, I’ve elected to keep the interviews intact and separate. This may not feel like smooth reporting or “good writing,” but the voices that emerge are difficult to ignore.

### **Mackenzie**

I chose to interview Mackenzie because her responses on the survey were fairly indicative of those of her peers. As I stated earlier, 46% of the participants wrote that they identified their voice when their writing included personal information. Mackenzie was one of those students. On her survey, she wrote,

I chose the selected sentences that I underlined because not only a sense of voice is included, but what I had written was personal too at times. Once my writing becomes personal I feel that my voice is being shown through my work. Digging

deeper and reflecting thoughts on a page for others to read or understand is where you start to teach yourself about voice, in my opinion.

Mackenzie's survey also indicated that she'd been exposed to lessons on voice by several teachers, including her present instructor. Her survey answers indicated that she believes voice is what makes her writing powerful, that voice makes her writing sound like her, and that voice is synonymous with style. She indicated that voice was connected to confidence and attitude as well.

I met with Mackenzie about 15 minutes before her English 1010 class began on a Wednesday morning in November. We sat in an empty classroom on the third floor of Patterson Hall and had a quick discussion. She was gracious yet seemed just a bit nervous to speak with me. I began by asking her what voice means to her. She thought for a moment and then said, "Someone's voice in writing is how they express their thoughts and feelings and ideas, and, like, the bigger, greater purpose for writing. When I think about someone's writing voice, I think it shouldn't be very different from their speaking voice in real life, like they should be honest and unguarded but also consider that people are listening." I asked Mackenzie if it was hard to be honest and unguarded when she wrote.

She said, "Well, not when I write for myself. Writing for myself is something I haven't done until recently, but I'm journaling, and being able to be 100% personal and honest feels great because I can let all of my thoughts go on paper without worrying about negative judgment." I asked her if she felt like that personal writing had her voice in it. She said, "Well that [personal] writing is 100 percent me, nothing fake or no trying to sound smart or be anyone else. I don't use my phone to find a smarter synonym or anything like that. I'm just writing what

I'm thinking. Seems like that must have my voice." Her answer is in line with those of her peers who wrote about not-fakeness, and again, I see agency in her response.

I asked her if writing for herself was easier than writing for a class, and she laughed out a definite "Yes!" But then she added, "But sometimes writing for class assignments just seems pointless, like who cares about a discourse community, until I get further or deeper into the assignment and realize that I actually *do* care about a discourse community. I mean, my sorority is a discourse community and it is very important to me. When I realized that connection, writing the paper was easier." In other words, for Mackenzie, when the writing is personal or important to her, the writing seems to come easier, and her words feel more honest, or not-fake. Additionally, when her words are honest, she feels like they contain her voice.

She told me about the multiple drafts she went through for her discourse community essay, and she confessed to struggling with figuring out what she was really trying to do and say with that assignment. She said, "At first, like that first draft for sure, what I was writing just felt, I don't know, uninteresting and, well, not good." She added, "But then I thought about how if we didn't have ways or reasons to communicate with our sorority sisters, then the whole point of the sorority would just be, well I guess there just wouldn't be a point." For Mackenzie, when she realized the point or reason for the assignment and was able to make that reason a personal one, she said, "I started to see why I was writing. Once I found the reason why, and once that reason was important to me, then the paper came together and I felt like I was more invested in it." Once again I see agency playing a role in Mackenzie's writing and in the value she assigns to it.

I asked her if she thought being invested in the writing helped her put her voice into that assignment. She said, "Honestly, I'm not sure. I think so. I mean, I think maybe if I care enough to do like four drafts on a paper and change things around that much, surely there's more of me

in there than some paper I wrote in two hours.” It was time for her class to begin, and students were beginning to file into the room where we sat, so I asked her one last question. I said, “Who are you, Mackenzie? Who are you in person and who are you on the page?” She surprised me with her quick response, “I’m a work in progress, Professor Bishop. I am a determined work in progress in both places.”

## Canaan

The primary reason why I chose Canaan to interview was because he selected quite a large portion of both of his writing samples as voiced. In fact, much more of his writing was underlined than not. I’m including an image of just one page of one of his essays because it is quite indicative of the remainder of his work. He chose almost everything as sounding voiced. See Figure 1. Essentially, it seemed as

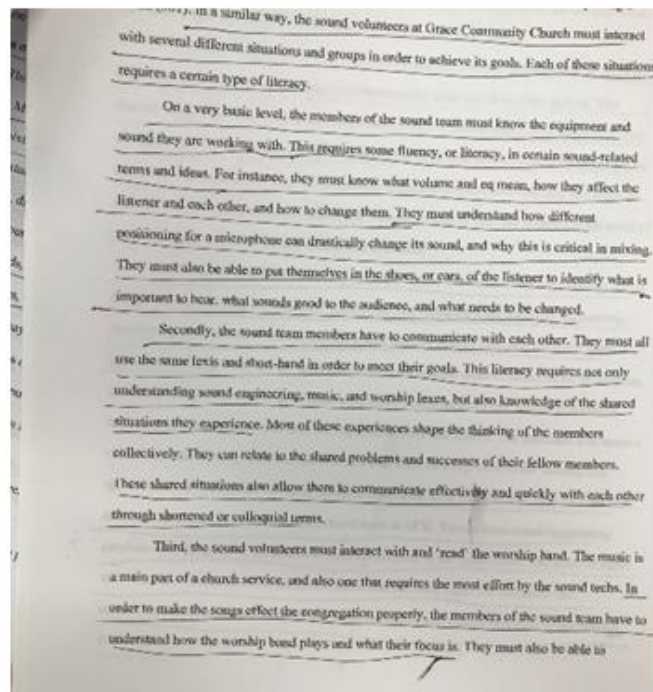


Figure 1

if Canaan was indicating that anything he writes is voiced. I wanted to follow up with him to see if my interpretation was correct.

Additionally, when he was asked on his survey to explain why he selected certain passages as voiced, Canaan wrote,

I chose the sentences mainly by deciding if I liked the way they sounded or if they sounded like how I want to write. Normally, I like concise but flowing sentences

more. I want to sound knowledgeable and authoritative, but not too dry. I don't like rapid fire sentences in my writing, or redundancy. I really like sentences that tie in from the sentence earlier but that add new information.

I found his explanation intriguing because his voice passage choices were based on whether the particular passages sounded like he *wanted* them to sound rather than like he *thinks he sounds* when he speaks. Unlike most of his peers, he seemed to disconnect the aural voice from the written voice. He also had a very specific explanation of the type of writing he prefers: to the point and relevant but not dry or redundant.

I met with Canaan directly after his class at the end of November 2018, right before final exams. We stepped away from the emptying classroom and sat at tables in the common area. I showed Canaan his survey with the selections he'd made from his own writing, and I stated that it seemed like he was fairly confident that his writing is strongly voiced. I also mentioned that I found this interesting since on his survey he had indicated that he'd never had any specific lessons on writing with voice.

Canaan said that his educational background was probably not like most college first-year writers. He explained that he had been homeschooled and came from a large family (nine siblings). His mother was a college graduate with a degree in education; his father was an engineer. Canaan was obviously an intelligent young man who seemed fairly confident discussing himself and his family. When I asked him how he came to an understanding of voice, he said, "My family reads. We read a lot, and we had family discussions about what we read. I think, maybe, my understanding of voice probably comes from how we would talk about certain authors and their style or tone. And maybe voice. I guess authorial voice is something I connected more to being a reader than a writer." I told him that his insight was quite profound

for someone new to the voice discussion. He laughed and said that he had older siblings who were creative writers and that he'd learned things about voice from them.

I asked Canaan if he considered himself a creative writer, and he gave an emphatic no. He stated that he prefers reading and writing nonfiction, and he reiterated an idea that had been mentioned in his literacy narrative. He said, "I think writing is about communication. If it doesn't communicate something clearly, then it isn't good. If I write something that communicates my ideas clearly and, you know, in a way that I like, then it has enough of me in it that it must be in my voice."

As my final question for Canaan, I asked him to consider whether he feels, or has ever felt, powerful as a writer. He nodded yes and then said, "I guess I'm fairly confident as a writer. I don't seem to struggle with it like a lot of people do, so maybe that's a form of power. But I have felt powerful when I feel like what I'm writing about is important and needs to be heard." When I asked him for an example, he thought for a moment or two and then said, "Well, during the college application process, I wrote about AP Classes and Dual Enrollment and other similar things, and I think I was really sending a message to the universities I was applying to. I felt like what I was saying had meaning." After another moment, he said, "I also write devotional talks for youth group events, and I feel powerful when those go well." He paused again, and as the pause stretched out, I thanked him for his time and began to gather up my things. It was a stroke of luck that I had not yet turned off my recorder because he provided a great closing remark when he began to walk away, saying, "Maybe being powerful as a writer and writing with voice happen when what we are writing is important to us." Maybe so, Canaan. Maybe so.

## **Emir**

I chose to interview Emir because his responses were so contradictory and confusing that I felt the only way to understand them, and him, was by sitting down and speaking in person. Emir wrote with the bravado of a seasoned academic. His essays were redolent with the insistence that writing should be objective and factual if it is to be useful, yet he constantly contradicted this by including personal information. Additionally, I selected Emir because he provided a personal definition of voice on the short answer question on the survey. Emir defined voice as the way a writer attracts the reader. He wrote, “Based on my definition of voice, an individual’s way of attracting the reader, I underlined what I felt best matched this definition.” However, Emir followed up this statement with another that I found to be contradictory, “Everything I underlined was when I was being objective. Personally, I think my strongest writing is when I state the facts.” His definition of voice, a way of attracting the reader, seemed somewhat divorced from what he said he underlined, i.e. parts of his paper where he felt he was stating facts, which was divorced from what he actually underlined—a seemingly random selection of sentences. In other words, like so many first-year writers, he was a walking contradiction, and I hoped a face-to-face interview might shed some light on his true understanding of voice.

I met with Emir on a cold and rainy Thursday afternoon after his class let out. We walked up to the fourth floor and sat in the faculty lounge. Emir described himself to me as “an athlete, gamer, guitarist who loves to eat and be outdoors.” He said he finds reading boring, yet he admitted that he spends hours on social media; he detests writing about himself, yet uses SnapChat to communicate his moods and feelings with friends. The Emir contradictions

obviously were not restricted to his written word but also spilled over into the young man himself.

I asked him to tell me about a specific line in his literacy narrative (See Figure 2) where he wrote, “Writing equals vulnerability and that is

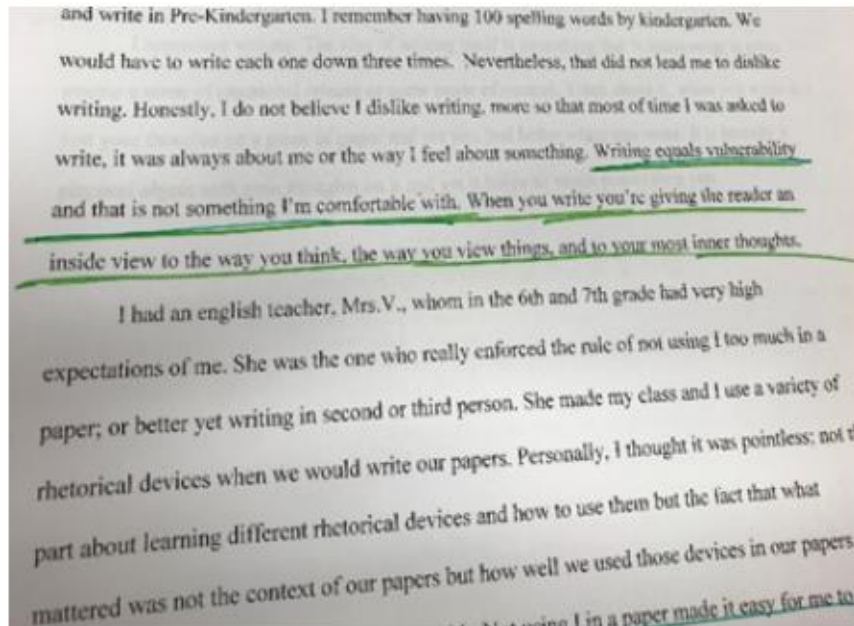


Figure 2

not something I'm comfortable with. When you write you're giving the reader an inside view to the way you think, the way you view things, and to your inner thoughts.” It was a section of his paper that he had identified as being voiced, and I asked him why he chose those two lines instead of any of the ones that came before or after. Emir looked over his writing for several minutes before saying, “I guess I chose that passage because when I read it, it sounds truthful. I mean, I really am not comfortable being vulnerable and when you give a paper to someone to read, you are at your most vulnerable. Maybe that's not voice at all, but it is honest. I don't always fully believe what I end up writing...a lot of it is just blowing smoke or making up crap, but this felt true. That's why I chose it.”

I asked Emir if he thought there might be a connection between writing that is powerful and writing that is truthful. He shrugged, closed his eyes and seemed to think for a moment or two before saying, “If I'm honest about my own writing, the only time it ever feels powerful is



when it means something important to me. And if it means something, then it is usually truthful.” I asked him to give me an example and he said, “Well, this might sound dumb but the writing I do on social media is honestly truthful. Not like sharing a meme or reposting someone else’s thing, but if I actually take the time to write something, it is because it is important to me. I had a post a while back about celebrating Ramadan that got like 300 likes and some reposts. It made me feel pretty powerful.” While I don’t want to be too heavy handed with my hammer of not-fakeness agency, I see Emir talking agency as much as he is talking honesty.

Before we wrapped up our quick interview, I asked Emir to read me his final lines from his literacy narrative. Those lines were: “Think about it, when you write it’s just your thoughts on a piece of paper and yet you feel better when you write. It is literally a physical object with your thoughts on it and yet it hold so much power over you [sic].” He obliged me and read the lines aloud, and then looked up at me. He had a wry expression on his face. I said, “Voice or no?” He shook his head no. “True or not?” He shrugged and said, “I don’t know. I guess I believe it, but I really just included it because I thought the teacher would like it.” I said, “So just to be clear, if you had really believed this when you wrote it, do you think it would hold your voice?” He nodded and said, “Yeah, I think so. If I write something that is meaningful for me and not because I think someone else will like it? Yeah it probably has my voice.”

### **Afterword**

As Christine Tardy points out, while there are plenty of studies about voice, few of them are located within the classroom and fewer still focus on the perspective of the undergraduate writer. This study not only situates itself in the classroom, it privileges the voices of first-year writers. I am really proud of these voices. They have taught me so much. They have taught me how they conceptualize voice and that the teaching of voice is less common than one might

expect. They have taught me that when the writing topic or situation is interesting to them, it is easier to invest in that writing. They've taught me about not-fakeness, agency, and power. They've taught me about cracks in the writing, and they've helped me see the value of voiced writing that isn't necessarily good writing. They've shown me that developmental writers might not have the same access to voice instruction that other writers have. They've taught me that making choices, actually having the power to make choices about writing, helps them feel more connected to the writing, which gives the writing more meaning, and from there, more voice.

I'll close out this chapter with the voice of Shanna, a student participant from this study. Shanna struggled to identify her own voice in her writing for this study. She said, "I had a hard time choosing anything because it's hard to write with voice. What I chose are words that are not anyone else's but my own. I feel like I do not write with voice because most things we write about aren't interesting." Layered within Shanna's words are these concepts of ownership and personal investment. Shanna believes that she needs to write about interesting things in order to write with her own voice. Whether *I* believe this is true or not doesn't really matter. *Shanna* believes it. Therefore, to do my job well, I need to meet her in that place and begin to help her build a better understanding of writing and a better understanding of what it means to write purposefully and with voice. In order for Shanna to care enough to try to write with purpose and with voice, I need to help her locate those "interesting things" to write about. Like Emir said to me in his interview, "If I write something that is meaningful for me and not because I think someone else will like it? Yeah it probably has my voice."

In closing, I want to reiterate that most students don't think of their own voiced writing as especially polished or "good" writing. Instead, they see their own voiced writing as something that sounds like them and that shows their thoughts and opinions. Often, such moments of

sounding or showing self in their writing can be seen in those cracks Elbow mentioned—small fissures in the writing. A bit of the writer shows through in those disjunctures. Students don't necessarily see such moments as good; they don't really see those moments as bad either. Rather, for students who have any concept of voice in writing, *voice just is*. Like their eye color or their skin color, voice simply is. Perhaps it can be subtly changed or accented, but the idea of creating or crafting a voice is a new concept to most undergraduate writers. Elbow writes that while voice is important for writing, voice alone isn't enough "to make writing *good*" (*Vernacular* 108). Perhaps we need to start distancing these two ideals: voiced writing and good writing. They are not synonymous.

There is some seriously good news to be found here. If our student writers are able to accidentally include moments of resonant, voiced writing—whether those moments are disjointed or not—then helping students learn to craft those moments and to use their voices more intentionally is most definitely within our reach.

## Chapter 3

### Connecting Voice with Citation:

#### How Undergraduates Utilize Concepts of “Voice” in Written Researched Arguments

##### Foreword

It feels like there are more moving pieces in this chapter as I’m reporting on this study while also attempting to make connections with the findings in Chapter 2. At times, the narrative feels a bit like watching a tennis match—head swiveling left to right. I’ve done my best to mediate whiplash, but there are likely to be a few bumps and more of those disjunctures. As in Chapter 2, the Key Findings section is somewhat bulky, but I’ve chosen to believe that “bulky” is not a bad modifier for the findings of a study. There’s a lot going on in this chapter because a lot happened in the study.

In many ways, the study detailed in the second chapter is a jumping off point for this chapter, which focuses on how undergraduates in an argument writing course conceptualize and utilize voice for their researched arguments in the second-semester course within the FYW curriculum (English 1020). English 1020 is described in the university catalogue as one designed to investigate the roles that argument plays in society at large, while focusing primarily on how argument functions in academic writing. In addition to strengthening the academic writing practices learned in English 1010, the primary goal of English 1020 is for students to produce a “substantial researched argument” that illustrates competency in five learning outcomes. Those outcomes include demonstrating “an ability to conduct research-based inquiries by posing research questions, conducting academic research, evaluating secondary sources, integrating sources to support claims, and citing sources appropriately.” I highlight this particular learning outcome as it was integral to the study design. This project utilizes a chapter I wrote for the

course textbook; the chapter focuses on using the lens of voice to better integrate secondary sources.

Whereas the previous chapter in this dissertation examined voice through the lens of first-year writers in their first-semester writing course, this chapter will have a narrower lens—specifically considering how undergraduates understand and utilize voice in researched arguments and how or if that understanding changes after specific voice instruction.

## **Introduction**

In his 1987 article “Voice as Juice: Some Reservations about Evangelical Composition,” I. Hashimoto argues that scholarship devoted to the teaching of voice holds a spiritual fervor grounded in a fear-based, evangelical tradition. He writes that voice scholarship embraces a “Biblical feel, the sense of mystery and music that comes to true believers” (75), adding that voice is often proffered to students as though *voice alone* can somehow make writing whole and valuable, just as only a Christ figure can absolve sinners of all transgressions. Hashimoto admits that this come-to-Jesus/come-to-voice approach might be effective for some writers, but for others, “evangelical exhortation may not be appropriate” (77). His point is that not all writers come to composition classes with writer’s block or frustration born of prescriptive teaching methods piled upon them in their past. Not all writers feel silenced. Not all writers see themselves as weak compositionists with nothing important to say. Essentially, he argues that voice might be helpful for some, but it is not necessary or helpful for all. Hashimoto suggests that voice instruction is often an anti-intellectual pursuit, overly focused on personality, feelings, and mystery rather than actual substance. He believes that when writing instructors focus too much on voice, they risk crossing a line, basically giving up their teaching role for a preaching one.

The first time I read this article, my feelings got a little bit hurt. I felt attacked. I tried to set aside the article for a time, thinking his particular brand of rhetoric simply was *not* what I needed in my life. However, I've come to realize that Hashimoto saw something about voice scholarship that was harder for me to see because I was, and still am, a believer. In spite of the year the article was published, Hashimoto's argument is still relevant. There *remains* a spiritual component to voice. Much of the scholarship about voice still trends more homily than report. Much still alludes to concepts of morality and faith, like when Elbow writes about voice and intonation as ways that readers hear "honesty, untrustworthiness, arrogance, open mindedness" (*Vernacular* 107), or when Joseph Harris explains voice as the "breath, spirit, presence, what comes before words and gives them life," (33) or when Jane Danielewicz says that voice offers to readers "the weightiness of belief" (424). Admittedly, much of my own history with voice leans more evangelical than scholarly. After my first semester of teaching first-year writing (hired as an adjunct two days before the semester began), I emerged battle worn and clutching my very own rubric that awarded students for writing with "pizzazz."

My pizzazz was basically Elbow's earliest explanations of voice—though I also emphasized proofreading and polish. I talked about pizzazz with exuberance and, quite honestly, very little else—nothing but happy feelings and a solid belief that any student could and should write in such a way. As Hashimoto suggests, I was fervent and evangelical in my belief that the very idea of voiced writing had the power to change writing instruction as we know it. Voice as Savior. I wanted to baptize all of my students in the pizzazzy waters of voice and anoint them with my praise.

To keep with my proselytizing theme, here's my confession: Hashimoto forced me to check myself, to question those walk-by-faith convictions, and to look for proof that voice as I

understand it can actually be taught. After study and reflection, I found that parts of his argument were valid. I found that I agreed voice should *not* be taught at the expense of other fundamental writing instruction. Yet in spite of this newfound knowledge, I came to the realization that *I still believe*.

I believe voice is rather Divine—with the potential to save uninteresting writing from its very uninterestingness, or the power to save a writer from an apathetic subject position. I believe voiced writing demands attention and forces the audience to engage with the writing. I believe voice embraces passion, and that by holding onto passion, students can find a measure of power. When writing is voiced, small errors like a misplaced comma or a misspelled word become much less important because voice pulls the reader along. In fact, in the chapter that participants read for this study, I wrote that voice can “cover a multitude of sins.” Yes, I wrote that. *I believe it*. But I also know that Hashimoto makes some excellent points. Voice scholarship needs to be about more than just warm feelings and spiritual devotion.

The study highlighted in this chapter was predicated by my desire to systematically teach voice—to offer instruction, useful terminology, and a space for learner-centered voice discussion. Danielewicz writes that voice is “a quality of writing that can be taught or promoted from any theoretical stance and all types of pedagogies” (423), and she argues for the teaching of a “public voice” (423). For Danielewicz, this public voice is not an intrinsic quality unique to each student, but is, rather, the result of how a writer positions herself within her text, and how she engages with her readers. Danielewicz teaches public voice as a way to help her students achieve a level of social power in what she terms “public life” but might be more commonly referred to as “the real world.” Jill Jeffery argues that the voice skeptics like Hashimoto created a need for teachers of writing to both justify and assess voice. I agree. Hashimoto certainly created

that need for me. I also agree with Danielewicz's position that the teaching of voice is simply another rhetorical move we can offer our students.

I'm convinced that Erika Lindemann is also correct when she states that successfully teaching writing cannot rely solely on anecdotes and good feelings. Teaching writing cannot rest on "Well, this always works for me," and it cannot count on a spiritual calling that only a few can hear. Lindemann writes that using "private criteria" to establish good teaching is useless, and that a larger conversation within public spaces helps to identify those teaching practices that actually are effective (179-180). Paul Lynch argues against "recipe-swapping" (17), a term he borrows from Ann Berthoff. Recipe-swapping is that practice so common in teaching where we try out a new lesson or idea that we've heard is infallible, only to find that in our class it is, sadly, *quite fallible*. Recipe-swapping is that practice of removing the lesson plan from its intended context, severing it from its accompanying theory. It's swapping baking soda for baking powder with often disastrous results. Lynch says recipe-swapping fails because it "divorces practice from theory" or "from the inspiration that might animate it" (19). Determining a teachable theory of voice, one that is useful for student writers and their instructors, is the goal for this study. I'm not interested in adding to a theory that places voice deep inside a writer, a theory that maintains voice must only be *found*. I don't believe that. *Voice must be constructed*.

Ann Berthoff's note of caution for the composition community about a "pedagogy of exhortation" (310) is also instrumental in my desire for a better approach for teaching voice. Berthoff argues that many composition instructors eagerly embrace a far-too-common pedagogy of exhortation, calling such an approach "not instructive" (310). A pedagogy of exhortation is defined by statements such as *write with voice!* (my own example) or "Feel comfortable...Wake up!...Find something you're interested in" (her examples) (310). Instead, Berthoff argues for



Paolo Friere’s “pedagogy of knowing” as a more meaningful approach to teaching writing, saying that teaching students *how to know* means conscientiously and intentionally teaching students to define, name, think, and perform in specific ways for specific purposes.

Along with Hashimoto’s admonition, Berthoff’s analysis of writing pedagogy was instrumental for this study. Placing Berthoff alongside Hashimoto impresses upon me the need for a well-thought out and intentional teaching plan. Together they tell me that my thoughts on pizzazzy voice aren’t worth much at all. Together they tell me that teaching voice requires more than pretty words and an energetic teacher. Berthoff writes, “If college students find generalizing difficult, it’s because nobody has ever taught them how to go about it, and abstraction which proceeds by means of generalizing – *concept formation*, as it is often called – must be deliberately learned and should therefore be deliberately taught” [emphasis hers] (320). While Berthoff may not have been specifically referring to teaching voice when she wrote those words, I can’t help but think that voice perfectly fits this explanation. If we want *voiced* writing from students (if we want them to generalize a way to write with voice), then we need to deliberately teach them how to understand voice (how to conceptualize it), and we need to deliberately teach them how to write with it. That’s what this study does.

## **Purpose**

I want to know if teaching voice is possible and, if it is, I want to know that it is also useful. I organized this study around the direct instruction of voice for argument writing, including pretest and posttest surveys on student conceptualizations of voice, to see if it was possible to remove some of those mysterious, unhelpfully fanatical qualities of voice and provide something more tangible for students to grasp—to offer them the deliberate instruction Berthoff suggests. Additionally, since citation is such an important component of the argument writing

curriculum, I wanted to see if connecting voice with citation instruction might be beneficial for students. As Kathleen Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak suggest, helping students learn a new concept works best when we can attach the new information to old information (14). I hoped that connecting voice and citation would result in richer knowledge and more fruitful application of that knowledge for the participants in the study, and it did.

The purposes of this study were to better understand how first-year writing students conceive of voice for argument writing and if specific lessons on voice might enrich or affect their understanding. The primary research questions guiding this chapter are:

- 1) How do FYW students conceptualize voice?
- 2) How do FYW students understand and utilize voice for researched arguments?
- 3) How does an intentional teaching of voice affect student conceptualizations of voice?

## **Procedures**

The 60 FYW participants came from three different sections of English 1020, taught by a single instructor during the fall of 2018 at the University of Memphis. The classes included one honors sections, and two standard sections. The professor for this study was a late stage PhD student who successfully defended her dissertation during the course of the fall 2018 semester. She began teaching college level composition in 2008, and she had specifically taught the English 1020 course at the university for ten years when she participated in this study. I did not specifically ask for demographic information from students. In order to protect the identities of both students and professor, I have assigned pseudonyms when necessary.

To determine how students conceptualize voice for argument writing and if specific voice instruction might change that conceptualization, I designed the study with a pretest, instruction,

posttest model. I rounded out the research with brief interviews with three students, one from each section who volunteered to be interviewed.

The pretest survey focused on students' previous educational histories and their understandings of voice; the survey can be seen in Table 7. About six weeks into the term, the instructor assigned a chapter I wrote for the course textbook titled "Crafting Voice and Avoiding Plagiarism." We dedicated the following class period to teaching voice and highlighting how voice could be used in argument writing. In November, toward the end of the semester, I gave students the posttest survey and asked them to write reflectively about their experiences with voice in the classroom and about how they were—or were not—able to include voice in their academic arguments. That survey can be seen in Table 8. I spoke with Jesse, Lilly, and Jack very briefly after each class period on that day. Findings from those interviews will be shared in the Afterword. As with the other studies that comprise this dissertation, I used the constructivist grounded theory (CGT) approach as the theoretical base.

### *Surveys*

The surveys for this study were intended to illustrate student understanding of voice, and more specifically, how their understanding of voice might evolve in a class for argument writing when voice was intentionally taught as a method for incorporating sources into researched arguments. (Please refer to Tables 7 and 8 for specific wording for the questions.) For both versions of the survey, I included seven multiple-choice questions designed to elicit answers displaying students' general understanding of voice in research writing. Note that four questions are similar to what I asked of students in the English 1010 study.

<b>Table 7</b>	<b>English 1020 Pretest Survey Instrument Questions</b>
1) In your past learning experiences, have any of your previous teachers taught lessons on voice in writing? Choose 1 answer only.	a) Yes. More than one teacher taught me about using my voice in my writing. b) Yes. One teacher taught me about using my voice in my writing. c) No. Teachers have mentioned voice, but no one has taught me how to write with it. d) No. I don't know what you mean by voice. No one has ever told me about this.
2) In your past learning experiences, have any of your previous teachers taught you how to properly cite an academic source by including direct quotations and/or paraphrasing another person's words or ideas? Choose 1 answer only.	a) Yes. More than one teacher taught me how to properly cite an academic source. b) Yes. One teacher taught me how to properly cite an academic source. c) No. Teachers have mentioned citing sources, but no one has taught me how to do it. d) No. I don't know what you mean by citing a source. No one has ever told me about this.
3) What is voice? Choose one or two answers that correctly reflect your understanding.	a) Voice is what makes my writing sound powerful. b) Voice is what makes my writing sound like me. c) Voice is something that can't be taught; you either have it or you don't. d) Voice is a combination of different elements of writing. e) Voice is not appropriate for all writing situations. f) Voice is basically the style a writer uses. g) Voice is basically the tone a writer uses. h) I don't know what voice is. i) I can see/hear voice in others' writing, but I don't know how to write with it.
4) When you "hear" voice in writing, what do you hear? Choose one or two answers.	a) I hear the writer's attitude about the subject. b) I hear the writer's confidence—or lack of confidence—about writing or the topic. c) I hear the writer's level of formality. d) I hear the writer's respect for her audience—her understanding that she needs the audience to understand her intentions. e) I hear a liveliness or energy in the writing. f) I hear something like an accent in the writing. g) I don't hear anything.

Table 7 Continued	English 1020 Pretest Survey Instrument Questions (continued)	
5) When you consider your own writing or the writing of someone you know, when do you think the writing is the most powerful? Choose one or two answers.	a) When the writing is personal. b) When the writing indicates the author’s attitude. c) When the writing has “normal” language—as in the writing sounds like the author’s speech. d) When the writing is energetic or lively. e) When the writing is about a powerful or interesting topic. f) When the writing is clear and to the point. g) When the writing has no errors.	
6) Which of the following terms have you been taught are significant for writing. Please circle all answers that apply.	a) Diction b) Syntax c) Details d) Imagery e) Tone f) Clarity g) None of the above	
7) Which of the following terms could you identify and explain in your own writing? Please circle all answers that apply.	a) Diction b) Syntax c) Details d) Imagery e) Tone f) Clarity g) None of the above	

Additionally, I asked students in this study to consider when writing is powerful and to reflect on their familiarity with specific terminology (diction, syntax, details, imagery, tone, clarity). Such terminology plays a significant role in the content of the lessons for teaching voice for argument.

I wrote the multiple-choice questions with three purposes in mind: 1) to establish a baseline of information for English 1020 students’ previous and current conceptualizations of voice, 2) to mimic the survey from the English 1010 study so that the results could be compared, and, similarly, 3) to preview the survey that will be used in the following chapter devoted to undergraduates’ perceptions of the role of voice in professional and technical writing.

<b>Table 8</b>	<b>English 1020 Posttest Survey Instrument Questions</b>
Question	Answer Options
1) Thinking about this class this semester, choose the best answer about the topic of voice instruction. Choose 1 answer only.	a) We had two or more lessons on voice. b) We had one lesson on voice. c) I don't remember any lessons on voice. d) I don't know what you mean by voice.
2) Thinking about this class this semester, choose the best answer about the topic of citing sources for academic argument, including direct quotation and/or paraphrasing another person's words or ideas. (1 answer only.)	a) We had two or more lessons on citation. b) We had one lesson on citation. c) I don't remember any lessons on citation. d) I don't know what you mean by citation.
<b>3) – 7) same as pretest</b>	<b>Answer options same as pretest</b>
Please answer at least two of the following short answer reflection questions.	1. Please describe how your understanding of voice has changed (or not) during this English 1020 class. 2. Please explain how it was (or was not) helpful for you to think about citing sources in terms of allowing the voices of authors to speak. 3. How well do you think you managed to insert your own voice in your academic argument? 4. Describe anything in particular from the chapter or from class that you found helpful regarding voice in your argument writing.

The survey instrument is meant to help tie all three studies together in concrete, tangential ways. On the posttest survey, I included open-ended questions about how participants' understandings of voice had changed or if they felt like they'd been able to craft a voice for their argument, how thinking of citing sources in terms of allowing the voices of authors to speak was or was not helpful, and to describe anything in particular from the class or textbook that helped them better understand voice.

### *Voice Instruction*

This study centered on an instructional period during which I asked participants to read a chapter I wrote for their textbook entitled “Crafting Voice and Avoiding Plagiarism” and a class period devoted to reviewing the chapter and engaging in discussion and voice writing exercises. The participating instructor assigned the chapter (see Appendix A for the complete text) with its accompanying exercises as homework to be due in mid-October. She assigned point value for the exercises and required that students type them up and hand in their responses for credit. I aided the instructor in designing instruction and facilitating discussion centered on the exercises.

“Crafting Voice and Avoiding Plagiarism” details how understanding voice enables writers to better incorporate outside sources into their researched arguments. The lessons on citation are offered through a lens of voice rather than a list of do’s and don’ts. The chapter provides the illustration of a slide ruler to help students understand that their writerly voice can slide back and forth along a line of what might be appropriate for a specific audience or rhetorical situation. The chapter instructs students that all voices along the continuum are variations of a writer’s voice(s). The point I tried to make both in the chapter and in class discussion was that a writer has the power and skillset to compose a formal, academic argument that is still true to her individual self-conception. The chapter focuses heavily on how to construct a voice appropriate for the genre and audience by paying close attention to diction, details, syntax, imagery, and tone. As I said earlier, those terms are highlighted and defined in the text which is why they were included on the surveys.

During class discussion, the general consensus among students was that they’d been exposed to such terminology in previous English classes, but most participants indicated these terms were treated like vocabulary words in middle school, complete with multiple-choice tests

on their meaning, and that there had been little focus on application in their writing. As for high school experiences, students said the terms were used in class discussions to help them analyze pieces of literature. Of these five words—diction, details, syntax, imagery, and tone—the one that students most discussed as important to their writing was tone, and many participants said their previous teachers had commented on tone on their papers. Second to tone was detail-oriented writing. Few students in any of the three classes had ever been asked to consider the diction or syntax *of their own writing*, and most said that their only exposure to imagery was in the various curricular units focused on poetry.

These comments seem consistent with the guidelines for Tennessee state tests for high school English (English I and English II). There remains a disconnect between such tests conducted by state or local governing bodies and the writing valued by composition instructors (White 12). Such a disconnect will undoubtedly persist as long as state tests center on detached, multiple-choice definitions. Of course, even in the writing classroom, students often struggle to apply what they've learned to their own writing (Rubin 373). Even when students have been taught writing-related knowledge, they cannot always transfer that knowledge into their writing. Additionally, students who are familiar with voice, who were taught voice in high school, may only have knowledge related to how to identify voice in other texts rather than how to write with it themselves.

However, as Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak have found, there are methods that assist students with transferring writing knowledge from one situation to the next. They state that “prior knowledge—of various kinds—plays a decisive if not determining role in students’ successful transfer of writing knowledge and practice” (14). Their model for helping students access and use such prior knowledge includes three specific practices that they’ve termed



“assemblage,” “remix,” and “critical incident.” Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak believe that helping students assemble, layer, or scaffold new knowledge upon old conceptualizations is one way to improve transfer. A second way is their “remix” model, which is essentially the combining—mixing up—of both the new and old knowledge for a specific situation. The third practice, “critical incident,” involves a student learning to overcome a writing obstacle that, in turn, helps the student reconsider their goals and successes as a writer. Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak’s work with transfer helped me theorize a best practices approach for teaching voice in the English 1020 classroom. Their work greatly influenced the way that I put together the chapter for the textbook, and it influenced the way that I approached this study as I was constantly looking to find ways to help students assemble and remix old knowledge with the new.

The writing instruction for this study centered on the chapter from the textbook which is provided as Appendix A, discussion in class about the text, and three specific writing activities performed in the classroom. Those writing activities are detailed in Appendix B.

## **Key Findings**

### *Multiple-Choice Questions: Pretest and Posttest*

As I navigate the findings for the multiple-choice questions for both the pretest and posttest surveys, I will also tie the findings to what I learned in the previous study. When there are similarities or differences, I will point them out and try to explain. Because I am attempting to simultaneously move forward and reflect backward, this section of the chapter may feel a little cumbersome. This is another one of those moments of tension for me, and I admit to some frustration and uncertainty with this part of the chapter. I tried several different methods of narrating these findings, but I kept getting lost in my own writing. Without subheadings for the question numbers and a fairly strict adherence to a chronological ordering, the findings just

became too hard to sort out. Clarity ended up winning out over creativity as my creative attempts simply muddled the information. Therefore, for each question, when applicable, I will compare or contrast the pretest findings to the previous study. Then I will offer the posttest findings with a brief analysis. While the delivery method may not be exciting, the findings themselves offer confirmation of findings from the previous study and illuminate noteworthy information.

### **Past Experiences with Voice**

For the first question, participants were asked to reflect upon previous educational experiences and consider any instruction they'd been given about writing and voice. Quite similar to what we learned in the English 1010 study, the findings seem to confirm that at least half of the first-year writing participants had no previous instructor who explicitly taught how to write with voice.

Table 9 compares the results for this question with the same question asked of participants in the English 1010 study. While there are no glaring differences between the two sets of participants, minor differences are seen in the higher number of participants in the English 1010 courses who had no prior knowledge of voice. This seems like a logical finding—essentially students in English 1020 have had another semester of instruction with additional possible exposure to voice lessons, so it makes sense fewer students would say they've never had voice instruction. Moreover, the higher number of students who had no prior knowledge of voice in the English 1010 study might be attributed to the higher number of second language learners and developmental writers in that study. Recall that the English 1010 participants included students from four sections of developmental writing classes which had relatively high numbers of L2 writers. For this English 1020 study, no developmental writing classes were included, and there were few L2 writers.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Table 9</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Comparison of English 1020 and English 1010 Survey Results for the Question “Have previous teachers taught voice?”</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">% of students in English 1020</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">% of students in English 1010</p>
<p>In your past learning experiences, have any of your previous teachers taught lessons on voice in writing?</p>		
<p>Yes. More than one teacher taught me about using my voice in my writing.</p>	21%	14%
<p>Yes. One teacher taught me about using my voice in my writing.</p>	29%	23%
<p>No. Teachers have mentioned voice, but no one has taught me how to write with it</p>	42%	49%
<p>No. I don't know what you mean by voice. No one has ever taught me about this.</p>	8%	14%

For the posttest, the version of this question focused specifically on instruction within the English 1020 class. Whereas in the pretest survey, only 50% of participants stated that a previous instructor had specifically taught lessons on voice, in the posttest survey, 100% of students who participated stated they'd received lessons on voice over the course of the semester.

Additionally, over the course of the semester, the percentage of students who initially said they didn't know the significance of voice dropped from 8% to 0%. This is certainly what I hoped would happen: their responses reflect the fact that they did receive instruction on voice. At the end of the semester, 100% of the participants claimed to know the significance of voice, and 100% stated they had received specific lessons on writing with voice.

**Previous Lessons on Citation**

On the pretest, students were asked to consider previous learning experiences with source citations. The question reads, “In your past learning experiences, have any of your previous teachers taught you how to properly cite an academic source by including direct quotations and/or paraphrasing another person’s words or ideas?” While this question may not seem directly connected to writing with voice, I included the question for two reasons: 1) I was curious about

the comparison between voice instruction and citation instruction, and 2) the English 1020 curriculum in the chapter would encourage students to consider how voice and citation work together. This question was not included in the previous study as there is no requirement for citation in English 1010, which means there is no comparison for the previous study. However, there is something quite telling about the findings for this question.

On the pretest, 97% of the students in this study claim that one or more previous teachers had provided lessons on citation of an academic source, while 3% of students claimed that teachers had only mentioned citation but never taught it. See Table 10. None of these students were completely unfamiliar with the concept of source citation. Let me reiterate this information as I believe it is important: only 50% of the participants entered English 1020 claiming previous teachers had taught voice, while 97% claimed previous teachers had covered citation.

<b>Table 10</b>	% of 1020 students
<b>In your past learning experiences, have any of your previous teachers taught you how to properly cite an academic source by including direct quotations and/or paraphrasing another person's words or ideas?</b>	
Yes. More than one teacher taught me how to properly cite an academic source.	87%
Yes. One teacher taught me how to properly cite an academic source.	10%
No. Teachers have mentioned citing sources, but no one has ever taught me how to do it.	3%
No. I don't know what you mean by citing a source. No one has ever told me about this.	0%

Perhaps because of my background in writing center work, I expected the numbers for previous citation instruction to be much lower. Students so often come to writing centers claiming no background knowledge of citation. Source citation is an area in which so many first-year writers seem to struggle, and I assumed they must not be getting any practical exposure to

the concept in middle or high school. According to the Tennessee Department of Education, it is possible that I was both wrong and right.

The Tennessee Department of Education has established that approximately 32-34% of the high school English II state test exam should focus on reading, understanding, and integration of informative texts, but only 2-4% of the exam actually focuses on the protocol of such integration. Additionally, 13-18% of the exam places emphasis on vocabulary acquisition and usage. I interpret this to mean that students are taught the vocabulary, are taught how to recognize citations and source materials, but they aren't actually given much practice writing research papers based on secondary sources. These state test requirements might explain why an overwhelming number of the study's participants had been given explicit instruction on source citation.

The findings remained essentially the same for the posttest. For the posttest, participants were asked to reflect on their lessons in English 1020 about citation—including lessons on direct quotations and/or paraphrasing another person's words or ideas. Again, 97% of participants reported receiving at least one lesson on citation over the course of the semester.

### **What Is Voice?**

On the pretest, participants were asked to reflect on what voice means to them.

Participants were allowed to choose more than one answer for the question, "What is voice?"

The results indicate that students in the English 1020 study believe:

- voice is what makes their writing sound like them (67%)
- tone is equated with voice (35%)
- style is equated with voice (33%)
- voice is what makes their writing powerful (33%)

- voice is a combination of different elements of writing (18%)

Table 11 shows a side-by-side comparison of the English 1010 and 1020 studies for this question. A majority of participants from both studies saw voice as that which makes their writing sound like them. It’s also clear that many see no differences between concepts of voice and tone or of voice and style, and at least a third of both populations associate power with voice.

<b>Table 11</b>	1020	1010
<b>Comparison of English 1010 and English 1020 Survey Results for the Question “What is voice?”</b>	% of students	% of students
What is voice? (Circle one or two answers that correctly reflect your understanding.)		
Voice is what makes my writing sound like me	67%	80%
Voice is basically the tone a writer uses	35%	54%
Voice is basically the style a writer uses	33%	33%
Voice is what makes my writing sound powerful	33%	40%
Voice is a combination of different elements of writing	18%	9%
I can see/hear voice in others' writing, but I don't know how to write with it	12%	16%
I don't know what voice is	10%	14%
Voice is something that can't be taught; you either have it or you don't	7%	13%
Voice is NOT appropriate for all writing situations	5%	n/a

The posttest findings for this question illustrate that the most significant change in participants’ conceptualization of voice is in how they understand voice as a construction of a variety of rhetorical skills and knowledge. This is certainly worth exploring. Table 12 shows the differences between the pretest and posttest. Whereas on the pretest only 18% of participants chose the answer indicating that voice is a combination of different elements for writing, 82% chose this answer for the posttest. During the instruction session on voice, both the chapter from

the textbook and the class discussions emphasized that voice can be crafted by intentional and thoughtful use of writing strategies such as attention to diction, details, syntax, imagery, and tone. It appears the participants for this study retained this information for the posttest. They got it.

<b>Table 12</b>	1020 PRETEST	1020 POSTTEST
<b>English 1020 Pretest &amp; Posttest Comparison for “What is voice?”</b>	% of students	% of students
What is voice? (Circle one or two answers that correctly reflect your understanding.)		
Voice is what makes my writing sound like me	67%	39%
Voice is basically the tone a writer uses	35%	2%
Voice is basically the style a writer uses	33%	8%
Voice is what makes my writing sound powerful	33%	71%
<b>Voice is a combination of different elements of writing</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>82%</b>
I can see/hear voice in others' writing, but I don't know how to write with it	12%	<b>0%</b>
I don't know what voice is	10%	<b>0%</b>
Voice is something that can't be taught; you either have it or you don't	7%	<b>0%</b>
Voice is NOT appropriate for all writing situations	5%	0%

Other findings from the posttest indicate that, after instruction, participants in this study were more comfortable conceptualizing voice as something they could construct and understand. In fact, the percentage of participants who initially indicated they did *not* know how to write with voice dropped from 12% on the pretest to 0% on the posttest, who did *not* know the significance of voice dropped from 10% on the pretest to 0% on the posttest, and who believed voice could *not* be taught dropped from 7% on the pretest to 0% on the posttest. These findings suggest that students were able to apply the information from the chapter and class discussion and reconsider their previous conceptualizations of voice to include this new knowledge.

### **What Do You Hear?**

As in the previous study, I asked participants what they “hear” when they encounter voice in writing. Again, participants were allowed to choose more than one answer. The answers for the English 1020 study indicate that they what they hear most often includes:

- attitude (63%)
- liveliness or energy (42%)
- confidence (38%)
- formality (or informality) in the writing (13%)
- something like an accent (13%)
- respect for the audience (10%)
- nothing (3%)

I find it helpful to compare these responses with those of the participants in the English 1010 study. Table 13 shows the current study’s responses in the 1020 column with the previous study’s responses in the 1010 column. For both groups, the answer chosen by the highest percentage of students was that students hear the writer’s attitude about the subject when they hear a voice in writing. When paired with the information from the previous pretest question indicating that a large number of students see tone and voice as interchangeable terms, perhaps we can infer that what students “hear” when they notice the writer’s attitude is actually the *tone* the writer is using—such as enthusiasm, boredom, uncertainty. Perhaps this is why so many students in both studies also chose “liveliness or energy” and “confidence” as something else they hear when they hear a voice in writing. The conflation of tone and voice might explain these answers.



<b>Table 13</b>	1020	1010
<b>Comparison of English 1020 and English 1010 Survey Results for the Question “What do you hear?”</b>	% of students	% of students
When you "hear" voice in writing, what do you hear? Choose one or two of the following answers.		
I hear the writer's attitude about the subject	63%	76%
I hear a liveliness or energy in the writing	42%	38%
I hear the writer's confidence--or lack of confidence--about writing or the topic	38%	57%
I hear the writer's level of formality	13%	36%
I hear something like an accent in the writing	13%	14%
I hear the writer's respect for her audience--her understanding that she needs the audience to understand her intentions	10%	25%
I don't hear anything	3%	10%

I worded the posttest question exactly the same as the pretest question. *Here is where I clearly see the promise and possibility of teaching voice:* The most common answer for the posttest, seen in Table 14, represented an idea never explicitly stated in the text or in the class discussions. Students had to synthesize the information provided and arrive at a conclusion. A total of 74% of participants on the posttest survey said that when they hear voice, they hear “the writer’s respect for her audience—her understanding that she needs the audience to understand her intentions.” Note that only 10% of participants chose this answer for the pretest survey. This finding indicates that participants in this study held deeper, more contextualized concepts of voice after instruction on voice.

<b>Table 14</b>	1020 PRETEST	1020 POSTTEST
<b>Pretest &amp; Posttest Comparison for the Question “What do you hear?”</b>	% of students	% of students
When you "hear" voice in writing, what do you hear? Choose one or two of the following answers.		
I hear the writer's attitude about the subject	63%	42%
I hear a liveliness or energy in the writing	42%	45%
I hear the writer's confidence--or lack of confidence--about writing or the topic	38%	45%
I hear the writer's level of formality	13%	6%
I hear something like an accent in the writing	13%	0%
<b>I hear the writer's respect for her audience--her understanding that she needs the audience to understand her intentions</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>74%</b>
I don't hear anything	3%	0%

### **When is Writing Powerful?**

I asked participants to consider their own writing, or the writing of someone they know, and reflect on when that writing seems to be the most powerful. Participants were again allowed to choose more than one answer. Their answers indicate that more than half of the participants believe writing is powerful when it is personal, and almost half believe writing is powerful when the topic itself is powerful or interesting. The full results are below:

- Writing is powerful when personal (52%)
- Writing is powerful when about a powerful or interesting topic (47%)
- Writing is powerful when clear and to the point (33%)
- Writing is powerful when it indicates the author's attitude (22%)
- Writing is powerful when energetic or lively (20%)
- Writing is powerful when it has 'normal' language--as in the writing sounds like the author's speech (8%)
- Writing is powerful when there are no errors (0%)

I am intrigued with the finding that indicates very few participants (8%) see writing with “normal” speech language as powerful, as even Elbow has suggested that writing can be improved if we can manage to get some of the rhythm and natural characteristics of speech into our texts. More intriguing to me, however, is that none of these participants chose the answer that said perfect, error-free writing is powerful.

The English 1010 study did not include this question, so no comparison can be made between the two groups about this question. As for the contrasts between pre- and posttest surveys, there were very few differences to report. Table 15 has the side-by-side comparison of the pre- and posttests for this question.

<b>Table 15</b>	1020 PRETEST	1020 POSTTEST
<b>Pretest &amp; Posttest Comparison for the Question “When is writing most powerful?”</b>	% of students	% of students
When you consider your own writing or the writing of someone you know, when do you think the writing is the most powerful? (Circle one or two answers)		
when the writing is personal	52%	41%
when the writing is about a powerful or interesting topic	47%	45%
when the writing is clear and to the point	33%	24%
when the writing indicates the author's attitude	22%	20%
<b>when the writing is energetic or lively</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>51%</b>
when the writing has 'normal' language--as in the writing sounds like the author's speech	8%	10%
when the writing has no errors	0%	0%

On the whole, differences are subtle with one exception. The response that writing is powerful “when the writing is energetic or lively” jumped from a 20% response on the pretest to a 51% response on the posttest. More than half of the participants chose this option on the posttest when less than a quarter chose it on the pretest. This seems to indicate that the time spent

discussing diction and syntax as ways to add voice and vitality to their writing changed their conceptualizations on voice to include a more nuanced understanding that voice is more than just what makes writing “sound like me.” After instruction, they realized that intentionally crafting voice can invigorate their writing. As for similarities, both pretest and posttest responses indicate that participants see writing as powerful when the writing applies to them in some way—when they find the topic interesting and are personally invested in the topic.

### **Terminology**

For these two pretest questions, my goal was to better understand the terminology that students had been taught as important for writing and to better understand if students felt like they could apply those terms in their writing. I anticipated that students would largely recognize these words but might not be able to apply them. I also believed that with intentional teaching of the terminology through the textbook chapter and class discussions, their knowledge would deepen. On the whole, the findings suggest my assumptions to be true. These two questions were not included in the English 1010 study, so I will make no comparisons to that study.

Both pretest questions offer a list of terms—diction, syntax, details, imagery, tone, and clarity—and ask participants to 1) indicate if they’ve been taught any of the terms are significant for writing, and 2) indicate if they could explain the term or identify it in their writing. Only one student out of the 60 participants claimed to be unfamiliar with all of the terms listed as options. Clearly the participants had been taught that these words are significant by previous teachers or instructors. Table 16 shows the results. In declining order, students were most familiar with tone, followed by imagery, diction, details, clarity, and syntax.

Regarding whether participants could identify or explain the terminology, it is worth noting that more students claimed they could identify and explain “details” and “imagery” than

were actually taught that those words were important for writing. Students mentioned during class discussion that teachers have used these words primarily for the analysis of literary texts rather than as important for composition. I am also intrigued by the finding that while 72% of students claimed they'd been taught "diction" was significant for writing, only 43% knew how to identify and explain the word. Similarly, the word "syntax" had higher recognition at 58% with only 40% of students knowing how to apply or explain it.

<b>Table 16 Terms of Significance</b>	% of students choosing the word as significant for writing	% of students who can identify and explain term in their writing
Tone	90%	75%
Imagery	73%	78%
Diction	72%	43%
Details	68%	73%
Clarity	68%	55%
Syntax	58%	40%
none of the above	2%	2%

The posttest results showed that, with the exception of the word "clarity" which was not specifically taught in the chapter on voice, all of the remaining terms rose in recognition (students chose the word as significant for writing) and in application (students claim they can identify and explain the term in their writing). See Table 17. At the beginning of the semester, 40% of students thought they could identify syntax in their own writing. At the end of the semester, 90% of students were confident they could identify syntax in their own writing. Additionally, that favored word among students, "tone," moved from a 75% selection by

students who thought they could identify it in their writing at the beginning of the semester to 94% who were confident they could identify tone at the end of the semester.

<b>Table 17</b>	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
<b>Comparison for Terms of Significance</b>	PRETEST	PRETEST	POSTTEST	POSTTEST
	% of students choosing the word as significant for writing	% of students who can identify and explain term in their writing	% of students choosing the word as significant for writing	% of students who can identify and explain term in their writing
Tone	90%	75%	100%	94%
Imagery	73%	78%	96%	92%
Diction	72%	43%	100%	90%
Details	68%	73%	96%	92%
Clarity	68%	55%	65%	57%
Syntax	58%	40%	100%	90%
none of the above	2%	2%	0%	0%

### Survey Summary

The findings from these seven multiple-choice questions both affirm and strengthen the foundation laid in Chapter 2. Half of the first-year writing participants in English 1020 had never been taught how to write with voice while 97% had been taught how to cite sources. No participants saw any connection between error-free writing and powerful, voiced writing. Few participants saw a connection between “normal speech” and powerful, voiced writing. Without specific instruction on how to write with voice, most students believed voice is simply what makes writing sound like them. *After* specific instruction on writing with voice, students were able to see that writing with voice means understanding how different elements of composing

work together. Before specific instruction on writing with voice, participants largely believed that when they “heard” voice in writing, they were hearing the writer’s attitude, but after instruction, participants reported that “hearing” voice meant hearing the writer’s respect for her audience—that writing with voice meant being careful and thoughtful with diction, syntax, and details. Both before and after voice instruction, participants primarily believed that powerful writing was personal and interesting, but this understanding was tempered and deepened after lessons on voice because they later reported that powerful writing is also energetic or lively. Finally, specific lessons on the terminology associated with voiced writing resulted in higher confidence among participants that they could both identify and explain such terminology in their own writing.

#### *Posttest Writing Prompts Key Findings*

The posttest survey asked students to think reflectively about their semester long experiences in English 1020. The responses for these four questions provided valuable information that I will briefly summarize, but Table 18 and Table 19 offer more details and a sampling of the answers from the students in their own voices. Participants were encouraged to answer at least two of the following questions:

1. *Please describe how your understanding of voice has changed (or not) during this English 1020 class.*
  - 80% of participants indicated that their understanding of voice improved
2. *Please explain how it was (or was not) helpful for you to think about citing sources in terms of allowing the voices of authors to speak.*
  - 73% of participants indicated that they found something valuable or helpful in thinking about citation through the lens of voice

3. *How well do you think you managed to insert your own voice in your academic argument?*

- 76% of participants indicated they felt like they did well incorporating voice into their arguments

4. *Describe anything in particular from the chapter or from class that you found helpful regarding voice in your argument writing.*

- 73% of participants indicated that something from the lessons on voice was helpful for them

### **How has your understanding of voice changed?**

For the first short-answer question, which resulted in 80% of the participants indicating that they had grown in their knowledge about voice, I coded their responses with five primary categories: 1) tone/voice, 2) citation, 3) application of definition, 4) reader/writer, and 5) creating voice for rhetorical situations. See Table 18 for details. For the students who responded with comments about *tone*, they indicated a better understanding of the differences between tone and voice, which helped them better understand how voice functions. For the second category about *citation*, these participants indicated that their understanding of voice improved in a way that helped them better conceive of how to cite sources and avoid plagiarism. For the third category about *applying the definition* of voice, these participants wrote that their conceptualizations of voice changed simply because they better understood the word itself. To be more specific, these students indicated that prior to the voice instruction, they either didn't know what voice was or they had a definition but no application for it. For the "*reader/writer*" category, these participants explained that their previous conceptualization of voice was from the standpoint of a reader rather than from that of a writer. They stated that previous encounters with voice were generally



experienced as the audience of creative writing. It was helpful for them to think about *creating* the voice rather than just *consuming* the voice written by others. Finally, there were participants who wrote that their understanding of voice changed simply because they now understood they could and should create voice for the writing situation. This group of students emerged from the study with a solid grasp of exactly what I hoped they would learn.

**Table 18**

Samples of Student Responses for: Please describe how your understanding of voice has changed (or not) during this English 1020 class.

### **The Tone/Voice Relationship**

- “Voice has changed for me in the aspect of tone. Tone is how one sets the mood and lets the reader know what kind of perspective one is taking for the argument, but tone is just part of the voice we construct as writers.”
- “I have learned that voice is much more than just your tone. It goes deeper into what you say and how you say it, your words, your details, the way you pace yourself when writing.”

### **Citing Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism**

- “My understanding of voice has changed for the better. I am now more aware of what it means and how it improves my writing. I also see how voice can help with citing sources and weaving in new information.”
- “My understanding of voice has drastically changed. I did not realize that writing using another's voice or diction was in fact plagiarism [sic]. I feel much more confident in my ability to use my own voice now.”

### **Applying the Definition of the Word**

- “I've come to understand what voice really means and what my voice is as opposed to the textbook description of voice.”
- “I didn't even know about voice being used as a term in academic writing before this class.”

## Table 18 Continued

### Reader or Writer

- “I had a teacher in middle school who taught voice when we did a poetry unit so I thought voice was basically a creative writing thing. Now I see voice is appropriate in other types of writing too.”
- “I had a solid background on voice from high school but it was more geared toward me being a reader than a writer, so this has showed me how to consider creating my own voice rather just being a consumer of another voice [sic].”

### Creating Voice for Rhetorical Situations

- “I did not realize the purpose of making my writing have a voice, especially if it's not a fiction series or book. I now understand that voice can be used to connect the writer to the reader, and that I have the power to craft that voice with just some specific word choices and other strategies.”
- “I had this understanding that voice is unique, which is still my understanding to an extent, but now I see that I can actually craft/create/cause voice intentionally if I'm intentional and aware.”
- “My understanding of voice has strengthened to understand that it's not only your personality coming through your writing, but voice strengthens writing because it pays attention to tone and syntax and other stuff.”

### **Was considering citing sources as allowing the voices of authors to speak helpful?**

Approximately 73% of participants found the lens of voice helpful for citation. Coding their responses created four categories: 1) simple but effective, 2) accountability, 3) choosing when to quote or to paraphrase, and 4) the argument must be their own.

For the participants who signaled that thinking about a source as another writer's voice was *simple but effective*, they wrote comments indicating the voice lens provided a reminder that another human's voice spoke in their sources, and as a writer, it was their job to let the voices speak. Along those lines, others saw voice as valuable in learning citation methods because it

simply made them more *accountable* as writers—meaning that it was a lot harder to appropriate another writer’s ideas or words when they were associating those words or ideas with a human voice. Another reason why students found voice useful for citing was in helping them determine *when to quote and when to paraphrase*. They mentioned learning that when a strong voice was at work, they needed to quote instead of paraphrase, but when the information was more powerful than the voice, paraphrasing was the way to go. Additionally, for this group, many admitted they’d never paraphrased anything before these lessons. Finally, some students found voice helpful for citation because voice enabled them to better understand that *the argument itself must be their own* while the citations are nothing more than evidence. These students explained that in previous attempts at citation, they had tried to use sources to make the argument rather than using sources to support their own argument. Using voice as a lens helped them see the difference. Table 19 offers sample explanations for this question in the students’ voices.

**Table 19**

Samples of Student Responses for: Please explain how it was (or was not) helpful for you to think about citing sources in terms of allowing the voices of authors to speak.

**Simple but Effective**

- “Yes, it was actually pretty helpful to think about citing my sources because, in other words, those words weren't my own but the author's voice.”
- “It was helpful to understand that I'm trying to take another author's voice and incorporate it into my own writing and that allowing another voice is cool as long as I credit the author.”
- “Citing sources helped me incorporate the authors' voices in my own writing. It just made more sense.”

**Accountability**

- “It was helpful for me because instead of seeing citing as a chore, I now see it as giving credit where it's due.”
- “Citing has always been a chore, something I had to do without understanding why. The voice angle helps justify the work of quoting.”

- **Table 19 Continued**

**Accountability continued**

- “I always hated citing (and honestly still do) but I better understand why sometimes I need a direct quote and sometimes a paraphrase is cool. Like sometimes my readers need to hear the voice and words of the person I'm quoting and sometimes they just need to hear the idea.”

**Choosing to Quote or Paraphrase**

- “When I considered how powerful a point and delivery my source had made, it became obvious who was quote-worthy. This allowed me to minimize the quotes in my paper, which led to a more continuous voice of my own.”
- “This approach was very helpful as it made it very clear what should and should not be cited. When it is necessary to call in ideas from another author, you were using their voice and you had to make that clear.”
- “I think it was helpful to think about this because when you cite sources you want to present it in your own voice, but you don't want to take away from what they are saying. This is especially true if you're directly citing from an extremely well known person as their writing would strengthen your argument. So directly cite that voice instead of forcing it into your own voice.”
- “Very helpful! Certain aspects of an author's writing should be shown verbatim and cited. This also makes my writing more powerful. Due to not trying to use the author's thoughts in my less impressive words.”

**Knowing the Argument Must Be Their Own**

- “It is helpful because they are not your words. You are using the author's voice to back your own up. You can't make an argument by only using other people's ideas. The argument has to come from you and needs to be in your voice. The other voices are support.”
- “In terms of citing the sources, it shows that you know what you are doing as a writer. Voice also helps you express yourself as a writer when you use other authors and cite them and then go back and talk about the information because it shows that you know what you're writing about. I never really understood how to cite like that, to make it support me instead of being the main thing.”

### **How well did you manage to insert your own voice in your academic argument?**

The third open ended question asked students to reflect upon how well they managed to include voice for their academic arguments. Admittedly, I did not word this question well. The question reads, “How well do you think you managed to insert your own voice in your academic argument?” Belatedly, I’m troubled by the word “insert” in this question, and I wish very much that I would have caught my mistake much sooner. A better term would have been more consistent with what I used in their textbook chapter, namely “craft” or “create” or even “include,” as those terms are much more indicative of what I truly wanted to know. Regardless, the results for this question seem to indicate that a good majority of the participants felt like they managed to create or insert voice in their written argument. In fact, 76% of participants indicated they felt like they did well incorporating voice into their arguments. Of course, not everyone was that confident. Approximately 6% said they didn’t do well, and another 8% said they weren’t really sure if they were successful incorporating voice. About 10% of these participants elected to not answer this question.

Perhaps because I worded the question poorly, the answers were not rich enough to catalogue for differences. For the most part, students who provided answers for this question said they felt they had managed to use voice in a way that strengthened their arguments. This student’s response is indicative of the answers for this question: “I feel like I have inserted my own voice well. Using my own examples to connect back to the topic and summarizing in my own words gives me the opportunity to make the paper my own.” Again, I do wish I had caught my word choice error sooner.

### **What was helpful for understanding voice in argument writing?**

I designed the final short answer question on the posttest survey to identify the information and activities that were most helpful for students as they attempted to incorporate voice in their researched arguments. On the whole, 73% of participants indicated that something from the lessons on voice was helpful for them. Approximately 15% declined to answer that specific question, and the remaining 12% indicated that nothing was especially helpful. Of the 73% who identified something specific as helpful, three major categories emerged: *writing exercises*, *textbook examples*, and *connecting voice to citation*.

Of the 73% who found helpful the textbook chapter or the in-class instruction, about a third of them named *writing exercises* as specifically helpful. These included a Twitter exercise, a paraphrasing exercise, and a third writing exercise titled “I’m a Bitch/I’m a Lover” that we completed in class. Each are detailed in Appendix B after Chapter 5. Some students wrote “twitter” or “bitch exercise” while others described the activity. For example, one student said, “I found the activity where we listed things about ourselves helped me to find my voice and apply it.” Another said, “When we did that twitter exercise from the book. I realized my voice is all over my social media accounts and that I could do the same with this paper.”

For the *textbook examples* category, participants identified examples from the textbook that they found beneficial. Included on this list were the slide ruler example, Rebecca Moore Howard’s four categories of plagiarism, and the suggestions for when to cite, paraphrase, summarize, or “none-or-ize” (specific information is in Appendix A). Finally, for the *connecting voice to citation* category, some participants mentioned that drawing a connection between the crafting of voice and the task of citation was beneficial. One student said, “That whole voice+citation thing was actually pretty helpful.”

On the whole, I found the short-answer responses illuminative. Knowing that students were able to explain how their own conceptualizations of voice had changed throughout the course of the semester is rich information. Because they were able to identify subtle differences in how they understood voice and tone or how their knowledge of citation had deepened, I feel confident that participants did benefit from the voice instruction they received in this course. One specific piece of new knowledge worth further study is the disconnect between understanding voice from the often competing perspectives of reader and writer. Consumers or students of creative writing are familiar with the language used to analyze and appreciate the text; however, this study shows the disconnect between being able to identify voice in someone else's text and being able to craft it in one's own writing.

The findings from this study support the idea that teaching voice can enrich a student writer's conceptualizations of her writerly voice in ways that can help her craft a voice appropriate for a rhetorical situation. Since the findings from the pretest survey indicated only about 50% of the participants had received previous instruction on voice, and since much of that instruction was reader-focused rather than writer-focused, I argue we need to be intentionally teaching voice in our college composition curriculum. The benefits of a deeper understanding of voice can offer students ways to reconsider their own revision practices and provide them with specific techniques for revising focusing on issues like diction and syntax. Additionally, voice can provide students with another lens for citation that seems to have resonated with these participants.

I'll close this Key Findings section with the following points, all of which reiterate the value of teaching voice:

- Before voice instruction in English 1020, most participants were familiar with terms like tone, diction, and syntax, but far fewer knew how to identify or explain those terms in their own writing. After instruction, approximately 90% of participants claimed they could identify and explain those terms in their own writing.
- Before voice instruction, 18% of participants understood voice to be a combination of various rhetorical strategies. After a period of instruction about voice and its usefulness for researched writing, 82% of participants claimed to understand that voice is crafted through diction, syntax, imagery, details, and tone.
- Before voice instruction, 12% of participants claimed they did not know how to write with voice, and 10% claimed they did not actually know what voice signified. After a period of instruction about voice, those numbers dropped to 0%. In other words, after instruction, all participants claimed to know the significance of voice and how to write with it.
- Before voice instruction, 10% of participants chose an answer that indicated voice is connected to audience awareness. After a period of instruction about voice and its usefulness for researched writing, 74% synthesized information and arrived at the conclusion that voiced writing indicates audience awareness and respect.
- After a period of instruction about voice and its usefulness for researched writing, 76% of participants reported that they were successful at crafting a voice appropriate for their arguments.
- Finally, approximately 73% of the participants in this study claimed that either the textbook chapter on voice or the class time devoted to voice instruction helped them compose a voiced researched argument.



These student responses indicate that the teaching of voice has value. For students writing researched arguments, voice offers strategies for successfully incorporating source citations. Additionally, teaching voice as a way to revise by focusing on diction, details, syntax, imagery, and tone can only be beneficial for student writers.

### **Afterword**

As I reflect upon what I've learned from this study, I keep returning to the power and potential of voice when our students know how to craft it. Elbow told us that writing with voice is writing with power, and for some writers, this is an easy truth, but for others, the promise of power is unfulfilled because they haven't been given the keys to unlock that door. The tricky thing about writing with voice is that most novice writers need to learn how to do it—how to take the voice that appears in the cracks and turn it into something powerful, something that uses syntax, diction, details, imagery, and tone intentionally. Giving novice writers access to terminology and writing exercises to help them tap into their own interests and passions is one practical way to start teaching voice. Offering guidance about using voice to better understand when, what, and how to cite secondary sources is another.

The best experiences I had with this project were when I could listen to the voices of the student participants. Their written responses were rich and offered me wonderful information. I also enjoyed being in the classroom with them and talking with them before and after class. I'm so often struck by the absolute generosity of spirit our students have. Three participants in this particular study were especially generous of their time, agreeing to interviews outside of the regular class period. They taught me about powerful writing moments.

Powerful writing moments *do* happen for our students; they just don't always happen *in* or *for* the classroom. When I spoke with Jesse, Lilly, and Jack, the common theme of powerful

writing emerged in our short discussions. I asked each of them to tell me about a time when they felt powerful as a writer. Their answers uniformly indicated they have felt powerful when writing about something that interests them and/or something about which they feel knowledgeable. Rarely have those times of feeling powerful come from scholarly writing situations. Instead, Jesse told me he felt powerful when he wrote what he called a “biography” of a friend who committed suicide. He said,

I had a friend take their life last year in my first semester at college. We had gone to high school together and were in the same (college) English class and it felt wrong with him no longer being there...and no one having really known him in our English class. So I wrote a little biography of him for our class, and I felt power as if I was doing him some good.

Jesse’s memorial for his friend offered him a tangible way to show how important his friend had been, and this act of creating and memorializing his friend also offered Jesse a sense of positive self-efficacy in knowing that his words held importance for his classmates. I asked Jesse if he’d kept a copy of the memorial, and he said that he’d actually printed out copies for everyone in the class and had shared it with his friend’s family as well. Even for this digital generation, there is power in the tangible written word—and this seems like something worth considering. I want to know about my students’ powerful writing moments, and I want to ask if they have tangible evidence of those experiences. Did they save a screenshot? Print out a paper and put it on the wall? How do we memorialize our own moments of powerful writing? What do we do with the evidence? These are questions I someday want to explore.

From the second class, Lilly told me that she felt powerful when she wrote her own fan-fiction novella. She said, “I was once heavily involved in a community of online fan fiction. I

wrote a novella and it took off with 75,000 hits. After that, I was more confident and felt encouraged to use my own voice, my own opinions, and I felt powerful.”

When I asked her if her confidence came from the act of writing or from the online community, she said, “I’m not sure. I think, um, I think that once I realized other people liked my writing, their appreciation just sort of made me more confident whether I was writing for the fan fiction community or for class.” She added, “But the writing also was something I *wanted* to do,” Lilly emphasized that word “wanted” and also said, “like I would not do my homework because writing about those characters in my head was just, well, it made me feel important and creative and like I was doing something good.” This idea of writing being something Lilly *wanted to do* is another idea I want to explore with students. When does writing feel so important or so creative or so positive that we absolutely want to compose? What is it about such writing that makes us feel so good? How much of these good feelings are because we are expressing our passions? How much of this is *voice*? These are more questions I someday want to explore.

From the third class, Jack told me he felt powerful when he writes music and song lyrics. Jack said, “I feel powerful as a writer when I write music. I think this is because there is no one but me governing over what I write, and I have complete reign over the creative aspects. Voice also plays a role because I can use differing voices for the messages I am conveying.” When I asked Jack if songwriting made him a better academic writer, he laughed and said, ‘Honestly probably not. I mean, I’m not so great with the grammar and punctuation of academic writing, but it’s really more that I don’t care much about the academic writing. That’s more like just a task. Music is more my soul.’”

I am struck by this idea of writing something from the soul, from those parts of the human existence that, for many, never truly see the light of day. Jack was a performer, a poet, a

songwriter. He made an entrance when he entered a room. He had a confident air, almost a swagger about him. Not everyone has that type of confidence, and so I wonder how can I help non-Jack types write from their souls? Can voice help with this? Can voice smooth over those academic expectations that Jack doesn't care for? Can voice allow even academic writing to be soulful writing? See? More questions I want to answer.

I am struck again, as I reflect upon these students, that their senses of agency and self-efficacy may not be tied to academic writing but can definitely be seen in the writing they choose to do for themselves or for those they love. On the surveys for this study, both pretest and posttest responses indicated that participants see writing as powerful when the writing applies to them in some way—when they find the topic interesting and are personally invested. Albert Bandura's theory on self-efficacy posits that a person's perceived self-efficacy, or her belief that she is (or is not) capable of successfully performing a task, has great impact on a person's learning experiences. Jennifer Coon, Laura Gabrion, and Rachel Smydra explain that Bandura's theory has been adopted by writing scholars as a “useful framework because it works concurrently with social constructivist and writing process methodologies to nurture substantive development in students' writing and their beliefs about writing” (82). They suggest that self-efficacy often results when students are comfortable, when activities are engaging, and when lessons include self-reflection. Coon, Gabrion, and Smydra believe that helping students develop positive self-efficacy in writing tasks leads to better student writing. They call on Bandura's theory to suggest that students with strong self-efficacy are often better writers than their peers who have a lower sense of self-efficacy.

Jesse, Lilly, and Jack, along with their classmates, may not be using the word “agency” in their explanations; they may not know what “self-efficacy” is, but it is undeniable that their

moments of feeling powerful as writers are deeply rooted in moments of satisfaction—moments of feeling as though their writing matters and has some sort of direct outcome or effect. It is also clear that such writing is difficult to create in a traditional classroom setting. This leads me to wonder, what do we do with this information?

Paul Lynch begins his book *After Pedagogy: The Experience of Teaching* with an explanation of the “Monday Morning Question,” essentially the question that all writing teachers ask when presented with a new theory or idea: “but what am I supposed to do with it when the students show up on Monday morning?” (xi). Lynch’s Monday Morning Question can, as he says, invite inquiry and create space for innovation, but much better than the Monday Morning Question is Lynch’s Tuesday Morning Question: “what do we do on Tuesday morning with the experience of Monday morning?” (xviii). In a review of Lynch’s *After Pedagogy* text, William Duffy states, “We have grown accustomed to imagining pedagogy as something that gets worked out *before* we enter the classroom, but such inquiry is often more valuable *afterward*” or after the teaching is done (90) [emphasis in original]. Lynch and Duffy both argue for a pedagogy that values experience, the classroom as a site of learning, and reflective practices to continually learn from and improve upon teaching experiences. I believe this study leans into those ideals.

In the conclusion for Hashimoto’s “Voice as Juice,” he writes, “The term ‘voice’ has many uses and I’m not suggesting that we abandon it completely. I am suggesting, though, that we ought to be careful when we tell students that we ‘can’t hear’ their ‘voices’ or when we tell them that ‘good’ writing always has a ‘voice’ and bad writing is ‘voiceless’” (79). He is not wrong. We *do* need to be careful. We need to be conscientious. We need to be specific about what we want students to know and understand. We need a pedagogy of knowing. We need to teach voice as another rhetorical function, as another way to enhance their writing.

However, Hashimoto *is* wrong when he mocks the value of voice. When Hashimoto writes about undergraduates being taught by instructors like myself who believe in the power of voice, he is wrong to say, even facetiously, that such students “can forego external research, shelve new ideas, and devalue facts” (77), and he’s wrong to insinuate that writing with voice is somehow a back-alley “short-cut to excellence” (77). Learning to craft a voice appropriate for the context and audience is no easy task, and teaching students to write with voice should be valued instead of mocked.

After my soul-searching journey for how to teach voice, I’m an even more fervent believer, but now I have some sight to back up my faith. The findings from this study suggest that participants responded well to their instruction on voice, that they became more familiar with voice, that they found the instruction to be helpful in writing their researched arguments, and that voice as a lens for citation was something that they valued. I’m convinced now more than ever that it is worthwhile to teach voice as a rhetorical strategy for students attempting to write researched arguments. At the end of this particular study, I feel like I’m ready to try to answer that Tuesday Morning Question. It’s time to teach voice in FYW.

## Chapter 4

### **Disrupting Expectations: How Undergraduates Conceptualize and Negotiate Voice in Professional and Technical Writing**

#### **Foreword**

For this third and final study, the actors at work included more than the student participants and their professor, more than the survey and document analysis I employed. The actors included past educational histories, lost-in-translation exchanges, learning disabilities, difficult classmates, cultural values, and discipline-specific expectations. Bruno Latour would say the significance and effect of actors—both human and nonhuman—must not be overlooked in a study such as this one. In fact, he would likely emphasize that Every Thing Matters, or that “everything is data” (Reassembling 134). Ehren Pflugfelder stresses Latour’s “most fundamental” assertion is “both humans and nonhumans have agency” (117), adding that these nonhuman actors “can be objects and things, sure, though also animals, weather, political structures, institutions, ideological instantiations, laws, and other hybrid formations” (117). Disability studies author Melanie Yergeau might add that the agency of the participants in this study emerges from that which makes each student different or queer or contrary (6). For this study, the actors at work were ideologies, identities, languages, personal histories, learning disabilities, personalities, and discipline-specific expectations. The students in this study were new to technical and professional writing expectations, but many of them were also new to Western educational ideals, and one particular student challenged educational expectations and resisted conformity.

This fourth chapter is very much about disruptions and the unexpected. The participants, their interactions with one another and with their assignments, their ways of knowing (or not

knowing) voice—they collectively offer knowledge about how the disruptions, the unexpected, and the absence of voice can be a framework for better understanding voice.

## **Introduction**

I want to tell another story. This one is about Doug's voice.

Melanie Yergeau says, "Storying, then, holds potentiality" (25) and that storying, or narrating, or the reporting of ethnography offers narratives that are often paradoxical and resistant toward cultural labels and expectation. However, before I story Doug, I must acknowledge my own existence as what Yergeau calls a "nonautistic stakeholder" (2) who has somehow claimed authority to narrate an autistic story. I will undoubtedly get some of Doug's story wrong as I am not Doug. I have wrestled with whether the knowledge gleaned from Doug's story is truly worth the risk of appropriating his agency since I'm honestly not sure if I'll tell the story well or "right," but I do believe his participation in this study is important. I believe his embodiment, presence, and voice(s) deserve an audience who will see and value them, as Yergeau says, as examples of "cunning expertise in rhetorical landscapes" (5). Yergeau explains that because autistic students are often unwilling to participate or "tell allistics [non autistics] what they want to know" (23), the stories surrounding such students hold assumptions of impairments. Because of Doug's participation in this study, I don't have a story of impairment to tell. I have a story of what Yergeau describes as a "neuroqueer mode of engaging, resisting, claiming, and contrasting" (23). I have a story of disruption—one where the disruption serves to show that the expectations needed a good musing up in order to better see what held meaning and value.

From the first day I interacted with the participants who became the focus of this study, Doug made his presence known. My initial encounter with him and the rest of the class started



well enough. I explained the purpose of my project, asked for the entire class's participation, and passed out the initial survey. Doug read and signed the participation agreement, no muss and no fuss, but when he began to read the questions on the survey, he became more and more agitated. He rocked back and forth and used his pen to score deep lines into the cover of his notebook.

I made my way around the room answering questions when students asked them. Doug didn't ask me a question, not directly anyway, but he did continually speak, to himself but to the class as well since his audible voice was not quiet: "But I don't understand. I don't know what this means. Why can't I understand this? What does this have to do with this class? I don't think I have to do this anyway." As his verbalizations continued, his agitation seemed to make his fellow classmates uneasy.

I went to Doug, sat beside him, and quietly asked how I might help. He answered me while speaking to his laptop screen. He expressed his frustration that he didn't know what "voice" meant. He didn't know what I wanted. He didn't know why I was even in the room. He didn't know how to answer the questions.

I said that if he honestly didn't know what voice was, then he could just say he didn't know. There would be no judgment. He immediately began writing—large letters scrawled across the page—and then shoved the paper into my hands. He had written exactly what I told him he could write, "I honestly don't have an answer to this question."

Doug certainly wasn't the only student in the class who didn't know what I meant by voice. There were other students who left the question blank or said they didn't have an answer. However, none of his classmates became visibly or audibly upset over their lack of knowledge. Doug did.

Over the next two months of classroom observation, I noted that Doug often interrupted the professor during her lectures to express his thoughts, offering what seemed to be his initial reactions or understandings. Doug talked aloud to himself during class, no matter what was going on around him—whether the professor was speaking, whether the class was quietly working, whether collaborative efforts were taking place—he spoke:

“I just don’t understand.”

“This doesn’t make sense.”

“This is stupid.”

“But I worked on this last night and now she wants me to do something different.”

“It’s not fair.”

His classmates eyed him from behind laptop screens while he talked. His audible voice was hard to ignore. It was there, pinging around in the room. Regardless of the day or the activity within the classroom, Doug’s audible voice was persistent, ungovernable, and somehow tied up in the embodiment of the young man sitting in the class. However—and here is where Doug has much to teach us—Doug’s writing offered a very different voice. Doug’s writing is where I found a disruption, a disconnect, between the writing and the young man who had written.

His writerly voice was controlled and confident. It was compelling, knowledgeable, conversant. Doug’s writerly voice did not match the persona he embodied. Doug taught me my first lesson about voice in professional and technical writing: *diction, details, syntax, imagery, and tone work just as well in technical writing as they do in argument or essay or narrative*. The diction Doug used, the syntax that created a crispness and clarity, the controlled punctuation, the specific details he employed—these building blocks for voice created a professional and technical voice for Doug. *A professional and technical voice*. Even in the absence of

personality—or perhaps especially in the absence of personality—a writerly voice can be crafted for the rhetorical situation. This was the first thing I learned in this third and final study. It may be the most important thing I learned as well. The voice of the embodied author is not always reflected within the voice of a professional and technical writer, yet voice exists nonetheless.

I'll come back to Doug later, as he is interwoven throughout the entirety of this study. His influence cannot be overstated, and there will be more to learn from him. My goal for this project was to study voice in an environment where voice as a reflection of the author usually is not valued—to look for evidence of voice in writing intended to have little of the author in the text. Yet voice was there. Doug was there too, in the text and in the classroom. Five L2 writers were also there, and they brought a host of other disruptions that livened up the space. Two English majors also kept things interesting. Essentially, when I asked undergraduate writers new to professional and technical writing to help me conceptualize what voice meant in that context, they did not disappoint.

### **Purpose**

My primary purpose for this project was to see what could be learned about voice when the rhetorical situation valued the *absence* of the very qualities the first-year writing participants believed constituted voice: personality, passion, individuality, and writing that “sounds like the writer.” I wondered if writing that expressly featured a *lack* of such qualities could teach me anything about voice. I wondered if students in a class for professional and technical writing would also conceptualize voice in ways that were similar to their English 1010 and English 1020 counterparts.

I focused this study on students enrolled in an introductory level technical writing course at the University of Memphis, seeking answers about how undergraduates might conceptualize

voice and if those concepts needed to be negotiated for professional and technical writing situations. To my knowledge, no previous study has expressly asked undergraduates to explain how they negotiate voice in their own writing for technical writing purposes, which makes the study itself both unique and useful. Empirical voice scholarship associated with technical writing is somewhat scarce, but two studies do offer some illumination. Joanna Wolfe's analysis of twelve technical writing textbooks illuminates that such texts often give mixed messages about voice. Wolfe found a disparity in how textbooks address topics like audience awareness, style, formality, and active and passive voice construction. Her findings indicate technical writing textbooks "commonly contradict or fail to address" important rhetorical features of technical writing, features which include voice and style (354). While voice was not the specific focus of Wolfe's study, her results indicate voice can be a muddy topic for technical writing classrooms. Her research was helpful in identifying some of the areas of disparity between what instructors teach and what students understand in regard to voice and style in technical writing.

Additionally, Wolfe's research found a lack of general interpersonal communication skills, including both written and spoken communication forms (351) among engineering students writing for technical purposes. A similar study by J.D. Ford found that engineering students writing for technical purposes were unable to transfer knowledge about what are typically considered higher order issues—issues such as audience awareness, focus, purpose, and tone. Instead, the only knowledge transferred was related to lower order issues, most specifically formatting issues. Together these studies paint a picture of technical writing students struggling to transfer higher order rhetorical strategies from classroom to workplace. Perhaps a better grasp of voice could be a way to improve rhetorical awareness and communication methods because

writers who understand audience, purpose, style, and voice are stronger writers regardless of the rhetorical situation.

I entered this project thinking I might learn more about the ways voice is perceived in professional and technical writing. I believed the value of the study rested dually in 1) seeking concrete explanations of this abstract concept of voice and 2) in complicating or expanding the academy's understanding of voice for technical writing—as the commonly accepted belief holds that technical writing requires a removal or minimization of any identifiable or unique voice. I anticipated working with students, mainly juniors and seniors, who would be familiar with voice and who would have some insight into how or why voice might be mediated for a particular purpose. And I did have those experiences; however, I was also side-tracked and taught by the L2 writers in the course, and by Doug and his collaborative writing partner Jake, and by two English majors in the class who seemed to struggle with the expectations of professional and technical writing. While voice was the reason for my presence in the class, rather than the object of the study, voice became the lens through which I saw other important components of writing and writing instruction. As it so often does in writing, voice became the actor rather than a simple narrator. Observing how these novice technical writers learned to craft a professional voice taught me much more than I anticipated. I left this study with a rich understanding about how voice is perceived by L2 writers, about my own unintentionally ableist approaches to student with disabilities, and about the value of collaborative writing in the classroom.

The study's findings indicate the participants in this technical writing class were largely confused about how to define voice, were fundamentally unsure of how to identify voice in their own writing, and yet they were somehow confident of how and why they removed or moderated their own voices for technical writing. Essentially, the findings indicate general misconceptions

by the participants about voice. Additionally, the L2 writers in the study were baffled by the task of identifying voice in writing and had little educational or cultural background that prepared them to discuss or understand writerly voice. Finally, for Doug, a participant on the autism spectrum, the study illuminates a disparity between common perceptions of personae and voice.

The primary research questions for this study include:

- 1) How do undergraduates in a professional and technical writing class conceptualize voice?
- 2) What do these writers select when asked to identify parts of their own writing that is voiced and/or parts of their own writing where they've intentionally mediated their voice?
- 3) What justification do these writers provide when identifying voice in their own writing and/or when identifying areas of the writing where they've mediated their voice?

## **Procedures**

This study was conducted during the fall semester of 2018. The site of the study was English 3601, an introductory professional and technical writing course at the University of Memphis. English 3601 is described in the catalog as an “introduction to rhetoric and style of documents written by scientists, engineers, technical writers, and other professionals” with “extensive practice in writing reports, proposals, manuals, and correspondence.” The course was taught by a tenure-track faculty member with a terminal degree in professional and technical writing. Participants included seventeen students consisting of eight female and nine male participants; five of the participants were nonnative speakers of English. Additionally, two of the participants were English majors, while the remaining students came from a variety of other

academic fields. The identities of these student participants will be protected, and pseudonyms consistent with their ages, home cultures, and primary languages will be provided when necessary.

To determine how students conceptualize voice, how they determine their voice(s) in their own compositions, how they negotiate a voice appropriate for the rhetorical situation, and by what means those determinations are made, I utilized 1) a survey similar to those used in the two previous studies, 2) in-class participant observation, 3) analysis of student writing samples and student reflections, and 4) interviews. Unlike the previous two studies, I spent considerable time observing this group of participants, joining the class on five different dates throughout the semester. Comfortable as an observer, I even had a favorite seat—a red one that swiveled and allowed me to observe and participate. I knew which students would talk a bit too loudly when time came for group work. I knew which students would attempt to hide behind computer screens hoping they wouldn't be acknowledged or questioned during class discussions. I knew which student was habitually late because she came straight from work on her lunch break, and parking was a disaster on campus at that time of day. I knew which students would share snacks during class, which ones covertly texted during class, and which ones probably didn't have the assignment completed on any given day an assignment was due. Because there were far fewer participants in this study, 17 instead of 60 or 162, I knew the faces, names, and personalities. In short, I had a sense of *knowing* the participants I can't fully claim for the other two studies.

The survey, which can be seen in Table 20, included multiple-choice questions designed to elicit answers that displayed general understanding of voice. Note that the survey includes questions intentionally similar to those asked in the previous two studies. This allowed me to sketch connections between the three unique studies. In addition to the survey, and similar to the

study found in Chapter 2, I asked participants to attempt to identify voice in their own writing and to explain how they were or were not able to complete the task. I also conducted interviews with Brooke, Alyssa, and Jake. I'll share Jake's interview in this chapter and will explain more about Brooke and Alyssa in Chapter 5.

<b>Table 20</b>	<b>Professional and Technical Writing Survey Instrument Questions</b>
Question	Answer Options
1) In your past learning experiences, have any of your teachers taught lessons on voice in writing? (Choose 1 answer.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes. More than one teacher taught me about using my voice in my writing.</li> <li>• Yes. One teacher taught me about using my voice in my writing.</li> <li>• No. Teachers have <i>mentioned</i> voice, but no one has taught me how to write with it.</li> <li>• No. I don't know what you mean by voice. <i>No one has ever told me about this.</i></li> </ul>
2) For the purposes of writing for technical communication, how do you understand the significance of voice? (Choose 1 answer.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voice reveals too much of the writer and should be removed from technical writing.</li> <li>• Voice in technical writing is usually inappropriate.</li> <li>• Voice in technical writing might be appropriate. It depends on the audience and context of the project.</li> <li>• I don't know what you mean by voice. No one has ever told me about this.</li> </ul>
3) What is voice? (Choose 1 or 2 answers.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voice is what makes my writing sound powerful.</li> <li>• Voice is what makes my writing sound like me.</li> <li>• Voice is something that can't be taught: you either have it or you don't.</li> <li>• Voice is a combination of different elements of writing.</li> <li>• Voice is <u>not</u> appropriate for all writing situations.</li> <li>• Voice is basically the style a writer uses.</li> <li>• Voice is basically the tone a writer uses.</li> <li>• I don't know what voice is.</li> <li>• I can see/hear voice in others' writing, but I don't know how to write with it.</li> </ul>



Table 20 Continued	Professional and Technical Writing Survey Instrument Questions
4)When you “hear” voice in writing, what do you hear? (Choose 1 or 2 answers.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>h) I hear the writer’s attitude about the subject.</li> <li>i) I hear the writer’s confidence—or lack of confidence—about writing or the topic.</li> <li>j) I hear the writer’s level of formality</li> <li>k) I hear the writer’s respect for her audience—her understanding that she needs the audience to understand her intentions.</li> <li>l) I hear a liveliness or energy in the writing.</li> <li>m) I hear something like an accent in the writing.</li> <li>n) I don’t hear anything.</li> </ul>
5)When you consider your own writing or the writing of someone you know, when is the writing the most powerful to you? (Choose 1 or 2 answers.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) When the writing is personal.</li> <li>b) When the writing indicates the author’s attitude.</li> <li>c) When the writing has “normal” language—as in the writing sounds like the author’s speech.</li> <li>d) When the writing is energetic or lively.</li> <li>e) When the writing is about a powerful or interesting topic.</li> <li>f) When the writing is clear and to the point.</li> <li>g) When the writing has no errors.</li> </ul>
6)Which of the following terms have you been taught are significant for writing? (Choose all that apply.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Diction</li> <li>b) Syntax</li> <li>c) Details</li> <li>d) Imagery</li> <li>e) Tone</li> <li>f) Clarity</li> <li>g) None of the above</li> </ul>

## Key Findings

For the survey findings, I followed the same path I took in the previous chapters: using the questions as my organizational method and attempting to tie the new information to the old when possible. It’s still not creative, but the key findings I want to highlight from the survey are the similarities and differences among the three studies. Keeping the survey questions in the same order from the previous studies enabled straightforward reporting. Additionally, in the survey section, I have focused more on the comparisons between the three studies than on

attempting to tie the findings to outside scholarship as there is very little outside scholarship related to voice in professional and technical writing. I have also provided some student-authored definitions of voice when those definitions seem particularly useful.

The survey findings are first, then details from the document analysis and reflective writing answers, then more from Doug. I will pull things back together and fill in any cracks in the Afterword section.

### *Survey Key Findings*

#### **Past Experiences with Voice**

At least half of all participants in *all three studies* comprising this dissertation have never had an instructor provide lessons on writing with voice. Participants in the professional and technical writing course reported that 59% either had no previous experiences with voice, or their previous instructors had mentioned voice without specifically teaching how to write with it, while 41% reported one or more previous teachers offered instruction on voice in writing. Since this group of English 3601 participants is much smaller than the two other study sizes, the numbers themselves are not statistically significant, so naturally any comparisons are provided in very broad strokes. Having said this, I find it informative that the results support the findings from the previous two studies, namely that at least half of all participants regardless of the study have little knowledge of how to write with voice. Table 21 shows the findings for this question for all three sets of participants for comparison.

Worth mentioning is that of the students in English 3601 who indicated they had limited knowledge of voice, half of them were non-native speakers or writers of English. Indeed, all five L2 writers – students in their third and fourth years of college work – noted they did not

understand the significance of voice. Similar to findings from the previous two studies, the L2 writers seemed to be at a disadvantage when talk turned to voice in writing.

<b>Table 21: Previous voice experiences</b>			
	% of students in English 3601	% of students in English 1020	% of students in English 1010
In your past learning experiences, have any of your previous teachers taught lessons on voice in writing?			
Yes. More than one teacher taught me about using my voice in my writing.	18%	21%	14%
Yes. One teacher taught me about using my voice in my writing.	23%	29%	23%
No. Teachers have mentioned voice, but no one has taught me how to write with it	29%	42%	49%
No. I don't know what you mean by voice. No one has ever taught me about this.	29%	8%	14%

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, L2 scholarship on voice has largely determined voice to be a culturally biased concept privileging Western ideals of individuality and selfhood (Tardy). That the L2 writers in this undergraduate course were unfamiliar with the concept of voice seems to confirm that voice is not a globally valued concept.

Also noteworthy is the finding that of the students who mentioned multiple instructors teaching them about voice, half were English majors. The English majors in the classroom offered their conceptualizations of voice in ways that indicated they understood voice from the perspective of the reader rather than the writer. Additionally, much like participants in the two previous studies, Alyssa and Brooke included themes of uniqueness, personal history, opinion, personality, and tone when they were asked to define voice. Alyssa wrote, “[Voice] is how one

can immediately recognize a new work of a familiar author. It may also reveal where the author is coming from and what the author's opinion is." Similarly, Brooke wrote,

The significance of voice in writing is that it makes the writing more unique and also reflects the author's personality, character, and attitude. When I read a favorite author, I can usually find certain similarities in how they achieve voice, like their tone or the regular use of short sentences or hyperbole. It's what makes the writing theirs.

While neither of them specifically stated their definitions of voice derive from their training in literary criticism, both Alyssa and Brooke's answers indicate their understanding of voice stems from a readerly role rather than from a writerly role. This is also consistent with findings from the English 1010 study when students connected their perceptions of voice to having been taught voice for the study of poetry in high school. Interestingly enough, both novice writers and English majors in their third year of study hold Romantic notions of voice.

### **Voice for Technical Writing**

For the second question, I asked students how they understood the significance of voice specifically for technical writing purposes. Approximately 59% selected the option stating, "Voice in technical writing might be appropriate. It depends on the audience and context of the project." None of the students selected the option reading, "Voice reveals too much of the writer and should be removed from technical writing." This question is unique to this study, not replicated in the previous two projects. The results seem to indicate a rhetorical awareness that the younger, less experienced writers in English 1010 and English 1020 had not developed without specific voice instruction. In the English 1020 study, students were able to come to

rhetorically savvy conclusions about voice for audience and context but only after a period of instruction.

### **What is Voice?**

The key finding for the third question is that, *among all three studies*, “Voice is what makes my writing sound like me” was chosen most often among all participants. For the English 3601 study, this question required participants to select two answers that best define or signify the importance of voice. Among the 17 students, 34 selections were made. The top three selections were:

- Voice is what makes my writing sound like me (52%)
- Voice is basically the style a writer uses (47%)
- I don’t know what voice is (29%)

Table 22 illustrates the similarities from this study with those from the previous two studies. The English 3601 results are provided alongside those of participants in the English 1020 and English 1010 studies. While again, the sample size prohibits true generalization, it seems significant that “Voice is what makes my writing sound like me” was clearly chosen by the most participants in all three studies. Also quite interesting is the steady decline of those percentages from English 1010, to English 1020, to English 3601. While it is still the most commonly held conceptualization, more participants at the beginning of their college career (80%) chose this answer than students later in their college careers (53%). This possibly indicates growth in rhetorical awareness for those older students.

Worth noting is that the percentage of L2 writers in the current study is approximately 29% of the total participants, and the percentage of participants who chose “I don’t know what voice is” is also 29%. This is not a coincidence. Since there is no data from the English 1010 or English

1020 study tracking numbers of L2 writers, no specific comparisons can be made, but I would argue that the higher percentage of students unaware of the significance of voice is directly tied to the number of L2 writers in this study.

<b>Table 22: What is voice?</b>	English 3016	English 1020	English 1010
	% of students	% of students	% of students
What is voice? (Circle one or two answers that correctly reflect your understanding.)			
Voice is what makes my writing sound like me	53%	67%	80%
Voice is basically the tone a writer uses	24%	35%	54%
Voice is basically the style a writer uses	47%	33%	33%
Voice is what makes my writing sound powerful	12%	33%	40%
Voice is a combination of different elements of writing	18%	18%	9%
I can see/hear voice in others' writing, but I don't know how to write with it	18%	12%	16%
I don't know what voice is	30%	10%	14%
Voice is something that can't be taught; you either have it or you don't	0%	7%	13%
Voice is NOT appropriate for all writing situations	0%	5%	n/a

### **What Do You Hear?**

The key finding for the fourth question is that the top three choices for this study's participants were also the top three choices for the previous two studies. This question asked participants "When you 'hear' voice in writing, what do you hear?" Again the 17 students made a total of 34 selections. As in the other two studies, the top three choices that participants "heard"

were attitude, liveliness or energy, and confidence. See Table 23 for results for all three studies. Based on these three studies, it would appear that participants, regardless of which class they were in, have broadly similar conceptualization of voice, namely that the attitude or opinions of the writer come through the writing, that there exists a liveliness to voiced writing, and voiced writing projects a confidence (or lack of confidence) to the reader.

<b>Table 23: What do you hear?</b>	English 3016	English 1020	English 1010
	% of students	% of students	% of students
When you "hear" voice in writing, what do you hear? Choose one or two of the following answers.			
I hear the writer's attitude about the subject	71%	63%	76%
I hear a liveliness or energy in the writing	47%	42%	38%
I hear the writer's confidence--or lack of confidence-- about writing or the topic	47%	38%	57%
I hear the writer's level of formality	0%	13%	36%
I hear something like an accent in the writing	0%	13%	14%
I hear the writer's respect for her audience--her understanding that she needs the audience to understand her intentions	12%	10%	25%
I don't hear anything	24%	3%	10%

Additionally, I want to point out that for the English 3601 study, 0% of the participants indicated that they hear formality or an accent in voiced writing, while 24% indicated that they don't hear anything. Again, I believe these results are influenced by the L2 writers in the study.

## When is Writing Powerful?

This question asked, “When you consider your own writing or the writing of someone you know, when is the writing the most powerful to you?” For the participants in the professional and technical writing class, the top four answers indicated that writing is powerful when it is:

- About a powerful or interesting topic 65%
- Clear and to the point 47%
- Personal 35%
- Lively or energetic 29%

<b>Table 24: When is writing powerful?</b>	English 3601	English 1020
When you consider your own writing or the writing of someone you know, when do you think the writing is the most powerful? (Circle one or two answers)		
when the writing is personal	35%	52%
when the writing is about a powerful or interesting topic	65%	47%
when the writing is clear and to the point	47%	33%
when the writing indicates the author's attitude	6%	22%
when the writing is energetic or lively	29%	20%
when the writing has 'normal' language--as in the writing sounds like the author's speech	18%	8%
when the writing has no errors	0%	0%

Table 24 illustrates the similarities and differences between the English 1020 and English 3601 study (this question was not asked for the English 1010 study). The top three answers for both groups were the same, i.e. participants saw powerful writing when it was personal, about a



powerful or interesting topic, and clear and to the point. Also, the same for both studies was that no participants (0%) in either group chose the answer that indicates “when the writing has no errors” it is powerful.

### Terminology

Table 25 illustrates the similarities and differences between the English 3601 and English 1020 classes in how they understood specific terminology.

<b>Table 25: Terms significant for writing</b>					
	English 3601	English 3601		English 1020	English 1020
	% of students choosing the <b>word as significant</b> for writing	<b>% of students who can identify and explain term in their writing</b>		% of students choosing the <b>word as significant</b> for writing	<b>% of students who can identify and explain term in their writing</b>
Tone	88%	59%		90%	75%
Imagery	59%	47%		73%	78%
Diction	59%	35%		72%	43%
Details	71%	59%		68%	73%
<b>Clarity</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>82%</b>		68%	55%
Syntax	82%	41%		58%	40%
none of the above	0%	0%		2%	2%

The questions asked students to identify specific terms they’ve been taught are significant for writing, and then to choose which of those terms they could identify and explain in their own writing. This question was also included in the English 1020 study, and the same terms were

used: diction, syntax, details, imagery, tone, and clarity. Students were encouraged to select any and all terms that applied. For this group of technical writing participants, “clarity” was the only term selected by all 17 students as something they’d been taught was significant for writing, meaning 100% of them identified “clarity” as a term important for writing, and of those students, 82% stated they could identify and explain clarity in their own writing.

Table 25 shows the results from the current study compared with the results from the English 1020 study. For the most part, participants recognized a term more often than they were able to apply or define it. The top three terms deemed significant for writing for this study were “clarity,” “tone,” and “syntax,” while the English 1020 participants ranked the terms with “tone” at the top, followed by “imagery” and “diction.”

### **Survey Summary**

On the whole, the survey offered support for the findings from the previous two studies as can be seen in these primary take-away points:

- In all three studies, at least half of the participants had never had previous instruction on voice.
- In all three studies, participants believed that voiced writing is writing that sounds like them.
- In all three studies, participants said they “heard” attitude, energy, and confidence when they encountered voice in writing.
- In the English 1020 and English 3601 studies, participants saw a connection between powerful writing and writing that is both personal and interesting to them.
- The only question on the survey for the English 3601 study uniquely focused on technical and professional writing indicated that students in the upper level class might have more

rhetorical knowledge of the appropriateness of voice for a particular rhetorical situation than did their younger counterparts.

- In the English 1020 and English 3601 studies, when participants recognized a term as significant for voice, they were less likely to be able to apply or identify the term in writing—they recognized the words but were less confident in what to do with them.

### *Students' Analyses of Their Own Voices Key Findings*

As I did for the English 1010 study, I asked the English 3601 participants to read their own writing, try to identify their own voices, and then to explain how they completed the task. At the end of the semester, I gave students copies of two documents they'd composed for the class, a technical instruction paper and a collaboratively written technical explanation. I then asked them to evaluate their writing with an eye for voice. Specifically, their instructions were: "Please read over your own writing sample(s). **Underline** any part of the writing that you believe has a quality of voice in it. **Circle** any part of the writing where you deliberately removed voice or consciously moderated voice for this assignment." Additionally, students were asked to answer the following three reflective questions:

- 1) Why did you underline what you selected? (What makes this sounds like you? Are there words or phrases or rhetorical strategies that indicate your voice? Please explain. If you didn't underline anything, please explain why.)
- 2) Why did you circle what you selected? (Did you make a conscious effort to remove your attitude, opinions, or unique style from the writing? Why? How did you negotiate those changes? Please explain.)
- 3) How does negotiating voice in technical and professional writing assignments differ from your previous understandings of voice?

Analyzing what students chose to underline as voiced resulted in a general sense that students were unsure or felt unprepared for the task. They were simultaneously aware of voice and unaware of how they were performing with voice in their writing. There was a sense of confusion or uncertainty throughout their explanations.

The best example I can offer of this uncertainty comes from Shantelle who serves as an exemplar for her entire class. In her descriptive instructions for babyproofing a home, Shantelle identified parts of her writing as voiced because, she said, “The underline areas are some thing that I have faced with clients, some are things that I never thought would happen and they happen with families that I have to visit with. So I could hear more excitement around those instructions [sic].” The portions of her writing she identified as voiced are primarily instruction based and, while they may have been important to her, I didn’t really identify anything particularly voiced in them. However, there were several lines in her writing that seemed to hold her voice, yet she did not identify those passages.

For example, in Shantelle’s set of instructions, she explained that parents should protect both children and parents from slips and falls in the bathroom “by using nonslip mats in and out of the tub as well as on any hard-surface floors near the bathroom—chances are you’ll be chasing a naked, wet baby through the house at some point.” Her description evokes an image of a harried mother running after a naked baby, and her voice sounds like one who has the knowledge to back up the advice. Additionally, her use of the emdash provides a pause that replicates spoken voice. At another point in her paper, she writes, “Keep looking like a hot mama, but always move that flat-iron cord out of baby’s reach.” Again, her use of specific descriptions and word play like “hot mama” paired with the imagery of the hot flat iron seem to

capture her personae, liven up the writing, and generally offer glimpses of the writer; yet she did not identify these parts of her writing as voiced.

Shantelle was not alone in this confusion and is quite representative of the class as a whole. When I attempted to catalogue student responses, the overlying theme was uncertainty. Under that uncertain umbrella, four subcategories arose: 1) voice includes use of first-person pronouns, 2) voice holds errors, 3) punctuation marks matter, 4) L2 writers prioritize definitions over voice. I'll share findings using these subcategories as organizational placeholders.

### **First-person Pronouns**

The primary consistency I found in their responses was that a majority of students in this study identified portions of their writing that included first-person pronouns as being voiced. In fact, 75% of participants identified passages with first-person pronouns. As I stated in Chapter 2, empirical research supports the idea that the use of first-person pronouns promotes construction of authorial voice. Hyland says the first-person pronoun is the “most visible expression of a writer’s presence in a text” (351), and Ramona Tang and Suganthi John state using the first-person pronoun “I” offers a writer six potential identities or voices from which to speak: “I” as representative, guide, architect, recounter of research process, opinion-holder and originator.

However, Yan Wang and Mark Evan Nelson report that several studies suggest “that non-native speakers of English seem to prefer to use ‘I’ less frequently” in academic writing than do native speakers of English (9). This is consistent with the L2 writers in this study as three of the five L2 writers did *not* choose passages that included first-person pronouns. Wang and Nelson add that for both L1 and L2 writers, the use of “I” is often used to “reveal their identity” or “their personal feelings” (9) which would be consistent with the use of the personal pronoun among the students in this study.

As I said, this finding is consistent with empirical research, but it is also consistent with the findings from my previous study reported in Chapter 2. When participants in the English 1010 study were asked to select passages of their writing that seemed voiced, every single participant (162 students) selected passages that included first-person pronouns. Essentially, 100% of students in the English 1010 study selected passages with first-person pronouns, and approximately 75% of the participants in this English 3601 study selected passages with first-person pronouns.

Also similar to the English 1010 study, only a fraction of the participants who selected passages as voiced seemed to be aware they were choosing selections *because* of the use of first person. From the English 3601 participants, Brooke indicates her awareness when she writes, “I generally underlined the parts in which I used ‘we.’ These parts generally included an opinion I hold or indicated my participation in the process.” Likewise, Jake indicates his awareness of the use of first person when he writes, “This has my own knowledge and I'm using ‘I’ so it seems like me.” They were the only two participants with this awareness.

### **Voice in the Errors**

Also similar to findings from the English 1010 study were the students who identified their own voice in their writing due to errors. One English 3601 participant in particular, Lanie, identified voice in a paragraph because the paragraph *rambled*. She explained, “On the first page [...], I could say definitively that I wrote it because of the overuse of transition words. I have a tendency to use more than absolutely necessary. I tend to ramble.” Lanie seems to identify her voice because of what she deems a deficiency in her own writing—writing that is not concise or properly organized. This reminds me of a student in the English 1010 study who chose a passage she'd written as voiced because it contained a grammar error she often says in her speech, “me and my mom.” This reminder that students often find their own voices in their writing when the

writing is imperfect is important. We have continually seen examples throughout all three studies that students do not equate “good writing” with voiced writing.

For Lanie, her rambling is just one of those disjunctures Elbow speaks about when he discusses resonant voice. Remember that Elbow sees voice emerging from within resonant passages where the author manages to get something of herself into her writing; however, the very *something* might actually be a crack or “disjuncture” in the writing. Moments of fallibility where the writer peeks through can show a reader glimpses of personality, but the crack often disrupts what we might consider good writing. As I stated in Chapter 2, the cracks hold the writer, but the cracked writing is often flawed, awkward, short-sighted, incomplete—much like the writer herself.

### **Punctuation**

Another finding that emerged was the presence of a specific punctuation mark—the exclamation point—as a rhetorical device which holds an element of voice. About a quarter of the participants underlined portions of their writing that included at least one exclamation point. However, much like the unawareness regarding their usage of first-person pronouns, students were unable to make the connection between the punctuation and voice. In their justifications for selecting those portions of their writing, none of these students specifically pointed to their use of exclamation points as the reason why the writing seemed particularly voiced. Instead, their reasons for underlining the portions of writing including exclamation points were varied and unrelated to punctuation.

For example, Jamey wrote, “The parts I underlined were opinion based sentences.” He also indicated in the collaborative piece of writing, he and his partner “were able to include bits about how we felt about certain topics in the project.” His justification included concepts of

opinion and emotion, both of which align with the use of exclamation points, but he failed to name punctuation as the reason he chose those sections. On the other hand, Khloe's justification was not at all aligned with the use of exclamation points. She simply said, "I put in notes from my personal experience." There appears to be no obvious connection from her personal experience "notes" and the use of exclamation points. Tierra had no justification for underlining the portion of her writing that included exclamation points. She wrote, "I don't know."

While the participants seemed unaware of the power of their punctuation, Ann Archer explains punctuation adds to authorial presence. Archer says, "Bold face type, italics and punctuation are often used for intensification, signaling authorial engagement" (156). Such engagement signifies voice. Additionally, a study questioning the assumption that text-based communication lacks emotion or tone found authorial emotion can be communicated in text-based interactions through the use of punctuation—and the most common punctuation mark used to indicate emotion is the exclamation point (Hancock, Landrigan, and Silver 932). If authorial emotion is tied up in our understanding of authorial voice, then voice is connected to the use of punctuation, and these students who selected passages of their own writing with exclamation points were not off base in their selections.

### **L2 Writers' Preoccupation with Definition**

The final category for student explanations of how they identified their voices centers on the L2 writers. At first, I found Sohil's justification for identifying portions of his writing as voiced rather perplexing. After selecting a passage, he explained, "The definition. I always start my writing with a definition." I should note Sohil indicated on his initial survey he did not know what voice was. His response seems to confirm a certain amount of confusion. While his response connecting the rhetorical strategy of offering definition to the presence of voice did not



immediately make sense to me, I soon learned Sohil was not the only student to indicate that utilizing a definition is somehow connected to voice. L2 writers Kunji, Lukesh, and Saira all specified the portions of their writing that sounded voiced also had elements of definition. I'll provide their responses [emphasis mine].

- “I have underlined section 2 and 2.1 because I believe it gives a *definition* of the topic and where it can be applied.”
- “I am trying to talk to the point at the beginning and then *define and explain* it afterward.”
- “I used this kind of voice in my writing to present an attitude of generating information and *offering defines.*” [sic]

Clearly the importance of definition as a rhetorical strategy is significant for this group of L2 writers; however, I am unsure of the connection and can find no literature supporting this assumption.

On the whole, the student responses to the first reflective question about how participants identified voice in their own writing indicated a healthy measure of uncertainty.

#### *Identifying the Removal of their Voice(s)*

I also asked students to point out areas in their writing where they intentionally removed or moderated their voice for the professional and technical writing assignments. Somewhat ironically, while they may have struggled to find places where their voices were evident, they seemed much more adept at identifying places where they intentionally removed their voices.

With the exception of four participants, students indicated places where they intentionally moderated or removed elements of voice, and those students offered thoughtful justifications for such modifications. Their responses indicate measures of rhetorical awareness for the

expectations of professional and technical writing. However, I would argue that their conceptualization of voice is one tied to bias or opinion. In the following samples, the word voice could easily be replaced with opinion in almost all of them.

- “The reason I tried to remove my voice is because this was a step-by-step process that is not personal. It's strictly informative. My voice isn't needed.”
- “I could circle almost everything in the technical instructions assignment. This is because its purpose is to be a guide to teach specifics about a technical process. There was no room for voice.”
- “Definitely removed myself because the instructions were supposed to be straightforward, so I feel there was little room for opinions because it's a procedure.”
- “I circled my introduction on my technical instructions[...] My audience needed to know how to do something. That was the important thing.”
- “These phrases were just written to give a little more information and didn't need to be voiced.”

Doug, the student who opened this chapter, circled practically every section of his technical instructions. See Figure 3. He also seemed to believe voice and bias are interchangeable terms. He wrote, “I circled portions of the writing because I had to remove my bias to come up with anything objective.” Doug's comment echoes some explanations from the English 1010 study when students identified their bias or opinions as qualities of voice. In this way, the English 3601 study again supports findings from earlier studies.

Interestingly enough, two of the L2 writers connected voice to attitude for this question. Sohil wrote, “I removed my attitude of writing when I was writing warning signs. Because I wanted to keep the warning message as general.” And Saira said, “Yes I made an effort to

remove my personal attitude from the writing. I tried to keep it more general and information oriented.” Overall, the responses for this question indicate a higher awareness of the impact of voice than did the answers for the previous question. However, this awareness of voice is not completely accurate as students seem to be equating bias or opinion with voice, effectively treating the terms as interchangeable.

### *Identifying How Voice Differs for Professional and Technical Writing*

The third and final open-ended, reflection question asked students to consider how negotiating voice in technical writing differs from their previous understandings of voice. Not all participants provided responses to this question, but for those who did, their answers indicate a belief that technical writing is effective due to their knowledge and expertise of the subject

matter and that voice is not always needed. Their answers suggest they believe voice is a constructed addition to their writing, possibly an unnecessary one for technical writing. In these responses, the concept of voice seems again tied to bias or opinion. Their responses offer insight:

- “In technical writing you have a strict objective for what you are writing, so it can be difficult/counter productive to

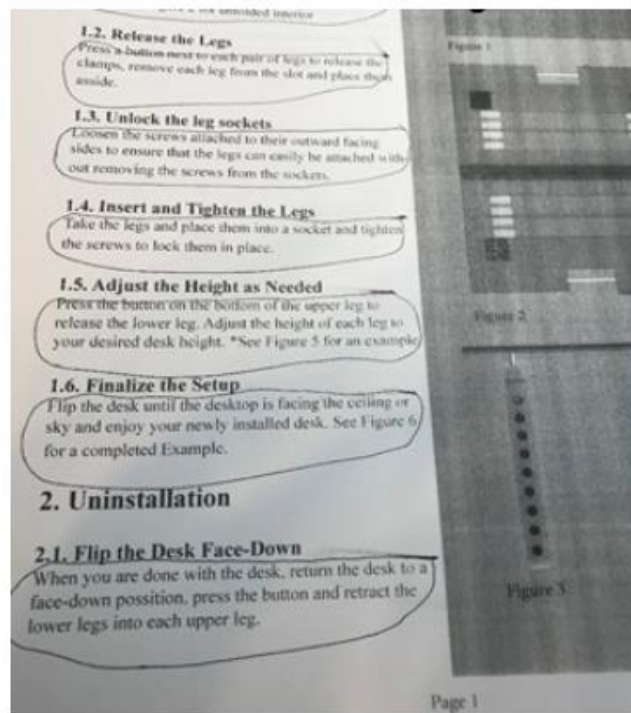


Figure 3

instill your own voice. In prose and other narrative based writing, it is easy to attach your own voice.”

- “Technical writing allows me to take myself out of the writing. I just used my expertise of the topic to teach my audience a new skill but they didn't need my voice, just my knowledge.”
- “The use of voice in technical writing can be differentiated from other types of writing due to the informational tone of technical documents. We explain processes rather than explain plots.”
- “In this class, I am trying to guide users or readers by simplicity, and by being clear and precise. This does not seem to be voice.”
- “Because technical writing is so specific in its target audience in comparison to other academic writing, there is less room to use voice.”
- “In other classes, I would only put my voice into papers when I was passionate about the topic, when I felt like it mattered. In this class though, I have felt like all these assignments are maybe more worthwhile. Like these assignments mean something, you know like writing memos and just the way that she's taught us to write as far as technicality goes. So it's giving me a better picture of what to expect in my future career and I find myself very passionate about that BUT I don't really think I'm putting my voice in this writing because the writing isn't really about me. The purpose is different.”

Even in this last response by Jake we see that voice seems to signify bias or opinion. Though when Jake states, “The purpose is different,” he indicates a rather sophisticated level of rhetorical awareness regarding technical writing. He explained he previously only wrote with voice when he was passionate about a subject. Yet now he is quite passionate about his technical writing

subjects, even envisioning how such writing projects will have direct impact upon his future job prospects. However, even with this passion, he does not see a need for crafting an impassioned voice because the purposes of the writing are different.

Jake was an important actor in the English 3601 class. In fact, the interview I conducted with Jake at the end of the semester helped me resolve some of the disruptions Doug had brought to the study. I'd like to revisit Doug before wrapping up this chapter.

### **A Doug Disruption**

From that very first encounter with Doug, I found myself struggling to figure out what to do with him in my observation notes. My first thought was to note him as an outlier, that I might exclude him because I was uncomfortable documenting what I was observing from his classmates, who either ignored him or snickered behind their laptop screens when he spoke. I was uncomfortable because, quite frankly and to my own shame, *I too* was tempted to either ignore him or to snicker behind my own laptop screen. I am not proud of this. Doug embodied the difficult. Difficult to include. Difficult to ignore. Difficult to place into a tidy box or to find a way to code in my notes.

When the instructor assigned a collaborative paper, Doug was paired with Jake. The communication between these two drew my attention during my classroom observation. Doug was obviously uncomfortable with negotiating shared ideas, but at the same time he was willing to engage with and even take some direction from Jake. Based on his previous classroom behaviors, I originally feared Doug would have a meltdown of some sort. Yergeau writes that an autistic's "queer asociality" essentially "fucks norms" (92), and I wondered if Doug's asocial behavior might inadvertently sink a collaborative project. Instead, he simply disrupted my

expectations again. He asked Jake what their topic should be and then fully accepted a healthcare topic, even though he stated he had no previous experience with healthcare research.

Doug's partner Jake appeared to be quite unflappable, which proved invaluable for the collaborative writing partnership with Doug. Finishing up his junior year and seeking a degree in healthcare administration, Jake's demeanor with Doug was both calm and accepting.

Because I was so drawn to the variety of the collaborative partnerships in the classroom, I asked three different collaborative groups for interviews. Of those I asked, one group agreed to be interviewed together (and will be discussed in Chapter 5), one group declined, and the partnership of Doug and Jake offered me a split decision. Doug did not want to engage in an interview or to answer any questions via email. Jake agreed to talk with me.

When we met for our interview session at the little coffee shop near campus, Jake told me about his own first encounter with Doug. He said, "So when I first met him, he came in class, and I certainly noticed his differences but didn't really think about it much. He has those outbursts kind of where he gets a little upset and I was like, 'I really believe he's on the spectrum...you know, of autism.'"

When I told Jake I was impressed with how well he and Doug were able to communicate and collaborate on their project, he said, "Thank you. Getting to work with him, I think it taught me a lot about patience because I'm not a patient person. I don't like to collaborate, and I don't like group work. But he gave me a new perspective." Jake added, "I think I also learned a little bit about how to work with people and talk with people who are like him. Who are a little different. Even if they aren't on an autistic spectrum, some people have that kind of mindset, and some people just aren't extroverted. Working with him taught me a lot."

I asked Jake to walk me through his group project, he explained when they first gathered together to determine their topic, Doug wanted to do something related to computer technology. Jake said, “I was like, I don’t have a clue. And [Doug] was like, ‘Okay, fine. What do you study?’”

Jake said when he told Doug he was a healthcare administration major, he expected Doug to immediately refuse to discuss any potential topic from the healthcare field. Instead, Doug said, “Well, what’s your favorite topic in healthcare?” And Jake replied he loved “epidemiology and diseases” thinking his answer would basically shut down the healthcare options for a topic, but Doug surprised Jake. Jake explained,

But Doug was like, ‘Fine. We’ll do that.’ And I was like, ‘Really, dude, we don’t have to do that.’ Then he called [the professor] over and was like, ‘We’re going to do diseases.’ And I was like, ‘Okay. I guess we’re doing diseases.’ [Jake laughed, shaking his head.] Doug constantly surprised me. I actually admired him for taking a topic he knew nothing about, researching it, and writing up a report that was very intelligent and very professional. Honestly, he wrote his part better than I did.

Jake said that, like Doug, Doug’s writing was surprising. The version of Doug who sat in class—the one who was disruptive and often antagonistic—was completely at odds with the composed and professional version of Doug we saw speaking on the page.

Jake said, “I think the first time I read his writing, I thought, ‘Whoa. Not what I expected.’ His writing is really nothing like what he’s like in person.” According to Jake, as Jake and Doug continued to work together, Doug’s writing continued to be at odds with Doug himself. Jake said that while Doug was difficult to communicate with in class and was unwilling to work together outside of class, Doug’s writing was impressive.

Jake mentioned that trying to get Doug to text with him or file share information was essentially impossible. Doug would only email Jake completed portions of writing and was unwilling to brainstorm or truly collaborate on ideas. Jake noted that Doug was deeply suspicious of texting, GoogleDrive, and phone calls. However, in spite of Doug's personality foibles, Jake repeatedly mentioned how much he admired Doug's writing. At one point in our interview, Jake said, "To me [his writing] sounds more professional than mine does. It sounds like someone who has more experience studying diseases wrote it. I think his writing is a little more interesting. He uses better words, which is ridiculous because he has no experience studying diseases." Jake laughed again but then became contemplative and said,

I think what happens in his brain, he just can't get out through his mouth and his actions. So initially I didn't think he was as smart as he actually is, but he's quite intelligent. His writing shows his intelligence in ways that his mouth can't seem to. I feel like if I had to write about something I had no idea about, it would sound so odd and wouldn't make sense. But for him, he took something brand new and was able to write up to the level I was writing at—and I've been studying diseases for awhile—and he probably even wrote a little bit better.

I asked Jake which of Doug's voices, the writerly voice or the audible voice, seemed more like him. He replied, "Well that's hard. I mean both the voice he speaks with and the voice he writes with are him. He's really smart, and that is in his writing. But he's also really difficult and stubborn, and that is what you hear when he speaks."

Jake's insight helped me resolve the tension I was experiencing with Doug's two voices. My observations of Doug and my analysis of his writing told me the same thing: Doug's writerly voice is quite different from the personae Doug exhibits through his speech and his actions.



Different...but still truthful. Opposite even... but still, well, *authentic* is the only word that seems appropriate. Doug is living proof that voice can be constructed, and that authenticity is simply too tricky to ever accurately determine. Doug challenges the belief that voice reflects personality. He disrupts the assumption that “voice sounds like” the writer sounds. He disrupts what we think we know about voice and writing. In many ways, he is representative of how this study, one focused on voice in technical and professional writing, disrupted my expectations.

### **Afterword**

I began this chapter with Bruno Latour’s assertion that everything is data, and everything matters in research. Actors act. A dried-up whiteboard marker, a squeaky chair, a professor with a cold, a language barrier, a difference in cultural values, a classmate who avoids eye contact—these all disrupt the research in ways that are impossible to predict.

In designing the study, I did not anticipate the inclusion of five L2 writers and a student on the autism spectrum. Because the population of this study was so small, 17 students, the presence and action of six participants who stand very much outside our comfortable myth of homogeneity had tremendous impact on the findings and even the focus of the study. Before I met the participants—before I knew their personalities, their accents, their stubborn streaks—I assumed the important findings would come from the survey and the document analysis. After all, no other study has asked a group of newbie technical writers to identify their own voices in their own writing, and those survey results and document analyses *are* wonderfully informative.

Yes, the data from the survey is modest, but it manages to reaffirm much of what I learned from the English 1010 and 1020 study. The fact that there were similarities in student conceptualizations of voice across all three studies should be highlighted and explored more fully. That the data from the document analysis hints at confusion and a lack of confidence from participants at identifying their own voices while, conversely, there is more confidence from

them in identifying where they *removed* their voices—this should also be highlighted and explored. *This finding speaks to my overall argument: namely that voice is constructed rather than found.* That the data specific to the L2 writers supports the findings from other scholars who have found that voice is not a globally valued concept in writing should also be more fully explored. I see significance in the L2 disconnection of good writing and voiced writing. L2 scholars have managed to separate these two ideals, which supports another of my claims: *voiced writing is not inherently good writing.* We composition studies folks really need to stop hogtying the two ideals together. All of these points are worthy of more time and attention, but instead, I want to focus the remainder of this chapter on Doug as he is representative of everything I didn't expect but came to value from this study.

Doug's part in the study prompts me to further consider how the cognitive psychology of writing intersects with the rhetoric of disability scholars like Melanie Yergeau. The relationship between thought and writing, between the expected and the queer, between the embodied and the written—all seem rich fields for future research.

Yergeau describes an autistic teen named Emma Zercher-Long who composes online in a blog space. Yergeau explains how Zercher-Long's "untamed body presents a rhetoricity [...] that diverges from her own purposive wills" (65) which occasionally strays from a written narrative. Yergeau explains that Zercher-Long offers an understanding of rhetoric not seen or understood in nonautistics. She quotes Zercher-Long as saying, "My mouth constantly talks different from what I think" adding that the sounds that emerge from one's mouth rely so heavily on the timing and the patience of the listener (65-66), hinting that the written word of an autistic might often be more indicative of that person's thought than the sounds that emerge from her mouth.

Charles Bazerman states “writing should be considered not only as a problem-solving process [...] but also as a constructive process in which thought is transformed, formulated, and constituted as new knowledge” (92). Because writing involves both logic and creativity, it seems impossible to remove thought, or cognition, from writing. The individual thought of the writer is what gives the writing its unique meaning; essentially *thought* is why one assignment elicits 17 different responses from 17 different student writers. As Bazerman says, while “we would be quite happy if all students turned in the same answer in mathematics, using closely similar lines of reasoning and work, we would be quite unhappy and even suspect cheating if all students were to turn in the same essay with converging drafts” (92). At a basic level, writing is nothing more than a visual display of the thoughts of the writer, and the thoughts of the writer are deeply affected by her brain function, her personal history, her relationships, her self-identity, her mood, her culture, and her native language. The importance of how a writer understands a writing task and how his brain accepts and reacts should not be overlooked.

Ultimately, Bazerman defines writing as communication and a knowledge-making activity, one “based on our understanding of human relations, stance, emotions, and anxieties” and “writing creates a public self, forming an identity that is potentially more durable, transportable and public than most other forms of behavior and action” (101). When the writer struggles with human relations, has a difficult time managing emotions, and presents a public persona much different from a writerly one, much of what we *think* we know about writing is tested. Yergeau argues that “autistic subjects stake and deny rhetoricity by queering what rhetoric is and can mean, by in/voluntarily middling and absenting themselves from rhetoric’s canons” and generally “messing with residue and spreading our neuroqueer dandruff all over your black blazer” (178). In other words, what we think we know about writing and rhetoric is

necessarily disrupted by writers who are atypical, and it seems there is so much to learn in those disruptions.

Like many writing teachers and scholars, before undertaking this research, I historically connected personality to voice, operating under the assumption that the personality of the writer *breathes* into the writing. These are pretty words that are true for some (maybe even *most*) writers, but they are not true for all. Doug taught me that. His personality did not breathe into his writing—and his writing was all the better for it. His thoughts, his intellect, and a careful attention to detail crafted his written text.

While I certainly cannot claim expertise on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Doug inspired me to learn more. We so often have students in our classes who present as autistic. Knowing more about their capabilities can only be helpful for any type of writing pedagogy. Elizabeth Finnegan and Amy Accardo explain that for many people with ASD, an “atypical executive function” is quite common, and this can cause specific problems with the “the retrieval of linguistic information for encoding, the generation of ideas, planning, and the monitoring of behaviors needed to produce text” (870), all of which are part of the writing process. However, Finnegan and Accardo note many individuals with ASD “tend to perform better in highly structured settings” (871). They add that while there has been evidence that individuals with ASD, specifically children, tend to have trouble writing when character development is required, as in for creative writing, it seems as though individuals with ASD are more likely to be successful in writing when the purpose and expectations are quite structured. For Doug in this particular writing course, the highly defined expectations and stated purposes of the writing assignments certainly worked in his favor.

Cheryl Scott, Denise Davidson, and Elizabeth Hilvert suggest that students with ASD perform better on writing tasks when there are “explicit lessons on what constitutes adequate detail, elaboration, etc., as well as peer evaluations or peer-mediated instruction focused on the same processes” which is very much what happened in this particular class (3423). Doug received specific instructions on form, content, style, and even white space expectations from his professor, and his dealings with Jake reinforced the specific expectations for their shared assignment. Doug only truly struggled when the parameters of the writing task were more abstract and reflective, such as the types of questions I asked of him on the survey and on the end-of-course reflection.

Additionally, Scott, Davidson, and Hilvert specify overall quality of writing is more likely to suffer for ASD writers when the writing topic is more abstract. Again, the writing topics for professional and technical writing were well suited to Doug’s particular writing abilities. Scott, Davidson, and Hilvert note that at the sentence and word level, people with ASD often use “significantly greater frequency of long words, and a marginally greater frequency of rare words,” than their non-ASD peers (3422-23). This is consistent with Doug’s writing, and also supports Jake’s comment that Doug’s writing “sounds more professional than mine does. It sounds like someone who has more experience studying diseases wrote it. I think his writing is a little more *interesting*. He uses *better words*, which is ridiculous because he has no experience studying diseases” [emphasis mine].

Doug taught me that my typical approach to teaching and interacting with students did not work well with him. I tend to ask open-ended questions. I like to ask students to think abstractly, to reflect upon what they’ve learned and what they still need to learn. I eschew prescriptive measures, preferring to give students enough room to think creatively, but for Doug,

my open-ended, reflective questions simply did not work. He did not/could not/would not answer those questions. Perhaps, wording my questions in a more direct manner, something like, "List the benefits of X" would have offered better results. This is something I need to remember for future research and for future interactions in my classrooms.

Another thing I need to remember is that disruptions are not bad and expectations should be challenged. I began this study with an eye on the role of voice in technical writing, but I leave this study with an eye on L2 writers, ADS writers, and novice technical writers who are all attempting to be better writers in a particular discipline. Through voice, I saw I simply did not know enough about second language writing to understand how the five L2 students in the class were perceiving writerly identity. Through voice, I saw that many of our writing students—those with disabilities or those from othered cultures—are often simply misunderstood. Much of what they think and believe is effectively lost in the translation of the American classroom where the neurotypical are privileged and the neuroqueer (Yergeau 27) are not. Because of voice, I realized my own emphasis on voice is sometimes misplaced and, quite possibly, hurtful unless I carefully consider the individual needs of my students.

The knowledge gained from this project offers composition studies scholars pertinent information on what technical writing students understand voice to be, how to better use the concepts of voice in the classroom, and ultimately whether voice might be a useful pedagogical tool in technical writing courses. The ultimate key finding for this study is that constructing a writerly voice that is professional and technical works much like the construction of a writerly voice that is lively or witty or self-effacing. The voice is constructed for the rhetorical situation using the same building blocks of diction, details, syntax, imagery, and tone. We need to stop *looking* for voice and start *building* it.

## Chapter 5

### Voice Stories: Personal and Pedagogical

My mother taught second graders how to read and write for 30 years, and then one day, she woke up from an afternoon nap and her ability to decipher words on a page was simply gone. Forgotten.

*Alzheimers.*

Her story is painful, still and always difficult for me to share. Diagnosed at 53, gone at 62. Her story is mine now, and in the telling of it, I have learned that a story without voice is a jigsaw puzzle with a missing piece, a set of chessmen without their king. A story without voice is a story without life.

Let me tell one last story.

I have a memory of coming home to visit my parents with a toddler in tow. My mother walked hand-in-hand out to the back garden with my rosy-cheeked son. When they returned, still hand-in-hand, I heard the slam of the screen door and the prattle of her voice mixed with my son's giggles. I saw that she was wearing only one shoe. She didn't notice. I didn't comment because I knew this part of the story. I knew this plot twist. She often misplaced a shoe—the left one, always, for reasons we could not fathom. Dad later came in with a small red sandal in his hand and lined it up next to a pile of other single shoes beside her spot on the sofa.

On another day, my mother woke from her nap with no voice.

She existed for several more years, but she never spoke again. No way to communicate. No way to tell us what hurt, what she needed. That part of her was gone, and only in its absence did I realize how vital is the human voice to the human condition. Her last years were spent in a hospital bed in what had been the dining room before it became the room where he cared for her. He refused to send her away. He refused to leave her side. He spoon-fed her pudding and

reminded her to swallow. He brushed her hair and told her she was beautiful. He kissed away the tears that so often spilled from the corners of her cornflower blue eyes. He performed the intimate tasks we don't speak of when a person is bedridden, and he sang her to sleep each day, always holding her hand. He kept her stories. She kept his heart.

One voice singing softly to another in darkness—this speaks of human connection, of commitment, of *presence*. Pam Gilbert believes we writing teachers are so enamored of voice because we have “a need to identify a human presence behind the text, to be assured that human will generated the work in question” adding that voice lines up quite neatly alongside Western philosophies valuing presence, self, truth, and uniqueness (196). Gilbert says a text that holds a voice seems to guarantee “commitment, authenticity, truthfulness” while texts without voice seem lacking in such areas (197). Possibly more insightful, Gilbert believes teachers of writing value “evidence of a student’s personal involvement in the writing experience,” evidence of a student’s “personal voice” (203). While Gilbert herself is not a fan of the metaphor of voice or the importance it so often holds in the writing classroom, she acknowledges that we writing studies pedagogues value voice because, quite simply, we need to know our students are invested. *We crave their commitment*. We require their involvement. We want their voices as evidence of life.

I see no fault in Gilbert’s assessment of voice. The writing most valuable to me as a daughter, wife, mother, and sister holds the voices most dear to me and offers me their commitments to love, to devotion. The writing I value as a professor of writing holds a commitment to the topic or the assignment or, quite simply, a commitment to improvement. I value such commitment. I value the voices that *show* me this commitment.



Nick Barter and Hellen Tregidga say that narrative is the key we use to find and unlock meaning in the world around us (5). They add that “narratives saturate our lives” (5) and in academic writing where “an objective, decontextualized, dehumanized research narrative may appeal to current truth claims,” offering the dehumanized often means we lose the truth of the story (6). In dehumanizing our experiences, we hide the key that helps us unlock the meaning. Maybe this is why voice is so interwoven into the experience and teaching of writing. The voice of the storyteller directs the narrative; the narrative unlocks the meaning.

As I mentioned in the introduction for this project, Pollock and Bono state, “We have two jobs as scholars: Answering interesting questions and telling the story” (629). Their idea for voice is the “human face” (629), saying such a face imbues human emotion and human action. They argue that the voice or humanity of the writer is necessary for establishing veracity and creating connections between the text and the readers. They reason that the art of a good story, of effective narrative, is dependent upon the human voice of the writer. Similarly, Thomas Barone contends storytelling is at the heart of empirical research, and he claims a researcher must use storytelling as a way toward a “determined scrutinizing of the world” (142). He adds that educational researchers should tell stories that both provide and provoke inquiry and self-reflection, stating that storytelling within the world of education should artfully yet honestly portray the stories of teachers, students, and pedagogy. With this in mind, I’ve chosen to wrap up this voice project by narrating three stories I’ve gathered from the many provided by my generous student participants. My stories will focus on investment, agency, and negotiations and how such broad themes can teach us about voice.

## Investment Brokers

In Chapter 2, I briefly introduced Mackenzie, age 18. Dark brown braids pulled up in a messy bun, she wore an oversized University of Memphis sweatshirt on the day we talked. She was a fidgeter, her long, glittery nails tapping a pen against her notebook, rubbing a thumb across the edge of her phone. Her foot continually kept time as she sat cross-legged beside me. She was also a thinker. If this story were fiction, she might play the role of the beautiful cheerleader who secretly loved debate and had to choose between the big game and the big debate tournament. But this story is not fiction, so when I interviewed her, she told me the story of a college girl becoming a college girl writer.

Mackenzie was much like many first-year writers. She may not have loved writing, but the act of writing wasn't particularly difficult or anxiety-producing for her. She made solid grades on her writing assignments in both high school and college. She believed that having a voice in her writing was important, and she felt voice offered ways for her to express her confidence and make her writing more powerful, but Mackenzie was also a little different from many first year writers.

She had discovered, quite on her own, that personal writing was a cathartic activity. Borrowing from Anne Ruggles Gere, Mary Sheridan-Rabideau describes the type of writing Mackenzie discovered as "*extracurriculum* or the everyday self-sponsored writing," or writing not motivated by academic assignments (262). Sheridan-Rabideau notes the value of such self-sponsored writing and the potential impact it has on the writing classroom. For Mackenzie, her self-sponsored writing was beneficial both in and outside of English 1010. She explained, "Writing for myself is something I haven't done until recently, but I'm journaling, and being able to be 100% personal and honest feels great because I can let all of my thoughts go on paper

without worrying about negative judgment.” Mackenzie said that journaling helped her clarify her thoughts and figure things out. Her personal writing, something new to her, spilled over into her academic writing in English 1010. She began to see that writing was a way to clarify thoughts and figure things out in academics as well. She described composing multiple drafts in English 1010, and admitted that writing multiple drafts for a single assignment was entirely new to her, but she found that with each new draft her ideas became clearer. She started to see *why* she was writing, and once the why became apparent, the other parts began to fall into place. When she realized the reason for writing was actually important to her, “then the paper came together” and she felt “more invested in it.” *Invested*.

Investment. This is a word with meaning. This is a word important to writing, invaluable to the teaching of voice, and integral to the story of a writer. When I asked Mackenzie if being invested in her writing helped her craft a voice for her assignment, she was not quite certain how to answer at first, but as she talked, much like as she wrote, she eventually landed on an answer that felt right to her. She said, “I think maybe if I care enough to do like four drafts on a paper and change things around that much, surely there’s more of me in there than some paper I wrote in two hours.” Surely. Without doubt. *Of course*, when a writer invests her time, effort, and energy for a writing task, more of the writer gets—as dear Elbow would say—*behind the writing*. Mackenzie-the-writer learned how powerful her investment of time and energy could be for writing.

For the English 1010 study, 80% of the participants indicated that voice is what makes their writing sound like them. Additionally, 40% of the participants indicated that voice is what makes their writing powerful. What if it was possible to adjust that narrative just a bit? What if, through the strategic teaching of voice, 80% of our students learned that *investing* in their writing

is really what makes their writing voiced and powerful? What if (and yes, this may sound crazy) we were able to get 40% of our students to actually believe that revising through multiple drafts is how they truly achieve power as writers?

Perhaps investment is one way to change our narrative on voice from something whimsical and magical to something strategic and tangible. Investing time means a voice emerges that is, as Toby Fulwiler says, “carefully constructed—composed, revised, and edited” (45). Fulwiler indicates that crafting a voice is making a “fuss over words, ideas, and especially rhythms” (45) so that the voice portrays a writer worth knowing. Indeed, if we change the narrative on voice and teach voice as an investment strategy, we might teach students to know that writing with voice is essentially rewriting and revising. Investment brokers like Mackenzie are needed in English 1010, yet it isn’t just English 1010 students and professors who might benefit from such a strategy.

In the English 1020 study, we learned that participants did *not* see a connection between error-free writing and powerful, voiced writing. Both before and after their lessons on voice, 0% (zero!) of the participants in this study indicated that careful, error-free prose holds power. Likewise, in the English 3601 study, 0% of participants indicated that error-free writing is powerful. Unfortunately, I did not include this question for participants in the English 1010 study, so I have no way of knowing if they too would have seen no connection. I have my suspicions, but “suspicions ain’t facts” as my dad used to say. Regardless, I have some concerns about the fact that 100% of the participants in two of these studies indicated no connection between error-free writing and powerful writing. While I certainly am not a red pen wielding member of the Grammar Police, I do value carefully polished writing, and I believe that completely avoiding the topic of careful editing is to do a disservice to our students. So I guess

the main question becomes: how do we convince students who do not value error-free writing that error-free writing is valuable?

Perhaps there is a way to teach students that voiced, powerful writing is actually an effect of invested writing—that a powerful, convincing voice is a result of their investment rather than a happy accident of writing. Student writers should know that the kind of voice that works in their favor generally only emerges when the writer upholds her responsibility to be attentive, careful, and conscientious with the way she constructs her words.

As I said in Chapter 3, Hashimoto admits “The term ‘voice’ has many uses and I’m not suggesting that we abandon it completely. I am suggesting, though, that we ought to be careful when we tell students that we ‘can’t hear’ their ‘voices’ or when we tell them that ‘good’ writing always has a ‘voice’ and bad writing is ‘voiceless’” (79). Again I say Hashimoto has an excellent point here. We *do* need to be careful. We absolutely need to be conscientious. We need to be specific about what we want students to know and understand. We need to teach our students to be responsible and reflective in the way that they approach their topics and their audiences, but this does not mean that voice cannot be taught. It only means that voice must be taught in ways that are value-added and investment-heavy.

Additionally, if we teach voice as investment, we are no longer asking students, novice writers, to find or discover a personal voice—a task that can be unwieldy for so many of our first-year writers. Nancy Allen and Deborah Bosley point out that writing with a “personal voice may involve taking a stance on a subject” and novice writers may not be sure what is expected or required, which often results in hesitant prose (91). So perhaps instead of teaching voice like a golden egg that students must *find*, we teach voice as an investment strategy that works for writers at all levels.

Professional writers and published academics fuss over individual words, over the rhythm of a sentence. We reflect upon connotations, denotations, and ironies of word play. We move around clauses, play with punctuation, add and delete...and add and delete. I'm convinced that this fussing is where voice resides. Revision is where voice is crafted. Doug Downs offers one of my favorite analogies for revision. He says that the continual effects of revision and redrafting create a phenomenon similar to driving with headlights. His analogy goes like this:

The headlights reach only a fraction of the way to the destination; a writer can only begin writing what they 'see' at the beginning. Driving to the end of the headlights' first reach—writing the first draft—lets the headlights now illuminate the next distance ahead. A writer at the end of their first draft now sees things they did not when they began, letting them 'drive on' through another draft by writing what they would have said had they known at the beginning of the first draft what they now know at the end of it. (66)

Downs notes that novice writers, such as the first-year writing participants in these studies, often see revision as a punishment, probably because the language used for revision is often punitive. In fact, I'd be willing to bet my favorite green pen that we know (or are) a teacher who has said, "I let them revise if they get a low grade" (Downs 67). While undoubtedly good intentioned, such statements only add to the stigma of revision. We must revise the narrative on revision. Teaching an investment in revision just might be how we teach students voice. Teaching students that voice does not appear with an *abracadabra* and the flourish of a pen is important and should be a priority. A much more valuable way to discuss voice in our classrooms is to teach students that a strong, effective, writerly voice is nurtured, crafted, and cultivated.

I want to return to Mackenzie before I finish this story, since she was the original investment broker. She gave me the word *invest*, which gave me this story to tell. Mackenzie's parting words to me on the day of our interview were almost too perfect to be factual, but they were truly hers, and since she represents our Everygirl Student for English 1010, I find her words especially hopeful and helpful. She said, "I'm a work in progress, Professor Bishop. I am a determined work in progress" in both writing and in life.

Would you just look at that? An invested and determined first-year writer learned that writing is a way to help her clarify her thoughts. She learned that revision helped provide her a sense of ownership over her work, and she learned that she is, indeed, a writer. What a great way to end this story.

### **Secret Agents**

In Chapter 3, Jesse narrated a time when he composed a "biography" that felt powerful to him. It was, he said, possibly the only time in his life that writing had ever come with true meaning attached. Jesse wasn't one to overshare, nor was he one to really offer his thoughts in class unless he was directly asked. He was a transfer student, and often wore the wrong college colors—orange and white—on our predominantly blue campus. While his contemporaries arrived for class in faded jeans or comfortable, athletic clothes and running shoes, he strode into the room wearing khaki pants and leather shoes with tassels on them. Patterned dress socks. A leather satchel instead of a backpack. I'm sure there's a story there, in the clothes he chose for armor, but I don't know that part of his story. I do know he was in English 1020 after taking some time off from writing classes. He was a sophomore. It had been a year since he'd taken the equivalent of English 1010. It had been a year since he had learned a lesson in grief.

I asked Jesse about powerful writing; he had a ready answer. He talked about a friend he'd known since high school. Quite unplanned, they'd ended up at the same college and in the same first-year writing class. On a campus the size of his former university, their presence in the same English class must have felt somewhat providential. Jesse did not offer many details about his friend or the sad circumstances of his death, but as I reported in Chapter 3, Jesse's story as a writer rests here in this moment:

I had a friend take their life last year in my first semester at college. We had gone to high school together and were in the same (college) English class and it felt wrong with him no longer being there...and no one having really known him in our English class. So I wrote a little biography of him for our class, and I felt power as if I was doing him some good.

In this story, a young man of taciturn tendencies mentioned it simply "felt wrong" that his friend was gone and no one in their shared class had really known anything personal about him. It felt wrong, and Jesse felt a responsibility to his friend and to his audience of peers to memorialize and offer evidence of a human life. *It felt wrong*, so he did what needed to be done. He fulfilled a responsibility, and in that fulfilment, he leaned right into a moment of agency.

Roger Smith explains that an "agent" with "agency" is a person with the power to effect change or to cause events to happen. He adds, "Agency has become linked to notions of the autonomous self and to the dignity or status accorded to a 'free agent'" or someone with the power to direct their own steps and make their own choices (3-4). So agency is, essentially, the power we want our students to grab ahold of so that they feel empowered to use their knowledge, passions, and voices for good, to effect change, to make their own choices. Agency is about empowerment. Kathleen Blake Yancey identifies agency as a phenomenon "at the heart of the



teaching enterprise” (416), and states that she is “struck by our renewed interest in agency, by our abiding interest in students, and by our sense of our students and ourselves as writers—and of the power that writing can offer” (419). I too am struck by the power of writing and by the agency offered through writing, and I see the development of voice as intertwined with opportunities for agency.

In the English 1020 study, 52% of participants indicated that their writing is powerful when it is personal, and 47% indicated powerful writing happens when the topic is interesting to them. In the English 3601 study, 35% of participants indicated that their writing is powerful when it is personal, and 65% indicated their writing is powerful when it is about an interesting topic. Clearly, participants in both studies identify personal interests as significant for powerful writing, for writing that offers them agency. Jesse’s moment of powerful, meaningful, agentic writing certainly came from a place of personal interest, but it also came from a place of grief that, of course, no classroom teacher would care to emulate. However, all is not lost. While it may sometimes feel otherwise, school sponsored writing is not inherently empty of opportunities for agency.

A research project by Michele Eodice, Anne Ellen Geller, and Neal Learner sought answers from college seniors about what constitutes a meaningful writing assignment—in other words, what do students consider meaningful and in what ways do those assignments offer them agency? Eodice, Geller, and Learner define agency for student writers as a phenomenon grounded in those writers’ experiences and in the knowledge that their writing decisions are theirs alone (34). The authors also offer a definition of agency emerging from a student perspective. They explain, “Agency, from the perspective of students participating in our research, consists of opportunities to pursue matters they are passionate about and/or to write

something relevant to a professional aspiration or future pursuit” (35). Additionally, students in their study reported that they were given writing projects that offered them opportunities to find and make meaning for themselves, as well as space for developing agency as writers in both general education and major required courses (23). Eodice, Geller, and Learner found that student writers are able to claim agency due to the instruction provided by teachers who have sought to create meaningful writing projects for their courses (36). Their research indicates that when a student achieves a sense of agency in one writing context, she believes the experience will aid in achieving agency in other writing situations.

Similarly, John Albertinti argues it is possible to create opportunities for agency within the writing classroom. He says, “Writing in different genres for different audiences may help to cultivate multiple writing voices and nurture agency so that a student can develop a repertoire of writing styles and strategies” (395). This is good news, right? It’s good that offering students opportunities to write in different genres within our classrooms has the potential to create moments of agency for them. It’s great to learn that when students claim agency in one context, they seem to have a residual confidence their power will come along into other contexts as well. It’s incredible news that our classrooms and our teaching hold this power-wielding potential.

I don’t know if Jesse will ever again have that sense of power and agency he experienced when memorializing his friend. It may be that no course-required writing assignment will ever truly feel meaningful for him, but it’s also possible that Jesse will find other opportunities to use his agency and knowledge about teen suicide for academic or community purposes. Eodice, Geller, and Learner found that students were more likely to report moments of agency when the required writing assignments for classes were flexible—allowing for creative freedom and a measure of student choice (37). Maybe Jesse will have another professor in another class who

creates room for him to use his knowledge, and in that space Jesse may find another moment of agency. I don't know the ending of Jesse's story, but I do know the story of another secret agent.

In Chapter 2, we met Emir, our walking contradiction of an athlete, gamer, guitarist who hated reading but spent hours reading on social media, who didn't consider himself a writer because "writing equals vulnerability," but who confided that the writing he posts on social media is "honestly truthful." For Emir, his moment of writing with agency came in the form of a social media post about his family celebrating Ramadan. "It made me feel pretty powerful," Emir said. In spite of the vulnerability of sharing his beliefs on an online platform, he wrote about something personal and interesting, and in that experience he felt appreciated and supported ("300 likes and some reposts" he told me with a little bit of pride), which offered him a feeling of power and an opportunity to live into his own agency. Eodice, Geller, and Learner point out that many students in their study described the importance of "community" both in and outside of the classroom (39). The support of a community has a direct impact on the development of agency. Emir offers the perfect example of a moment of agency derived from the support from his online community about a topic important to him. The result was a feeling of empowerment and a belief that his voice was heard and appreciated.

When Emily Strasser was an undergraduate, she argued writing courses should attempt to blend the personal interests of the student with the intellectual pursuits of the classroom (200). In "Writing What Matters," Strasser says, "Teachers of writing in all settings should strive to help their students write what matters to their lives, and encourage them to express their voices and tell their stories" (204), adding that "writing can be a tool for self-empowerment and expression" (203). Her argument, one written by a first-year writer, seems like the most obvious thing in the world *because it is*—the writing class *should* offer a blend of the student's personal interests and

the course's intellectual pursuits. Of course, the trick for writing teachers is to figure out ways to balance the learning objectives, program requirements, *and* the personal interests of students in order to invite them into moments of agency, especially when it so often seems as though any classroom writing assignment is built on a crumbling foundation of artificiality. Luckily, Eodice, Geller, and Learner report that 94% of their participants, seniors from three different universities, "indicated that their meaningful writing projects were written as a course assignment" (108). Ninety-four percent (94%!) found at least one classroom assignment to be meaningful enough to report on it for a voluntary survey. This is great news, and even better is that their research isn't alone in supporting the positive impact of classroom writing on student agency.

In a study investigating the effects of student engagement in effective learning experiences, Patricia King, James Barber, and Marcia Baxter Magolda found that students *do* find value in classroom experiences. They write, "Many students shared stories of classroom experiences and discussions of academic or current events with friends" as effective means for helping them develop a sense of identity that would effectively guide their decisions as young adults (113). Additionally, King, Barber, and Magolda report that students who were learning to rely on their own decision making, on their own "internal voices," were using experiences from their courses, relationships, and prior life lessons as important factors in making choices about how they wanted to live their lives. They narrate the story of "Stacey" who described the effects of an art appreciation class on her own self-perception. For this student, the lessons from the class spilled over into her everyday life, and helped her embrace her own creativity, something she had never done before. The class also offered Stacey a new lens for viewing her relationships with family.

The findings from this study demonstrate that what we do in our classes has value. In fact, what we assign, how we teach, what we talk about, and how we interact with our students is, instead, instrumental in how those students build their own identities. King, Barber, and Magolda believe that when instructors respect the knowledge and belief systems that students bring to the classroom and invite those students to acknowledge and respect new perspectives, such an educational environment leads to student self-efficacy, which they call “self-authorship” (114). The authors suggest that educators should strive to offer a variety of meaning making activities for their students with “flexibility and freedom from a ‘lock step’ curriculum,” and “a range of experiences for students” (116). The impact a writing instructor might have on her students should never be taken lightly. What we do in the classroom directly affects the shape of the identities our students are so carefully creating.

One of the four types of identity described by James Paul Gee is that of an institutionally decreed identity, or an identity provided to a student by a classroom, school setting, or a teacher. Gee’s example is that an active child may be identified by one teacher as hyperactive or disruptive while she may be identified in other settings as athletic. Arnetha Ball and Pamela Ellis explain, “In a classroom setting, an individual’s identity would emerge through the power relationships that exist between students and teachers” and add that “students’ identities are strongly influenced by their teacher’s interactions with them” (501). This is even more good news for the writing teacher who wants to help her student take on the identity of a writer and take hold of the mantle of agency, but it is also important to note that, according to Ball and Ellis, the “pedagogical strategies, approaches to assessments, and the classroom context” (503) can all powerfully affect the identities students choose for themselves. Most important to the teaching of voice and to the agency of student writers is this argument by Ball and Ellis,

Whether an individual sees him or herself as a writer will be influenced by whether others respond to them as if they are a writer. Particularly within the classroom context, *teachers bear a heavy responsibility in confirming or disconfirming this identity for students*. Simply stated, classrooms play a large role in how students come to see themselves as writers and how they come to perceive the role of writing in their daily lives [emphasis mine]. (504)

It is our duty to confer the title of “Writer” upon our students. It is our duty to offer them opportunities within the classroom. It is our privilege, as Kevin Roozen says, to help students see themselves as members of the academic writing community. Our job as writing instructors is to place our students in conversation with other writers and help them figure out how they can add something worthwhile to the conversational threads. Eodice, Geller, and Learner assert that a pedagogy prioritizing meaningful writing projects offering students access to agency is a “collaborative, knowledge-making effort” (113), one privileging student, teacher, classroom, and community.

I sometimes wonder how Emir will tell his Ramadan story in five years, or in ten years. Will that social media post still be the defining moment of agency he’s experienced as a writer? Whether it is or not, I’d like to think his moment of powerful writing has had an impact on his self-perception—on his identity. Kevin Roozen argues that writing is not a skill-set but an identity-maker. He says, “The act of writing, then, is not so much about using a particular set of skills as it is about becoming a particular kind of person, about developing a sense of who we are” (51). Emir’s experience with writing to proclaim his faith and share with his community the importance of a religious holiday was a moment that made him feel powerful because he was brave and truthful. Jesse’s experience with writing to memorialize his friend was an act that

helped him develop a sense of himself and a sense of agency. Roozen adds that writing “functions as a key form of socialization” for a wide variety of settings, including academic, familial, political, and community organizations. Writing offers a mechanism for asserting our beliefs, claiming our values, and stepping into our identities. Both voice and agency are intertwined in such ideals.

Before I wrap up the stories of my not-so-secret agents, I want to point out the supporting cast members who so often move behind agency’s scenes—reflection and responsibility. In Jesse’s story, reflection deserves its own line in the closing credits. Jesse embodies reflection for us—reflecting on his friend, on his own feelings, reflecting upon his sense of duty to both friend and classmates. Reflection is the character in his story who leads Jesse to a writerly act offering him agency. The “biography” Jesse wrote was a reflection to friendship, but this act of writing also speaks to responsibility. Jesse felt beholden to his friend to show others that a meaningful life had been lived and lost, and he honored that obligation. Teaching reflection, encouraging responsibility to both the audience and the subject, and offering moments of agency are all vital to the teaching of writing and to the cultivation of a strong writerly voice.

In the English 1020 study reported upon in Chapter 3, the pretest indicated a distinct lack of reflection among the participants, but the posttest showed that participants had learned about both reflection and responsibility during their time studying voice. On the pretest, only 10% of participants reported a belief that writing with voice had anything to do with respecting their audience. However, after lessons on voice (lessons that included reflection, attention to detail, careful editing, and an emphasis on diction), the number of participants who saw a connection between voiced writing and writing with respect for an audience rose to 74%. In other words, after students learned more about how to craft a voice useful for argument, a majority of students

in the study saw a connection between voiced writing and the responsibility of the writer to her audience.

Jesse and Emir offer us stories that affirm the importance of agency for our student writers and for the voices they craft. Meaningful moments, personal interests, honest reflection, responsible acts—these are the essential elements of their stories.

### **The Negotiators**

This is a story of novice technical writers learning new genres, expectations, styles, and voices for technical writing situations. Like any blockbuster narrative, this story interweaves moments of Romantic expectations (big R not little r), insecurities, uncertainties, and ultimate successes. Full disclosure: I first titled this story “Know When to Hold ’Em,” because my parents loved Kenny Rogers, and I was feeling nostalgic. I justified the name by thinking that *surely* Kenny Rogers must somehow be relevant, and the story itself *is* about learning when to hold on to ideals or when to let go—but then I realized the year is not 1978, and Kenny Rogers isn’t that relevant after all. I needed to, well, fold ’em. As is so often the case when I’m stuck on an idea or in need of some insight, I opened up a search engine.

A deep dive into the Googleverse taught me a new word that absolutely felt too important to ignore: *Negotiatrrix*. Doesn’t that sound like a girl-power, kick-ass, movie title? I spent too much time on a negotiatrrix story, but it included fantasy and fiction, and this story is all truth. Sometime after the lyrics from that Kenny Rogers’ song finally stopped circling around in my head, I found my title. This story features negotiations. Negotiating genre, negotiating expectation, negotiating co-authorship, negotiating voices, and so I offer the story of Brooke and Alyssa who partnered to collaboratively write a technical description. They are the negotiators (or the *negotiatrice*—because how cool is this plural identifier?).



Alyssa and Brooke were roommates, best friends, and English majors. They sat next to each other in class, they shared chips from the same bag, and they leaned into one another in a way that intimated their closeness and trust, whispering, nodding, agreeing. When I interacted with them in and after class, they looked to one another for affirmation and finished one another's thoughts. They were both fangirls of tattoos, beanie caps, and local craft beer. They worked together on a collaboratively composed technical description about craft breweries. Their story tells how a collaborative voice is simultaneously more and less than what one writer can do alone. Their story also explains how technical writing is challenging for English majors in ways it might not be for students from other disciplines.

Alyssa pointed out an area of her collaboratively composed technical description where she and Brooke had deliberately removed voice. Admitting their earlier drafts included opinion, she provided an example: "Wiseacre brewery is the best (which it totally is, but still, opinion)." Alyssa noted that her collaborator Brooke helped identify the opinions and offered suggestions for removing them. She said, "Brooke was really good about keeping opinion away from that section." Alyssa also confided that when the expectations for technical writing became difficult, "Brooke helped me keep things in perspective. Sometimes I can get too passionate about my writing and can make it too personal or argumentative—probably because of my English literature writing background." Alyssa's background as an English major prepared her for writing arguments, for analyzing literature, for identifying voice in a written text, but it had not quite prepared her for technical writing. She was constantly negotiating knowledge—comparing what she knew about writing and what she was learning about writing. And in her collaboration with Brooke she was constantly negotiating her own presence in the text. She indicated that

removing her voice was actually trickier than she'd anticipated, and she relied on Brooke to help with that task.

As I shared in Chapter 4, Brooke and Alyssa had specific ideas about voice at the beginning of the study, ideas that included perceptions of uniqueness, personal history, creativity, opinion, personality, and tone. Alyssa defined voice as the way “one can immediately recognize a new work of a familiar author. It may also reveal where the author is coming from and what the author’s opinion is.” Similarly, Brooke wrote,

The significance of voice in writing is that it makes the writing more unique and also reflects the author’s personality, character, and attitude. When I read a favorite author, I can usually find certain similarities in how they achieve voice, like their tone or the regular use of short sentences or hyperbole. It’s what makes the writing theirs.

As English majors, their conceptualizations of voice came from analyzing literary texts. They understood voice to function as an unveiling of the author, offering glimpses of character, bias, personality, and opinion. Brooke’s point that voice could be discovered in the use of hyperbole or sentence structure was especially astute. Clearly both Brooke and Alyssa had a firm grasp of how to read and identify voice, yet this knowledge did not seem particularly helpful for them as they worked on their professional and technical writing assignments.

Alyssa explained that the writing required for the professional and technical writing class had been “tricky” because of the emphasis on removing self. She said,

Writing for technical purposes hasn't been hard, not really anyway, as writing is something that comes fairly naturally to me, but I think the removal of self is where the tricky part is with technical writing. Removing the things I tend to do,

lots of long clauses and complex sentences, and intentionally writing for almost plainness...like plain speech. Like no metaphors or creative descriptions, and that stuff has always been an easy thing.

Additionally, in Alyssa's previous English classes, the writing she composed was generally persuasive or argumentative, often using first person. A survey question asked of all students in the 3601 study was "How does negotiating voice in technical writing differ from your previous understandings of voice?" Alyssa's answer strikes me as important for this discussion. She said, "In this class I was *forced* to write with a more neutral tone, more so informative and descriptive rather than persuading my audience." I've italicized the word "forced" because I'd like to reflect on this word choice. There is an important part of Alyssa's story resting in that word.

Alyssa was a student quite comfortable in her writing skills; she was a student who had experienced her fair share of agency in writing long before she entered the English 3601 classroom. Much of her empowerment came from what she said was a natural affinity for writing. She'd achieved positive outcomes with her previous writing experiences and was fairly confident in her writing abilities, yet in this new writing situation where the writerly self, her writerly voice, was no longer desired or necessary, she felt "forced" to write neutrally. None of the other writers in this study used a word like "forced" to answer the survey question about the differences of voice in technical writing compared to previous experiences with writerly voice. In fact, the words used by her classmates to describe the expectations in the technical writing class were generally either neutral or positive as can be seen in the following examples:

1. "Voice in my technical writing class allows me to take myself out of the writing. I just used my expertise of the topic to teach my audience a new skill but they didn't need my voice, just my knowledge."
  - "allows" indicates a positive

2. “The use of voice in technical writing can be differentiated due to the informational tone of technical documents. Voice is used to explain processes rather than to explain plots.”
  - neutral
3. “I try to write in the same way I speak. This class was a little different as some of the topics were instructional in nature so my voice wasn't really heard in it.”
  - neutral
4. “In this class we have to give information/instructions to the readers in a fun, engaging, and simple to follow way. So VOICE comes in play as we summarize the information and put our understanding on it.”
  - “have to give” implies a certain amount of force, but the phrase is quickly followed by “fun” and “engaging” which seem to take the sting from the implied force

It appears that Alyssa was somewhat alone in feeling forced to remove herself from the writing.

For Alyssa, it seems that the agency she had as a writer coming from an English major background may not have immediately transferred into the technical and professional writing classroom. Before the new expectations of the English 3601 class, she claimed that her strength as a writer came from including a passionate self in her writing. Therefore, when the self was “forcibly” removed, she experienced moments of writerly vertigo. However, I want to note that Alyssa was able to find her balance and do quite well in the class. It’s important to remember that Alyssa is our original negotiator. She is the one who identified her collaborative partner Brooke as the force who helped her negotiate the new expectations of technical writing.

Brooke’s collaborative partnership with Alyssa appears to have been beneficial for both English majors as they charted their way through the new expectations of professional and technical writing genres. When I asked Brooke specifically about her writing collaboration with Alyssa, she said that their “secret weapon” was the fact that they were roommates and best friends. She said, “For the most part, having classes and working on projects together is

definitely a perk. We don't do much delegation of work, as we have so much time outside of class and generally just work on projects together.” When I asked if writing together made it more or less difficult to craft or remove a voice for technical writing, Brooke said, “I think that collaborating with a partner can help you place your voice appropriately. With the collaboration of someone else I was able to see where my voice could be utilized or changed.” Brooke’s statement about her collaborative partner helping negotiate voice for technical writing is certainly worth exploring.

Voice is rarely discussed in scholarship about professional and technical writing. And while many scholars have weighed in on the voices of collaborative partnerships, I’m not sure anyone has weighed in on how to go about *teaching* voice for collaborative partnerships. This is most likely because 1) we rarely teach voice, and 2) we rarely teach collaborative writing. In spite of the value that we, as a discipline, ascribe to collaborative learning and socially constructed voices, we still lean heavily on authorship as a one-woman show.

Lunsford and Ede speak of the prevalent view of authorship as a solitary act, saying that “the concept of authorship as an inherently individual activity is so central to our Western cultural tradition, it appears at first sight transparent, obvious [...] commonsensical” (73). They also trace this tradition, one based on “the emergence of the concept of the individual self” (79), to the influence of Rene Descartes, stating that he ushered in the valuation of the individual thinker and author. Lunsford and Ede explain that most scholars agree that Descartes’ motto “I think, therefore I am” or “*cogito ergo sum*” helped marshal in the age of a society that placed the individual at the heart of all things.

Those of us who are products of Western cultural traditions and a Western educational system are programmed to conceive of voice as a single construct from a single person, rather

than viewing it as multiple voices from multiple people. Melanie Sperling and Deborah Appleman say we position voice as an expression of an individual achieving her sense of self (73). According to Robert Connors, we can probably blame the Romantics for our emphasis on the individual writer over the collective. Connors says the Romantic movement had a profound influence on the field of composition and rhetoric, stating that “the personal feelings, experiences, thoughts, and appreciations of the writer acquired a centrality and power” (302). He calls personal writing, the type that privileges the experiences and the voice of the author, the result of “pure romanticism” (314). Knowing the roots of our fascination with single authorship and a single voice might help explain why the concept of a collaboratively negotiated voice seems so outside of the norm. These roots also point to why the type of writing that Alyssa and Brooke were so accustomed to composing for their literature classes did not fully prepare them to write in professional and technical writing genres. Their previous writing experiences were very much focused on the experiences and thoughts of a single author, but in English 3601, the writing genres required a giant step away from the personal, and the collaboration was another step away from that ideal of the singular author. However, this is what is so remarkable about these negotiators: Collaboration was the key to helping them discover ways to negotiate voice and genre expectations in professional and technical writing. Collaboration is ultimately what made them successful in the class.

Caryl Emerson says, “Because no two individuals ever entirely coincide in their experience or belong to precisely the same set of social groups, every act of understanding involves an act of translation and a negotiation of values” (248). For the purposes of their shared English 3601 assignment, Brooke and Alyssa assisted one another with the translation of genre expectations, and they successfully negotiated their values. Granted, with such similar academic

backgrounds and such a strong friendship, their values likely did not diverge in unexpected ways. Regardless, Brooke intimated that negotiating the amount of self or voice appropriate for the specific rhetorical situation was aided by her collaborator Alyssa. Between them, they successfully navigated new expectations by collectively mediating their own biases, opinions, personalities and, ultimately, deciding as a team what was or was not appropriate. This is valuable information. This is Negotiation 101.

Our *negotiatrice* may have encountered moments of struggle as they piloted their way through the new-to-them expectations of the English 3601 curriculum, but they managed to thrive in the class because they were willing to collaborate and negotiate. They negotiated prior genre expectations with current ones. They negotiated prior conceptualizations of voice with what is required for professional and technical writing. They negotiated their own positions of agency, and they negotiated a collaboratively written technical description. Their story is one that will likely even have a first-rate sequel as both negotiators valued their collaboration and saw the positive results of co-authorship. I see this evidence of negotiation as important for our emerging theory of a teachable voice because negotiating what is or is not appropriate for the rhetorical situation is one of the paramount tasks students should learn. Negotiation should be taught.

### **Elbow (in the) Room**

In the email Peter Elbow sent me a couple of years ago, he included a seemingly random list of thoughts...various occurrences he'd had over the many, many years he's written about voice. At one point in the list, he calls himself "a cheerleader for writing" and includes an endearing and completely *unironic* "Give me a 'W!'" He pulls quotes about voice from novels, poems, and articles. He references publications by other scholars and offers his perceptions and, for some, what he might say to rebut them. He also repeatedly mentions the teaching of writing.

His emphasis on the practical application of teaching voice to student writers is where I began this project, and it seems to be where I find myself at the end.

Elbow says the main reason why voice is useful in the teaching of writing is because voice is “the quickest way to the source of good writing: getting the self behind words, not holding back, bringing whole heft to bear” (email). For Elbow, voice offers a practical entry to the teaching of writing because by teaching voice we participate in a writer-centered pedagogy. While the criticism of Expressivism still echoes along the halls of writing studies, I must ask: What is wrong with a writer-centered pedagogy? Chris Burnham and Rebecca Powell say, “Expressivism places the writer at the center of its theory and pedagogy, assigning highest value to the writer’s imaginative, psychological, social and spiritual development and how that development influences individual consciousness and social behavior” (113). An instructor inspired by expressivist theory seeks to offer students opportunities to develop their voices and to grow into knowledge as they grow into writers. If this is wrong, well—darn it—I guess I don’t want to be right.

Included in Elbow’s classic *Writing Without Teachers* is an appendix titled “The Doubting Game and the Believing Game: An Analysis of the Intellectual Enterprise.” In it, Elbow explains that the doubting game is played by intellectuals and academics steeped in a positivistic history of searching for one truth. Elbow claims that “the doubting game has gained a monopoly on legitimacy” in academia (150), and that to be considered legitimate, intellectual scholars, we must doubt, question, and assume everything to be falsehoods in our search for truth. Within this falsely dichotomous model, Elbow says that *not* doubting is the same as *not* being an intellectual. Elbow identifies this mindset as a trap that does not provide the full picture of the possibilities in the meanings of words. Instead, Elbow supports a believing game, one



open to believing in the ideas of writers. Thomas O'Donnell says it is “unfortunate that the doubting and believing games have not been taken more seriously as seeds of an expressivist epistemology, or even—if such a thing can be imagined—as an expressivist angle on ideology construction” (85-6). There are plenty of scholars who have scoffed at Elbow’s critique of criticism, mocking his insistence on belief. There are plenty of scholars who still operate under the belief that expressivists, led of course by Elbow himself, are only concerned with the “personal and private construct” Berlin assigned to them (Rhetoric 145), insisting that nothing of weighty significance ever enters an expressivist professor’s classroom. Perhaps there is truth here if the professor is the one deciding on what is or is not weighty. Yet Elizabeth Sargent argues that the continuing resistance toward Elbow from some composition scholars is driven by “an underlying sense that deep un-game-like beliefs are being asserted or threatened” (97). In Elbow’s insistence on abandoning the ingrained training found in the literary tradition—a tradition of critique—he made, and likely *still makes*, quite a few folks uneasy. Yet his ideology of belief is something worthy of consideration for a writing instructor striving to teach voice and offer students opportunities for agency.

The believing game rests fully on an ideology that privileges belief over doubt. While I’m not overly interested in applying this ideology to published scholars, I *am* interested in applying it to novice writers. What if the very basis of the writing classroom was one situated within belief, credulity, acceptance, and consideration? Kenneth Burke explains ideology as “a spirit taking up its abode in a body: it makes that body hop around in certain ways” (*Language* 6). What if a *spirit of belief* took up residence in the writing course and the result was a slew of writing instructors hopping around believing in students and helping students believe in themselves? What a fantastically crazy idea.

And yet perhaps we already live in such a world. Perhaps there's an echo of expressivist theory grounding most writing classrooms. Eodice, Geller, and Learner seem to have proven there are a significant number of college professors who design meaningful writing assignments and offer their students opportunities to claim agency. Perhaps we already live in such a world because writing teachers know the value of writing and know how powerful a weapon it can be for carving out identities. In *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow illustrates his believing game with a gestalt image to show that while the doubting game does not allow scholars to admit there are two equally relevant truths, the believing game not only acknowledges both images, it respects both. Elbow emphasizes that truth is relative, often contradictory and messy, and with multiple interpretations. And so to believe is to acknowledge the contradictions while also allowing those contradictions to improve the writer's ideas. Rather than doubt, which shuts down the idea before it can fully form, Elbow encourages belief. The believing ideology asserts that the only way to learn, to know, or to find truth, is to accept that multiple truths exist. A student paper can be simultaneously wrong and right. Voiced writing is not necessarily "good" writing. Error-filled writing is not necessarily "bad" writing. A novice student writer can be both insightful and naïve. There are multiple truths to behold and believe. Elbow says that voice simply can't be viewed in binary terms ("What is Voice" 184). There is no "either/or" with voice. Instead there is something more like an "either/and/all/some/few/most/one/sometimes" situation happening when voice is being studied or discussed. If someone were to ask me if voice is more about a Western emphasis on identity, a personified or implied author, or an opportunity for agency, I would probably answer with an emphatic "Yes." Voice covers just about everything.

Over the last several years of studying voice, I've learned that voice is full of multiple truths. I've learned that a Western education system produces students who have definite notions

of voice. They've heard the word, they've had a teacher talk about it, some have even had teachers teach them how to spot it, and a few have been taught how to write with it. I've learned that our American conceptualization of voice is definitely *not* a globally held belief. I've learned that some L2 learners are stymied by voice. I've also learned that some are not. I've learned that voice can be naturally and unintentionally “not fake” and that it can be carefully constructed yet inherently untrue. I've learned that voice is a lens for teaching writing, and that careful and precise writing can intentionally be unvoiced. I've learned that, for many, voice is too big, too murky, and too unique to teach. I've also learned that *intentionally* teaching voice is important and should be considered as a way to introduce students to effectively including source citations in their researched arguments. I've learned that the written voice of an autistic student can sound nothing like his spoken voice—and yet both voices can be true. I've learned that the more I read about voice, the more there is to read. I've learned that the more I write about voice, the more I question my own biases and ideologies associated with voice. The more I *write with voice*, the more I struggle to be the *right* version of me for the rhetorical situation.

Earlier in this chapter I mentioned Pollock and Bono who state that a scholar has two jobs: providing answers to truly interesting questions and “telling the story” (629). Throughout this project I have sought answers to questions about how our students conceptualize voice. What do they know? What do they believe? Can they identify voice in their own writing, and if so, how do they do it? Can the teaching of voice improve an academic argument? What can we learn about voice from a technical writing course? I've tried to provide faithful answers for these questions, and I've tried to tell the story of voice using my own voice and the voices of undergraduates. Now I find myself at the point in this project where I honestly don't know how to wrap things up. There's no string at my fingertips with which to neatly tie a bow. I know a lot

more about voice than I did when I began, but I also know that there is so much more to learn. I suspect there will never be a time when I am confident I've learned all there is to learn about voice. Voice is evidence of the life of a writer, and life breathes, moves, changes, ages, and is constantly in the process of being remade. For these reasons, voice will always fascinate.

When I consider the next chapter of my own voice story, I have an outline already in mind. While there is still so much to learn about how our student writers conceptualize voice, about how they craft and construct their writerly voices, my next project is to consider how my composition studies colleagues conceptualize voice. What language do we use in our classrooms? Are we “finding” or “crafting” voice? What type of imagery is involved? Is it mystical or tangible? How do we assess the voices we see/hear, and how do we talk about those assessments with students? How do we bring voice into the classroom and in what ways can we improve those methods? Ultimately, I want to use the knowledge from this study to frame a second study about the teaching of voice. I will continually seek to refine a practical, teachable theory of voice.

This voice metaphor speaks of life. A writer's voice is a projection of the writer—a heartbeat for the words on the page. Sometimes the voice is clear and projects passion, confidence, or a coherent idea. Sometimes the voice is professional and technically astute. Sometimes the voice cracks, and in the crack a bit of the writer emerges, often incoherent or insecure. The voice metaphor remains because the writer remains and because the reader craves evidence of that heartbeat. Our student writers need to know we value their ideas, but they also need to be taught how to make those ideas more valuable. This is how voice can help. Teaching voice is teaching students how to add life to their writing. Teaching voice is a way to help students carve out identities and grasp ahold of agency.

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## Appendix A

### Crafting Voice and Avoiding Plagiarism

Yeah, I know. You hate citing sources. You hate reading about plagiarism. You hate me right now for even writing this chapter. People read or hear the word *plagiarism* and either immediately stop reading/listening or have a mild panic attack because they aren't sure what might get them locked up in Plagiarism Prison, but don't worry! I'm approaching this topic from a different perspective. Instead of hitting you with a bunch of rules and warnings, I'll explain how understanding writerly voice can help you avoid plagiarism.

#### Maintaining Your Voice While Incorporating Sources

My voice is a product of the people who raised me—and of the people I'm now raising. It is born of the places where I've lived, of the life that I've chosen. It is also a result of the texts I've read and the things that spark an interest in me. I'm a total word nerd. Words and how they work, how they can be put together in different and exciting ways, how one word can completely change the meaning of an entire argument—these things excite me. I know that's probably not your story though. For you, maybe a sport is your obsession. Maybe you love fashion or travel or cooking or Star Wars. Regardless of what your thing is, it helps shape you and helps create your voice. Your writerly voice is a product of who you are. It is distinctive. It is the *you* that is written into your work. Good writers are able to make their voices enticing, interesting, captivating, and very real. Good writers also realize that to borrow someone else's work is to borrow someone else's voice. Like all instances of borrowing, there are acceptable and unacceptable ways to go about it. Borrowing in an unacceptable way is...well...basically stealing (which is bad). Borrowing in acceptable ways, with permission and respect, is often very good, especially when you are writing an argument.

When I teach students how to use outside sources in their researched arguments, I like to begin with voice. Each writer, each and every one of us, has this inner spark that enables us to write in a way that no one else writes—to sound like no one else sounds. Just as you’d be able to recognize your mom’s voice even if you couldn’t see her face, your writerly voice can be recognized by your readers. Dr. Peter Elbow, Professor Emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, writes, “We have selves that are individual and to some degree unique (though not simple, unitary, or unchanging), and it helps our writing to honor our self and voice” (*Everyone Can Write* xiv). In other words, he suggests that our writing is strengthened when we recognize the value of our voice and allow that part of ourselves to enter the writing.

Peter Elbow is the preeminent scholar on voice in writing. He has been writing about voice for more than fifty years. Peter Elbow says that “flexibility of voice” (*Landmark Essays* xlv) is basically a range of voices that are all still mine. I like to think of my writerly voice as a sort of slide ruler or a continuum with the many different versions of me situated along the line. When I write for myself, in personal writing or in freewriting, I use one *me*, and when I write for another audience, I use another *me*. In other words, there are many different voices within my writerly voice.

Just think about how you might talk to your grandmother and consider how that voice is different from the voice you use when you talk to a puppy or a friend or a coworker. All of those voices are you; they are just variations of you for a specific audience and a specific context. The same is true of writing. You can remain true to yourself—true to your voice—and still write appropriately for various audiences.

## How to Construct *Your* Voice

As I stated earlier, your writerly voice is a product of who you are. It is distinctive. It is the *you* that is written into your work. Voice is awesome, but your writerly voice does not just magically appear. **You must create it.**

Strong writers use specific strategies to construct a voice that is appropriate for the context and audience, while remaining very much a reflection of the author. Below are five specific strategies to help you construct your writerly voice. While this list is not exhaustive, utilizing some of these strategies in your writing will certainly improve both your voice and your argument.

The following stylistic elements of voice—**diction, details, imagery, syntax, and tone**—offer an effective, engaging approach for achieving a strong voice.

### *Diction*

Diction refers to the word choices you make when you write. Word choice matters. However, please keep in mind that using a word you don't fully understand because you think the word might make you sound "smart" is actually NOT the best idea. If you use words that aren't familiar to you, then you are likely using them incorrectly—which means your word choice is certainly not reflecting any part of who you are. Also keep this in mind: strong diction does not come from randomly selecting a synonym by using the synonym function in Microsoft Word. Careless or haphazard synonym-selecting ends up creating a disjointed written product, one that often lacks any semblance of writerly voice.

Since word choice matters, BE THOUGHTFUL when you write. Consider the differences between using the word *courageous* rather than *bold*. They may be synonyms, but *courageous* and *bold* are not interchangeable. Why might you want to replace the word *tenacious*

with the word *gritty*? What are the denotations (dictionary type definitions) and the connotations (underlying meaning or associations) of the words? Thoughtfully choosing specific words helps you make your voice appropriate for the rhetorical situation.

Think of it this way: sometimes I call my mom “mother” and sometimes I say “mama.” Both are correct, but I use “mother” when I want her to take me seriously, and I use “mama” when I want her to take care of me. Word choice matters. Be thoughtful about the choices you make, and consider what sounds most like you and is also most appropriate for the context and audience. Diction means word choice, and word choice matters.

### *Details*

When you want to improve your writing, including appropriate and helpful details always helps. The details you choose to include also help you construct your writerly voice. For example, in a literacy narrative, a writer might say that her older brother always read her children’s books at bedtime. However, if that writer wanted to construct a strong voice, she would include details that make her narrative much more interesting. She might write something like this: “When I was fresh from my bath, dressed in soft footie pajamas with my damp hair tied up in a bun, my brother, Derek, would let me choose two books from my bookcase. I often chose books with animals because Derek did all of the animal sounds for me. One of my favorite books was called *Bear Wants More*. It had a bear, a rabbit, a wren, and a mole who were all friends. Derek made each character sound different and funny; he added in roars and tweeting noises. I would snuggle into my fleece blanket while he sat on the floor by my bed and read.” The details add layers to the account, but they also show the parts of the story that are important to the writer. This helps create voice.

For academic arguments, you can (and should) use details in your writing. Such details might include statistics, but you can also include anecdotes or descriptive information when appropriate. If you are writing an argument about graffiti as an art form in Memphis, then you need to describe the buildings, the neighborhoods, the colors, the styles, the meanings, and the actual graffiti. Details matter.

### *Imagery*

Like details, using imagery builds additional layers of context into your writing. Imagery is also a fantastic way to craft voice because the imagery you choose to use is often somewhat unique to you. Imagery can be crafted by painting word pictures for your reader using the five senses (see, touch, smell, hear, taste), but imagery also includes writing in metaphors or making allusions to other things. The things you choose to allude to will be of interest to you, so they will obviously reflect some part of yourself. I grew up in a tiny Oklahoma town and was raised on farming, fishing, and football, so I often allude to such ideas in my writing. Your own interests can and should make their way into your writing.

### *Syntax*

Syntax refers to the ways you put together your sentences. It is the order of your words and the use of punctuation within the framework of the sentence. Perhaps you've been told that your sentences should have variety—that you don't want all short sentences or all long sentences—because sameness in your syntax creates a sort of monotony in writing. This is very true. Changing up sentence construction is one way to craft your voice. Following up a long, complex sentence structure with a short two-word sentence is one way to make a statement in your writing. It also creates a rhythm that helps reflect voice. Keep in mind that audience and context should always determine syntax. If you are tasked with writing an instruction manual or

a lab report, a monotonous syntax structure would be entirely appropriate if not necessary. However, this book is intended to help you write in a way to effectively argue or persuade; therefore, your syntax should *not* be dry and monotonous.

Consider the following example, which comes from a reflective letter written at the end of English 1010. The reflective letter was the final writing assignment of the semester and was included in the student's end-of-term portfolio of work. The purpose of the letter was to allow the student to essentially prove his or her growth throughout the academic term. You will see that this student writer has a syntax structure that is quite tedious in its sameness. The only part of the paragraph that isn't monotonous is one three word sentence and the concluding sentence. While the author of this paragraph could have used some additional work on syntax, you cannot deny that a certain voice becomes apparent as you read this work. (It just might not be the best voice for the context and audience.)

The research paper was my most challenging paper. I chose to research how texting has affected our way of writing. I have written research papers before but not like this one. We had to interview people and do surveys and stuff. I'd never thought about how to write a survey so that was tricky. I think my survey questions ended up being pretty lame. My results weren't too exciting. I basically just discovered what I already knew. My generation texts so much that almost everyone I surveyed had accidentally included text-type in their schoolwork. We used the IMRaD format for this paper. I liked the structure of that okay. IMRaD helped me understand how to organize my paper. The writing sucked. But I think I'll use IMRaD when I have to write again, so I guess that's helpful.

## *Tone*

**Tone** expresses your attitude toward the subject or audience of the paper. Tone is often considered a synonym for voice in writing. While tone is not the same thing as voice, it is certainly part of voice. Crafting an intentional tone goes hand-in-hand with crafting your voice. In the previous example, the tone is apathetic. This student writer obviously does NOT care about the assignment, which is made quite clear for his audience.

Do you want your readers to see you as confident or questioning? Passionate or violent? Enthusiastic or critical? The tone you weave into your argument will help you establish both *ethos* and *pathos* for your audience, and the tone will also help you voice what is most important to your argument.

Strategies for creating tone in your writing include using **boldface type**, *italics*, and punctuation—such as an emdash or parentheses. The emdash (looks like this—and is three times longer than a normal hyphen) can be used in place of commas or colons. This emdash punctuation—one that sets off something important—has an almost exclamatory tone. It practically shouts to the reader, “You need to *see* this information.” In contrast, the use of parentheses tends to evoke a more intimate tone (one in which you might be *whispering* something to the reader). Using **boldface type** is generally used for highlighting key terms, such as terms you might need to define, while the use of italics can be used *sparingly* for emphasis. If you look back over this chapter, you’ll see that I’ve used these strategies to create the tone I wanted for this publication. Keep in mind that each of these strategies should be used intentionally and minimally. In other words, don’t go crazy with the emdash, or your reader will be exhausted from all of the excitement. Additionally, in academic writing, the use of the exclamation point (!) is not appropriate.



When you can control your **diction, syntax** and **tone**, when you provide **details** and **imagery** that show rather than tell, you are presenting polished writing in an authoritative voice. Knowing the different connotations of a single word or crafting syntax that is sophisticated or surprising can help you claim ownership over your own writing while you assert a voice that is yours and yours alone.

### **Using Voice to Understand Source Incorporation**

So how does voice help you incorporate sources? When we incorporate information from other sources, the temptation is to let the other writers do the work. I mean, these other writers have been published somewhere. They are the experts. They seem to know what they're talking about, right? In many ways, it makes sense to let them take the lead; so when we find a good quote—something that seems to have some power or punch behind the words—we drop that quote into our writing and keep on moving. However, this method of incorporating sources is NOT a good one. I call this **dropping quote bombs** and, like most bombs, the results can be destructive. Dropping quote bombs means that you are leaving your reader with unexplained, and often, unhelpful information in some other person's voice. It's confusing. It's disjointed. Frankly, it's lazy writing, and it's completely counterproductive to the entire reason that you are expected to incorporate sources in the first place.

*Why do you need to use material from other sources when you are writing a paper?*

Seriously, what's the point of using other sources? The answer is pretty simple; we use other sources to *support our arguments*. I'll say that again. **You use other sources, other writers' work, to support your arguments.** This does not mean that you should use other sources to **state** your argument. It does not mean you should use other sources to **create** your argument. I hate to be the bearer of bad news but creating and stating your argument are 100%

your job. You are responsible for determining the topic, for figuring out the possible sides of the argument, for choosing your stance, for finding the right research, and for figuring out any steps that need to be taken or supporting points that need to be made. YOU are the writer, so these are your tasks. In order for readers to believe you and trust you as the author since you are most likely not an expert on the topic, you need to find sources that back you up and provide you with some credibility. The other sources you use should help you create a trustworthy **ethos**.

*Examples of Incorporating Sources to Support an Argument*

**Example 1.** A few years ago, I needed to persuade the University of Memphis that a class I'd taken at Harding University should transfer to UofM and meet one of my degree requirements. My basic argument was as follows and should be read as general grumbling:

I've taken a course called Quantitative Research Methods worth three credit hours at Harding University. That ridiculously hard class should satisfy the requirement for a research methods class at this university. Please, for all that is good and holy, *please* don't make me take another quantitative research methods class *here* since I already took one *there*. Plus, I got a freakin' A, and it was a really hard class involving a lot of math. I hate math. I hated that class. I don't want to endure it again.

That was my argument, but since I knew it had to be approved by The Important People in the Graduate Studies office, I needed to back up my argument with sources that lent some credibility to my words. I also needed to slide across my voice scale and use the appropriate voice for this context and this audience. I used the course catalogue from my previous university and quoted the description of the class to prove how its description was closely aligned with the one I was supposed to take at the other university. I also quoted the Graduate Studies Handbook that stated,

“course requirements may be satisfied by courses taken at previous institutions if students can prove a close affiliation between the two classes.” My new argument looked something like this:

In 2012, I successfully completed a course called Quantitative Research Methods for three credit hours at Harding University. The course was described in the course catalog as one which “covers the fundamental principles of quantitative research methods in the social sciences with a strong focus on research integrity and ethics. Covers various research designs, measurement, and sampling” (Catalog 332). As you can see on my attached transcript, I earned an A in this course. Since the Graduate Studies Handbook indicates that I can transfer credit under certain conditions when it states that “course requirements may be satisfied by courses taken at previous institutions if students can prove a close affiliation between the two classes” (Graduate Handbook 117), I respectfully ask that you grant me transfer credit for the required Quantitative Research Methods course at this university.

You will be happy to know (though probably not as happy I was) that credit was granted, and I didn’t have to take another math-heavy research methods class. Hopefully, you can also see that the sources I used improved my credibility while my voice was intentionally crafted to be respectful toward my specific audience. The voice I used for that situation was just one of my many voices, but it was the voice most appropriate for the task at hand.

**Example 2.** I need a new car. My husband and I are trying to agree on what kind of car to get. He’s much more knowledgeable about cars in general—in other words, he knows engines, understands what words like “torque” mean, and he has firmly-held opinions on what we should get. He wants to buy a truck...a big truck. However, I do NOT want a truck. I have two active children, two even more active dogs, and one adorable nephew. I am often the chauffeur of those

little hooligans. I'm also somewhat "vertically challenged," with short legs and short arms, and I know how difficult it is to buckle kids into car seats when I can barely reach them. I also don't especially want to carry around a stepladder just to get into my vehicle. I want a minivan. Yes, darn it, I *know* minivans aren't cool—and that a minivan completely offends my husband's sense of manliness and car knowledge—but I also know that a minivan would make my life easier.

My job is to convince my husband that my choice of vehicle makes more sense than his choice. I know that if I go to him with only my opinion, then he will see himself as the expert and my opinion will be just that...*opinion*. So I do research. I educate myself on the worth of minivans, of the miles per gallon, of the types of engines available, and of the resale value. Only then do I go to him using information from other sources to solidify my argument. Rather than simply telling him that a minivan is easier for me to get the kids buckled safely into their seats, I make that statement and then follow it up with examples from the sources I've gathered.

Both my college credit and car anecdotes are simplistic examples of how we use sources to solidify our arguments. We determine our primary and secondary points and then back them up with another strong voice. That other voice is one that lends authority to our argument, but it only works if we introduce the voice as *someone else's voice*. If we try to claim those words as our own, then not only are we plagiarizing, but we are also derailing our argument **because the argument needs more than just my voice**.

For academic arguments, the importance of incorporating strong secondary sources cannot be overstated. When we interweave the words and ideas of academic scholars into our own academic writing, we are engaging in a scholarly conversation. We are participating in the work of the university. We are becoming scholars.

Rather than thinking about using academic sources as a punishment concocted by your professor, think of these sources as a way for you to prove to yourself and to the university community that **you belong here** (because you do). Your voice and the voices of published scholars should work together. Your words and ideas, partnered with those from academic sources, enter into a conversation or a discourse that should be interesting to you and to others in your class. Incorporating academic sources is one way for you to show that you too are a scholar and that you too have something to add to the conversation.

### **Time to Talk the P-word (Plagiarism)**

Let's talk for a minute about the dreaded word in all writing courses: **Plagiarism**. It's not a fun topic, but it is a necessary topic. I'll do my best to make it better than any other thing you've ever read about plagiarism; you do your best to finish reading the chapter.

One of my favorite composition studies scholars, Rebecca Moore Howard, breaks plagiarism into four distinct forms that I find much more useful than the catch-all term *plagiarism*. Her terms for those distinct forms are *fraud*, *insufficient citation*, *patchwriting*, and *excessive repetition* (Howard 1207).

**Fraud** is when an entire paper is ghostwritten, which basically means it was purchased or possibly borrowed from a friend. Fraud is when the intended author (you) gets someone else to do the authoring. This is fraudulent behavior. Thievery. *Wrong*. Howard says, "Handing in a paper that somebody else wrote is as bad as falsifying a transcript or hiring a test-taker: It thwarts two of the academy's most basic functions—to teach and to certify intellectual accomplishment" (1219). Therefore, if you commit fraud, you are a cheater and deserve to be punished. Fraud also shows intent to deceive. Fraud is bad, and in my class, it gets you a failing grade for the course.

**Insufficient citation** is when you borrow without giving credit. You drop a quote without explaining who originally wrote it and why. You find a great idea somewhere, but you fail to give voice to the one who originally came up with the idea. In an academic argument, your voice should be supported by the voices of experts, and this insufficient citation means that you aren't doing your job. You are not supporting your ideas with the voices of others. Insufficient citation is bad, but it's certainly not fraud. Many professors will assume that insufficient citation is intentional on your part, that you were perhaps too lazy to cite, or that you were trying to use someone else's ideas as your own. Insufficient citation can definitely get you into trouble with most professors, though some will allow you to revise so you can fix the problems.

**Patchwriting** is when you take brief strings of another person's discourse—perhaps part of a sentence, perhaps just a word or two—and patch them into your own sentences.

Patchwriting often ends up sounding disjointed and somehow wrong because your voice is not really yours any longer. Suddenly your voice is being stabbed with the words of another's voice. The result is sloppy writing. This sort of writing happens a lot when students are trying to write something at the very last minute and haven't allowed themselves enough time to work with their sources properly. Instead of paraphrasing or quoting correctly, they do a rush job that is neither paraphrase nor quote and is, instead, basically writing that needs to be revised.

Paraphrasing can be tricky for some writers, so I'll come back to this later in the chapter.

**Excessive repetition** is just annoying writing. It happens when you try to take a chunk of information from a text and condense it down to some overly obvious and uninteresting idea rather than pick out the bits that would be most useful. It's lazy writing, and again, it does not help you write an effective argument. Excessive repetition also occurs when you have more words from someone else in your writing than you have from your own head. In other words, if

every other sentence in a paragraph is from a source rather than from you, then you aren't doing your job properly.

In any instructor's classroom, fraud will end up with a zero on a project if not a failing grade for the entire course and can even lead to expulsion from the university. For those of you who are student athletes, members of the ROTC, Honors College students, or active in sororities or fraternities, fraud can have serious consequences on your continued participation in such programs—you could lose your scholarship or your membership. In many instructors' classes, insufficient citation will result in a failing grade unless you do some serious revision to correct the problem. Patchwriting and excessive repetition will result in a paper that is weak and not yours in the sense that your voice can't shine through it, and rarely are such papers rewarded with good scores.

What's the lesson to be learned about the P-word? **Be true to your voice.** Be you. Write your argument and use those outside sources to firm up what you want to say by giving those voices credit. Don't let the other voices speak in your place because fraud is wrong, and lazy writing is annoying and ineffective.

### **Quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing**

There are three primary strategies for borrowing the words and ideas of other scholars to support your argument: quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing. Each strategy has its own defining characteristics and uses, which will be explained below. Regardless of whether you are quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing, you should tell your reader whose voice you are borrowing. It does not matter whether the borrowed part is short or long or in quotation marks (or not): you must give credit to the one who gave you the words and ideas. *Always.*

## *Quote*

When you quote from a source, you are providing a passage of writing—sometimes a few words, sometimes a few sentences—in the author’s exact wording, and you are placing quotation marks around those words. There should always be a good reason why you choose to quote an author rather than simply paraphrasing the ideas into your own words.

Some good reasons for directly quoting:

- Quote when the original language is in some way powerful—if you changed the words, then you would lose that power.
- Quote when the author is a respected authority on the topic and his or her words would lend support to your idea.
- Quote when the author’s opinion is either different from your own or is different from what most people think about the topic.
- Quote when your purpose is to analyze the text.

Keep in mind that when you quote, you are allowing another voice to take charge, and when you allow too many other voices into your argument, there is a possibility that you’ll lose control of the writing. Quote because you believe the author’s words are powerful and helpful. Don’t quote because you need more words to reach a word count or because it’s easier to quote than to paraphrase. Also keep this general rule of thumb in mind: having more than one or two quotes in a paragraph is like having too many cooks in the kitchen—too much confusion, too much noise, too much conflict. And... not enough of you.

## *Paraphrase*

When you paraphrase from a source, you are borrowing an idea from another author and using your own language to express that idea. Because the idea belongs to someone else, you still



*always cite* the source. However, because you are using your own words, a paraphrase often flows more naturally within your writing. A paraphrase rewords the original passage but does not necessarily shorten the passage. In fact, sometimes a paraphrase will actually be longer than the original quotation.

Some good reasons for paraphrasing:

- Paraphrase when the details are important, but the way the author wrote those details isn't really memorable.
- Paraphrase when the author's words are really technical or wordy or somehow difficult to wade through. If you have a hard time understanding what the author was saying, then don't make your audience suffer through the same hardship. Make it easier for your audience to understand by paraphrasing.
- Paraphrase if you have other quotations in a paragraph and yet need to include the ideas from this other source.

*Okay, but how do I paraphrase?* Honestly, it takes some practice to get really good at paraphrasing. Paraphrasing is best accomplished when you *listen* to the passage you want to incorporate into your writing. Listening requires that you have a helper or a recording device. Ask someone to read a particular passage to you while you listen. You might need to hear the passage a couple of times. After you've heard it, write what you heard. When you aren't looking at the exact words on the page or on the screen, it is a lot easier to write the ideas in your own natural language. When no one is around to read a passage to you, use your phone and record yourself reading it. Then listen once or twice before writing the paraphrase down.

If you thought that paraphrasing was actually easier than quoting, then you'd be mistaken.

Successful paraphrasing requires more time and attention than quoting, but a good paraphrase is

often the best way to maintain control over the writing and keep your voice at the center of your essay. Additionally, there are many academic disciplines that require paraphrasing instead of direct quotes. If you will be going into a social science field or a medical field, then you need to know how to paraphrase because it's the only way you'll be allowed to incorporate sources into your researched papers.

### *Summarize*

Summarizing is the least common strategy you might use to help make your argument. When you summarize, you are taking a very long section of a source, or perhaps the entire source itself, and stating the main idea quite succinctly. You might summarize an eight-page article in two to three sentences, while an entire book might require a paragraph summary. In any case, a summary is significantly more general and less lengthy than the original source material. A summary is useful if you need to step back from the details and give an overview or provide some context. For example, if you were writing an argument about recycling in Memphis, you might first summarize an article about recycling in Tennessee or in the United States before getting into the meat of your own argument about Memphis.

### *None-or-ize*

Okay, yes, this is a made-up word. *None-or-ize* is my own word for when you don't actually need to acknowledge or cite a source. There may be a time when you are providing information in your argument and you're not quite sure if you have to cite it. My general rule of thumb is that if you had to look it up or you needed to do research to learn it, then you need to cite it. But let's say you are writing about the history of terrorism in America and you mention in your paper that Osama Bin Laden was one of the men behind the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, do you actually have to cite a source for this information? The answer here is no.

Knowing that Bin Laden was responsible for 9/11 is a *none-or-ize* situation. These are the types of information that don't need citations in your argument:

- Common knowledge (such as Bin Laden as a member of Al Qaeda)
- Facts found basically everywhere (America declared war on Japan in 1941, the number of oceans on Earth, the number of teeth in the human body)
- Your own **unpublished research** (if you did a survey of your classmates about how often they recycle each week, you would not cite yourself)

### **Maintaining Your Voice**

Maintaining your voice while you incorporate sources into your argument is how you write a solid paper that shows your ownership of the topic and your acknowledgment of other scholars who helped support your points. If you remember to simply write in your flexible voice for the appropriate audience and context and to provide credit where credit is due, then your paper will be stronger, more readable, and more persuasive.

### **A Quick Word about *Leading In* and *Leading Out* of a Quote**

Introduce a quote by using a **signal phrase**. A signal phrase (also referred to as an attribution phrase) gives credit to the original author and also lets readers know that someone else's voice is coming. A good signal phrase not only gives the name of the author but also situates him or her by explaining why the author is worthy of being quoted. Is the author a scientist? A photographer? A mail carrier? A scholar? A dog washer? Tell your audience the name and their significance in your signal phrase.

If I were to quote a line from a book I'm currently reading about antiracism in the writing class by Asao Inoue, I might use the following signal phrase (noted in italics): *Writing scholar Asao Inoue points out*, "The influence of the concept of race is in the coded ways we talk about

each other, the words we use for race and to avoid its reference. It is in the way we behave and perform our identities” (25).

But even if I used that signal phrase and provided the proper page number in parentheses after the quote, I would not yet be finished incorporating that quote. I will have led my reader into the quote, but I will not yet have led her out. To properly incorporate a quote into my paragraph, I must lead in *and* lead out. **My signal phrase is my lead in. My explanation of the quote is the lead out.** Here’s an example of what a good lead in/lead out looks like:

*Writing scholar Asao Inoue points out, “The influence of the concept of race is in the coded ways we talk about each other, the words we use for race and to avoid its reference. It is in the way we behave and perform our identities” (25). Inoue is arguing that even if we believe we live a life that is not informed by racism, we are deceiving ourselves because racism, like race itself, is in how we talk and interact with our world.*

**Keep in mind that each time you use a quotation, you need to lead in *and* lead out of that quote.** Use your signal phrase, give the page number or source information, and then explain the purpose of that particular quote. *Explain what it means and why it is useful for your argument.* A solid lead in and lead out allows you to quote another author while maintaining *your voice* as the primary voice in the paragraph.

You can Google “signal phrases” to get some ideas to spice up your writing and help you incorporate quotations.

### **Voice as Amplification**

The beauty of voice in writing is that voice functions like a megaphone. It amplifies the content of the paper. It demands attention. It convinces a reader to listen. Voice can help pull the reader through your paper because voice engages with them. It holds passion and power. Voice

can also cover a multitude of sins. When voice is present in a paper, the little surface mistakes seem less important because the content of the paper is engaging and worth reading.

Your voice is tied to your personality, to your preferences, to your style. Your voice reflects who you are. If you can't locate any of yourself in your writing, then there is no voice there. And where there is no voice, there is often nothing meaningful to you, which might mean there will be nothing meaningful for your reader either.

When you read your own writing, can you hear *your own* ideas? Can you see where you are passionate or interested in the topic? Can you identify passages that show your opinion or attitude on the topic? Can you picture yourself talking to friends or family about the topic in a way that shows your conviction? If so, you've found your voice. If not, you might need to rethink your topic. If you can't invest any of your passion or heart into the topic, then it's almost impossible to write well.

**Take Note: Self-plagiarism is a real thing.**

Self-plagiarism is essentially using your own previously written work in a different context than when you originally wrote it. For example, if you wrote a paper for an anthropology class last semester, and you submit that paper in full for your English class, then you would be self-plagiarizing. If you want to use ideas from previous work, then the safest bet is to consult your professor for advice on how to proceed. Self-plagiarism can come with harsh consequences, so avoid this practice.

**Final Thoughts**

The best advice I can give you for writing your academic argument is to allow yourself time to work with your sources. It's hard (if not impossible) to use sources well when you don't know what they really say. It's also hard (impossible) to write a solid argument supported by

solid sources when you don't really know what **you want to say**. Your job is to think, freewrite, consider, freewrite, think, read, read, read, and freewrite before you'll be ready to write this argument. Then, of course, you will need to revise, rethink, and rewrite to polish the paper for submission. Writing is a constant process of thinking and rethinking, so give your brain time to do the work.

**Good luck and happy writing.**

## Writing Prompts and Activities

### 1. Voiced Tweets

Consider the following tweets found on Twitter about the topic of rape culture. Even though each tweet is short, these authors manage to infuse their texts with voice through diction, details, imagery, syntax, and tone. Which of the following voices do you find most persuasive? Why?

@OhNoSheTwitnt

A perfect example of rape culture is allowing predatory men to profit off their stories while attempting to discredit their victims. And people still have the audacity to ask why women hesitate to come forward.

@PeachesAndHam

I wish men talked about rape culture and misogyny when not trying to be funny. That'd be neat.

@WarrenIsDead

there are plenty of dudes who have gotten laid who nevertheless hold a similar resentment over not getting laid as much as they think they deserve and guess where that goes!!!! it's **rape culture**, folks!!!! it's cosby and ck and lauer and weinstein

@AlexSchar

i'm tired of surprise dick pics

“i make gay girls str8”

women will never be = to men

aggressive authority and entitlement

rape culture being accepted and encouraged

cheating being justified bc MEN JUST CHEAT

i'm tired

## 2. Funky Aliens

You've probably noticed that this textbook was written by a number of different authors. This means there are many different voices at work in this book. Two authors who have very distinctive voices are Dan Conaway and Bob Norman. These authors have crafted their voices through intentional use of diction, details, imagery, syntax, and tone. Read Conaway's "All Funked Up" (under the *I'm a Memphian Readings*) and Norman's "The Alien Has Landed." As you read, attempt to identify examples of word choice (diction) that help craft voice for each author. Then identify specific details, imagery, syntax, and tone used by each author. Be very specific with your analysis so that you can compare your findings with classmates.

	"All Funked Up"	"The Alien Has Landed"
Diction		
Details		
Imagery		
Syntax		
Tone		

Now, write a reflection in which you compare and contrast the voices of Conaway and Norman using the specific examples of diction, details, imagery, syntax, and tone you found. What might change about the voices of these authors if they had used different words, different punctuation, or different details? Consider how you can apply these strategies to your own writing.



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## Appendix B

### Writing Exercises

#### Voiced Tweets

The writing exercise that was most valuable, according to students in the English 1020 study, was called “Voiced Tweets,” seen in Figure 4. I chose to use the platform of Twitter for this activity because most students are familiar with how Twitter works, many tweets can be viewed through the lens of argument, voice is often very much at play on Twitter, and bringing Twitter to the classroom was a way to model non-academic writing platforms that often

Writing Prompts and Activities

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A perfect example of rape culture is allowing predatory men to profit off their stories while attempting to discredit their victims. And people still have the audacity to ask why women hesitate to come forward.

**@PeachesAndHam\_23h**  
I wish men talked about rape culture and misogyny when not trying to be funny. That'd be neat.

**@WarrenIsDead**  
there are plenty of dudes who have gotten laid who nevertheless hold a similar resentment over not getting laid as much as they think they deserve and guess where that goes!!!! it's **rape culture**, folks!!!! it's cosby and ck and lauer and weinstein

**@AlexSchar**  
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rape culture being accepted and encouraged  
cheating being justified bc MEN JUST CHEAT  
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Figure 4

showcase self-efficacy.

This activity centered on identifying voice and evaluating the persuasiveness of an argument in non-academic writing—such as voices found on Twitter. I asked students to use their rhetorical skills and knowledge about ethos, pathos, logos, and audience to determine the tweet that was most persuasive. We were able to have a robust discussion revolving around the voices they

heard in these short written pieces, but we were also able to share reactions and to discuss how the platform, audience awareness, and use of diction, details, imagery, syntax, and tone combine

to create voice. Interestingly enough, the answer to the guiding question —“Which of these voices is most persuasive?”— became one that seemed to be divided among gender lines.

The overwhelming initial response for all three classes was the first example by OhNoSheTwitNt. More than half of the participants (52%) chose this example as most persuasive because they found the diction and details to be nicely combined while not being too explosive or divisive. However, here’s where gender becomes a factor: of the students who chose OhNoSheTwitNt as the most persuasive, almost 70% were male. When we explored why those males found this example to be the most persuasive, the participants came to the conclusion that, as men, this particular example didn’t make them feel uncomfortable. It didn’t attack them, which meant they were more likely to read it with an open mind—meaning there was a higher chance they might be persuaded.

The two examples by @AlexSchar and @PeachesandHam\_23h were closely ranked. @AlexSchar weighed in at 12 votes, and @PeachesandHam received 11 votes. AlexSchar’s voters were more equally spread out among genders (7 males/5 females), and the overwhelming reason why this example was chosen was because the students both heard and liked the tone of sarcasm that accompanied the syntactic choices. Overwhelmingly, all genders said the “That’d be neat” was both hearable and likeable. On the other hand, AlexSchar’s writing was chosen by almost all female students: 10 of the 11 who chose this example were female or trans. They said they were pulled in immediately with the first line—a line that is somewhat shocking and surprising, just like what the author was describing. They also commented on the poetic description, detail, and diction—calling these elements moving and convicting.

These discussions led to a fruitful and engaging session focused on the platform of Twitter and the audience awareness that each Twitter author possessed. We also discussed the

differences between persuasive efforts on a social media platform and persuasive efforts within a researched argument essay. By mingling the familiar, engaging non-academic writing platform of Twitter with intentional moments of reflection, I aimed to offer students a better appreciation for how audience awareness and rhetorical situation must shape the voice used to persuade.

### **I'm a Bitch/I'm a Lover**

One activity that I've found successful as an introduction to voice and as a brainstorming exercise is "I'm a Bitch/I'm a Lover." I like to use this exercise with students to help them begin to identify who they are as people so that they can identify who they are as writers. As an instructor, I find it illuminating as it offers me a perspective on each student I might not have without such an assignment. Additionally, it's fun, and honestly, don't we all need a bit more fun in our lives?

I begin this exercise by sharing Alannis Morissette's song "I'm a Bitch, I'm a Lover." We listen to it, laugh about it, and talk about any other songs that might be similar in terms of how the song essentially names the various parts of the songwriter, identifying the traits that make them who they are—no matter how random or disconnected those parts may be. I invite students to play songs they think are similar or to read out the lyrics of those songs. After some discussion, I ask students to take out paper, and I set a 10 minute timer for writing. Our goal is to compose twenty lines of written self in that time period.

When students start to slow down in their writing, I usually put a few questions on the overhead to help them keep generating more lines. At the end of the writing time, I ask students to share, calling on individuals to read from their lists if they are willing. I also share my own list—the various things that make me *me*. We spend time discussing our similarities as well as

our unique traits. I then ask students to try to add a few more lines of self to their papers because the discussion often triggers ideas that enable them to do so.

I ask them to silently read over their lists and identify anything they might explore more fully in a researched argument. I give an illustration from my own list or from a student's list that could become a research topic. For example, if a student writes that they are often anxious, that trait could become a research topic about anxiety and college students. If a student writes that they enjoy exercising, that trait could become part of a paper devoted to promoting healthier eating options and lifestyles on college campuses. I've had students write that family members have died due to gun violence in our city, which easily sparks a project about that topic.

Please note, when I used this exercise for the English 1020 study, I had to shorten the activity to about 20 minutes instead of the 45 minutes I usually spend on it. Regardless, it seems to have been a valuable exercise for many students in the study as they named it specifically as something that helped them understand the value of voice for argument writing.

During the study, after listening to the song and completing our lists, I asked participants to silently read back over what they'd written and to circle anything on their lists that was, in some way, reflected in their research topic. Some students could circle several lines; some couldn't circle anything. We talked about how to be self-reflective as they questioned why they had chosen their research topics. It's important to note here that students had only recently chosen their topics and were not yet at a place of no-return. These students had a large umbrella under which to choose a topic to argue. Their topics needed to be approved by the instructor, but as long as the topic was arguable and was a broadly defined local issue, their ideas were generally approved.

Many of the students who couldn't circle anything on their lists said they had chosen their topic because it seemed easy or someone else suggested it. Of course, there were a few who couldn't circle anything on their list and admitted that while they had not really taken the writing exercise seriously, they were, in fact, quite passionate about their research topics. For those participants, I would argue that because I was little more than a guest speaker and not their assigned instructor, they were less inclined to give their full attention to the exercise. For the participants who took the exercise seriously and realized they had no real or personal interest in their chosen research topics, I urged them to use their lists to help them determine something they might use their voices to argue for or against. I know at least one student changed her topic based on this exercise. Her original topic was police brutality, suggested by a friend, which she changed to animal rights after this exercise.

I'm including her results from the writing exercise below. I've italicized the lines she indicated as important in changing her topic.

*I am the crazy Turtle Lady.*

I always start arguments to explore contraversal topics [sic].

I love to read.

I have never and will never watch an actual horror movie.

I am a lover of all music (yes, primal screaming too).

I hate loving my hair.

I love to annoy my brothers.

I am vertically retarded.

*I like to have fashion shows and dance parties exclusively with my dogs. They are divas.*

I like potatoes, like really. Fried, mashed, but not baked.

*I find spiders horrifying but interesting.*

*I want to have more pets than I've had in the past.*

*I love to sing my dogs to sleep.*

I don't drink soda.

*I believe animals should be treated equally and humanely.*

I believe jackets should be worn year-round.

I bounce when I walk, and sometimes bob my head.

I don't like people that love pumpkin spice anything.

I like independence even though it clashes with my surroundings.

*I have my goals and won't let anything stop me.*

### **Paraphrasing Practice**

For the English 1020 study reported in Chapter 3, students wanted to unpack the suggestions in the text about when and how to paraphrase, quote, summarize, or none-or-ize (my own word for providing no citation for well-known or easily found information). In the first class, one student mentioned that she had always used direct quotes because paraphrasing felt like plagiarism, and many of her classmates agreed. Based on that comment, I had a moment of what Paul Lynch might possibly consider “inspired adhockery” a term he borrowed from Charles Taylor to explain how, of necessity, teachers often create impromptu assignments that are inspired by “commitments, ideals, and experiences imported into the present situation” (xx). The writing exercise I came up with was not planned, yet it was the response that emerged when students needed help learning how to paraphrase.

For this writing exercise, the practice was simple. I asked students to close their eyes and listen as I read aloud a paragraph from another article in their textbook. I read the paragraph

twice, reminding students to listen for ideas in between the readings. I then called on a student in each class to tell me what he or she had heard. In all three classes, students were able to provide a simple and accurate explanation of the paragraph, which we wrote on the board, revised and discussed, and then talked about how to provide the proper citation to go along with the paraphrase.

Teaching students to paraphrase means teaching them to *listen for ideas* instead of reading specific words. When the focus is on hearing the ideas, it is much easier to transfer what we hear into our own normal diction and syntax. Listening helps prevent the patchwriting that Rebecca Moore Howard warns us against.

### **Diction Days**

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, the work of sociolinguist Peter Stockwell has inspired me to consider the importance of diction in cultivating voice. Stockwell argues that diction creates an atmosphere for the reader, meaning that word choice is important because of the connotation of the word as much as the denotation. Stockwell argues that diction can create a sense of strength or a weakness, confidence or arrogance. His underlying premise is that the atmosphere of a work (what I would call the voice) rests on the word choices. I have found that an emphasis on diction in the classroom is a useful way to teach revision strategies as well as a focus on voice.

Throughout every semester with writing students, I spend significant time on lessons devoted to diction, details, syntax, imagery, and tone as I believe these building blocks help construct writerly voice while also improving writing. Some of those lessons are as simple as pointing to a paragraph in a student's written text and asking that she revise her paragraph focusing only on changing the tone or including more details or providing vivid imagery. Other



lessons are more intentional and are built into the daily classroom schedule. One example is a focus on diction.

On a Diction Day, we focus on words. Early in the semester when I introduce diction to students, we start with defining diction, showing examples, and talking about connotation and denotation. I often use exercises adapted from a variety of sources, including Nancy Dean's "Voice Lessons: Classroom Activities to Teach Diction, Detail, Imagery, Syntax, and Tone." I should note here that Dean's exercises are often geared toward younger writers and should be carefully considered before being adapted to the college writing classroom.

One of Dean's exercises that I find particularly useful includes this sentence by Barbara Kingsolver: "Art is the antidote that can call us back from the edge of numbness, restoring the ability to feel for another." I project the sentence on the board and then ask students to focus on the word "antidote." We interrogate what this word choice does for the writer and what it says about the writer. We consider what such a word implies. We wonder if the word conveys something about the author's thoughts regarding "the inability to feel" for others? And finally, we get to the heart of the exercise. We question what happens to the meaning of the sentence, the implication of the word, the voice of the author if we change "antidote" to "gift" or to another word choice. We follow that methodology by examining other word choices in the sentence, i.e. what happens to the sentence, to the voice of the author, if we change the words like "numbness" or "restoring"? From there we move to student writing. I project a sample of writing on the overhead and ask students to help revise by specifically focusing on word choice. These samples are usually a paragraph or partial paragraph taken from a student's writing from the class, but I also recycle previous student samples as well. We discuss how the use of a specific word choice sounds appropriate coming from one writer while it might not coming from another. We talk

about responsibly using the synonym function of Word, and I point to my favorite online thesauruses.

After working on diction as a class, I ask students to revise a paragraph or a page from their first writing assignment, focusing specifically on reconsidering their word choices. I realize none of this is particularly revolutionary classroom work, and in fact, some may find the process remedial. Depending on the dynamic of the particular group of students in a particular section of a class, I may include more or fewer Diction Days, continually keeping the students themselves at the heart of the classroom pedagogy.