

## **Abstract**

Title of Dissertation:                   ASSESSING THE SCHOLARLY VALUE OF  
ONLINE TEXTS

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Publishing discipline-specific scholarly articles in refereed print journals is a traditional and especially important professional requirement for post-secondary faculty seeking initial employment, tenure, and promotion. Online writing, particularly web-based online journal publications that incorporate the unique hypertextual and/or hypermedia allowances of the medium, is expanding the boundaries of print-based scholarship and engaging academicians within English Studies in ongoing discussions that attempt to resolve issues of parity between print-based and web-based scholarship. A review of the relevant literature shows a persistent perception within English Studies that online journal publications lack scholarly value in comparison to traditional print publications, and therefore they may

not be recognized as equal evidence of scholarly achievement for tenure, promotion, and review purposes. Scholars generally agree upon traditional scholarly standards for assessing print-based texts; however, no grounding rationale for understanding and valuing web-based texts as equally valid scholarship is readily available. This study aims to provide such a rationale.

Specifically, this dissertation addresses the need for valuing web-based journal publications as legitimate scholarship particularly among scholars in the subfield of Computers and Writing. The study provides a rhetorical analysis of a select group of “webtexts” published in the Computers and Writing subfield’s premier online journal, *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*. The analysis identifies common characteristics of webtexts and determines the extent to which these characteristics fail to meet, meet and/or extend traditional conventions of scholarship, thus contributing to the ongoing conversation of online scholarship assessment. The findings from the analysis lead to the development of an example assessment heuristic that may be useful for tenure, promotion, and review participants, online journal editors, and scholars within the Computers and Writing subfield to assess and defend the scholarly value of web-based journal publications.

ASSESSING THE SCHOLARLY VALUE OF ONLINE TEXTS

By

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For my mother, Dr. Esther M. Forti, and my father, Dr. Daniel J. Brovey who have walked this path before me and believed I could follow in their footsteps.

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## Chapter 1: Scholarship and Online Texts

### Statement of the Problem

“Scholarship” is a word that most academics have come to understand more or less intuitively as the production and dissemination of qualitative or quantitative research into questions and issues pertinent to one’s disciplinary field of study, which contributes new knowledge and is validated by one’s peers. In English Studies, that dissemination traditionally has been presented as written research reports and arguments published in books and journals. For purposes of tenure, promotion, and review, published scholarship typically has been valued most when it takes the form of a singly-authored monograph published by a university press or an article in a peer-reviewed journal with a solid reputation for “scholarship.” The nature of such scholarship is not often questioned in print-published literature, suggesting that everyone already knows what constitutes scholarship. Indeed, *how* to publish scholarship is more often the subject of literature addressed to junior scholars (i.e., tenure-track candidates) than arguments for what constitutes such scholarship.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, however, the advent of digital technology has challenged academics to rethink, in a more explicit way, the very nature of scholarship, particularly in the subfield of English Studies called Computers and Writing. In the

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the *MLA Style Guide for Scholarly Publishing*—one of the main sources of information regarding scholarship in the humanities—focuses many chapters on how to choose the right venue for publication, how to style a text in preparation for publication, and how to document citations, rather than on issues related specifically to research methods, writing effective arguments, and meeting specific form and content standards of traditional scholarship. The text presumes that these concerns already are understood and practiced.

Computers and Writing community, academics, who often identify themselves as “technorhetoricians,” have diverged from composing strictly traditional print scholarship to composing several relatively new and evolving forms of online texts including those that resemble more traditional forms of scholarship (e.g., downloadable books and print-based articles), as well as those that have taken new, less traditionally recognizable forms (e.g., web-based and new media texts—either of which may have traditional, formally developed report or argumentation structures—and Weblogs, wikis, and discussion list posts—any of which may form arguments in less formal and less traditional ways). This shift toward online texts—particularly web-based online journal publications that Computers and Writing scholars are increasingly submitting within tenure, promotion, and review portfolios—has motivated many questions and discussions within the subfield regarding the kinds of scholarship that are considered academically legitimate.

In my literature review, I note a persistent and widespread perception within English Studies that online journal publications lack scholarly value in comparison to traditional print publications, and therefore they may not be recognized as equal evidence of scholarly achievement for tenure, promotion, and review purposes. This perception applies to all types of online journal publications—whether print-based (texts published in online journals that follow a print paradigm) or web-based (texts published in online journals that move beyond the print paradigm by incorporating the unique hypertextual and/or hypermedia allowances of the online medium). Within the last few years, however, this perception has slowly evolved; English Studies scholars are increasingly accepting online journal publications within tenure,

promotion, and review portfolios—particularly from those candidates specializing in the Computers and Writing subfield. This acceptance may be due in part to the emergence of online journals that are counterparts to highly-regarded print journals (e.g., *Computers and Composition Online*) and have rigorous referee procedures, reputable review boards, and competitive acceptance rates.

However, a majority of articles published over the past decade in journals like *Computers and Composition Online* are actually print-replicated texts that follow traditional conventions of scholarly arguments—presumably a conservative decision, especially by junior scholars, to match scholarly print-based expectations of tenure, promotion, and review committees. Today there is a growing trend within Computers and Writing online journals for scholars to publish web-based texts that are increasingly more reliant on hypertextual and/or hypermedia strategies to tell their stories and make their arguments. My review of the relevant literature on hypertext composing reveals a consensus among scholars that web-based texts are new forms of rhetorical presentation requiring revised assessment criteria to account for the ways in which they extend the boundaries of traditional scholarship. However, assessing this relatively new and unique form of online text is challenging due to a general lack of familiar criteria for determining their scholarly value. While scholarly assessment criteria for print-based texts is widely (if somewhat intuitively) known, criteria for assessing web-based texts has not yet been explicitly articulated.

Granted, online journal editors and peer reviewers—who presumably are specialists in the Computers and Writing subfield—implicitly demonstrate what they value as scholarship through their choices of texts for publication. Similarly, external

reviewers signal their approval of online journal publications in tenure, promotion, and review portfolios through positive assessments. However, an explicit articulation of such criteria that emerges from an identification and analysis of the common characteristics of these unique texts can enhance scholars' general understanding of what constitutes "online scholarship" in web-based journal publications and how this "scholarship" measures up to the more familiar form of traditional print scholarship.

In order to discern common characteristics and publication criteria, I use online texts from *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy* (called simply *Kairos* hereafter), a reputable online journal in the Computers and Writing subfield, both to develop an assessment tool and to rhetorically analyze a select subset of published texts from that journal. I argue that an explicit articulation of such characteristics and criteria, as well as an explanation of how they may fail to meet, meet, and/or extend traditional scholarly conventions, can provide several invested groups, including tenure, promotion, and review participants (candidates, committee members, and external reviewers) as well as journal decision makers (editors and board members who may be called upon to defend published pieces, and peer reviewers who make initial judgments about submitted work), with a vocabulary for understanding and defending the legitimacy of these relatively new web-based forms of online texts as evidence of scholarship for the purposes of advancement. This dissertation contributes to the ongoing conversation regarding scholars' understanding of how and why texts that extend traditional scholarly notions can be valued as legitimate scholarship.



## **Overview: An Exigence for Articulating Assessment Criteria**

Within English Studies, the exigence for articulating assessment criteria regarding the scholarly value of online journal publications is evident in the changes brought about by the current state of academic publishing and the changes inherent to discourse production in the online medium. Specifically, as the costs associated with traditional print publishing rise and the expectations for faculty to “publish or perish” remain high, the Computers and Writing subfield is increasingly using and seeking acceptance of scholarly online journal publications. The literature suggests that online journals are financially viable, easily and generally accessible via the Internet, and potentially timely venues—from submission to publication—and they quickly are becoming rigorous platforms for publishing scholarship (see, for example, Burbules, Pass, Peterson, and Sweeney).<sup>2</sup> In addition to these benefits of publishing in online journals, scholars find added value in producing texts that move beyond print-based conventions by taking advantage of the hypertextual and hypermedia technologies of the medium. As more of these web-based online journal publications appear in tenure, promotion, and review portfolios, the necessity for understanding and defending their value becomes critical. Tenure, promotion, and review participants need a shared vocabulary—an explicit articulation of criteria that is grounded in traditional conventions but that also accounts for digital characteristics in online published scholarship.

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<sup>2</sup> Some exceptions exist to these generalizations; for example, the online journal, *The Writing Instructor*, has been offline for approximately two years as it undergoes a site redesign.

## **The State of Scholarly Publishing: A Shift toward Online Journals**

In a seminal letter titled “A Special Letter from Stephen Greenblatt,” written in late May, 2002 to members of the Modern Language Association (MLA), then-President Greenblatt addresses what many scholars refer to as the “crisis” associated with the future of scholarly publishing: economic constraints have caused university presses to publish fewer books, while the expectations for publication as a qualification for advancement have increased. This crisis, Greenblatt suggests, may find resolution in the shift toward an acceptance of article-length publications as primary evidence of scholarly research and the exploration of online scholarship.

Specifically, the point of Greenblatt’s letter is twofold: (1) to increase collegial awareness and preface the findings of the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of Scholarly Publishing that were about to be made public; and (2) to urge English departments to reconsider their expectations and requirements for tenure and promotion based on these findings. Greenblatt describes both the repercussions of federal and state budget cuts, which have reduced the amount of funding available for university libraries and presses, and consequently, the challenge to maintain the quantity and accessibility of traditional scholarly publishing:

Under financial constraint, universities have been unable to provide adequate support both for library budgets and for university presses. Responding to the pressures of shrinking budgets and of skyrocketing costs for medical, scientific, and technical journals, libraries have cut back on the number of books that they purchase. And university presses, suffering severe financial losses as a result of this shift in library purchases and a general decline in book sales, have cut back on the number of books they publish annually in certain fields.

According to the MLA Ad Hoc Committee’s 2002 report, “The Future of Scholarly Publishing,” the decline in the number of books published annually

particularly affects scholarly monographs in English Studies—many of which have little to no “crossover sales potential” and are less likely to be adopted by university presses (174). Greenblatt observes that a majority of language and literature departments require a full-length scholarly monograph (“a small number of departments expect the publication of two such books!”) as part of a tenure and promotion portfolio. The effects of the economic pressures on the academic publishing industry combined with the current demands of a “publish or perish” exigency places junior faculty—those up for tenure and promotion—in what Greenblatt appropriately refers to as a double bind: “They face a challenge—under inflexible time constraints and with very high stakes—that many of them may be unable to meet successfully, no matter how strong or serious their scholarly achievement, because academic presses simply cannot afford to publish their books.” In “The Future of Scholarly Publishing,” the MLA Committee’s concern for the apparent inequity of the academic reward model in the face of difficult financial times echoes Greenblatt’s position: “On a practical level, how can ever-increasing demands for publication as a qualification for tenure and promotion be sustained when scholars find it harder and harder to publish their books?” (176).

Toward a resolution for these challenges, Greenblatt urges departments to reconsider first whether these expectations are “reasonable or necessary” and second whether books are the best way of judging scholarly achievement. Similarly, the Committee suggests that scholars reconsider the standard “book for tenure” requirement by looking to another highly regarded form of publication—the journal article. They contend that journal publications may indeed more solidly achieve

some key scholarly goals: "...we need to consider whether journal publication—arguably determined more directly by peer readers—may often be not only better for individuals but also better for the collective advancement of knowledge" (179).

A promising possibility for resolving this scholarly standoff—and one that is most relevant to this dissertation—is the Committee's suggestion to consider online publication as a viable alternative to the type of scholarly work typically accepted in a tenure, promotion, and review portfolio. The Committee observes that scholars in several fields already are reading, publishing in, and citing from online journals and that this use is likely to increase in upcoming years (180).<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, the Committee suggests that implementation of a peer review process comparable to those used by university presses and reputable print journals will be one important measure of ensuring the quality of scholarly work selected for online publication. While this recommendation to incorporate a comparably rigorous referee process for online journals is significant for establishing the ethos of the venue, the recommendation does not articulate the criteria on which peer reviewers should judge texts that move beyond the print paradigm (print-based online texts) toward texts that incorporate the unique allowances of the online medium (web-based online texts). One reading of this omission may be that print-based online texts are,

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to be clear about what exactly is an "online journal." Although traditional print journals such as *College English* and *Computers and Composition* make their issues available in an online venue for subscribers (for example through JSTOR or ScienceDirect), these would not be considered "online journals" but rather "journals that are accessible online." (And, in fact, texts accessed online from these journals are indexed according to their print venue.) Rather, an online journal is a venue that publishes texts only available online. These texts may be print-based or web-based, depending on the journal. Usually, these journals do not require subscriptions. With regard to assessing texts that can be accessed online for the purpose of tenure, promotion, and review, the print journals made accessible through online publishing clearinghouses are not a problem. The PDF files in these journals can be assessed through traditional means. The true online journals present more of an assessment challenge, with online journals that publish print-based texts becoming less of a problem because the forms are recognizable, while online journals that publish web-based texts provide a significant assessment challenge.

in fact, the majority of what is published, and familiar assessment standards already exist for these texts. It is possible that web-based texts have not achieved that level of familiarity because so few journals publish them as yet. However, online journal publications that engage digital technologies challenge traditional scholarly conventions and require somewhat different assessment criteria—criteria that will need to be articulated explicitly if the Computers and Writing subfield is to make progress toward understanding the value of web-based online publications and consequently enhancing such publications' scholarly reputations.

### **Publishing in Online Journals: Value-added Scholarship**

If the general perception is that publishing in online journals is too risky a proposition for tenure- and promotion-seeking faculty, then why do some scholars still choose to push the boundaries of “acceptable scholarship” in this way? Part of the reason, as mentioned in the MLA Ad Hoc Committee report, is that publishing in traditional print journals has become ultra competitive, and online journals, given their capacity for publishing more texts per issue at minimal distribution costs, may offer a better chance for work to be accepted for publication.<sup>4</sup> This in no way suggests that online journals are any less competitive venues for publication than are

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<sup>4</sup> Unless an online journal is funded by a grant or fellowship, there exist unacknowledged costs even when the journal is developed, managed and published upon an infrastructure of volunteers. Some of these costs include hundreds of hours of volunteer time that may not be remunerated monetarily, the requirement of a host server, and the constant need to keep up with changes in technology. However, online journal membership typically is free to the reader. On the other hand, print journals incur more obvious costs including course load reductions for faculty, funding of administrative assistance, and the actual cost of printing and distributing the journal. While it is true that online journal editors may receive similar course load reduction and administrative assistance, a vast majority of volunteers probably do not. Moreover, online journals simply do not have the costs associated with printing and distributing. Therefore, it seems likely that Byron Hawk's statement in “Facing the Future of Electronic Publishing” has some accuracy: “As print becomes more costly, publishers are cutting back on the number of books and journals they agree to publish, and as state budgets are squeezed tighter and tighter, administrators are less willing to fund the production of print journals (in some cases even asking print journals to move onto the Web).”

print journals. A print journal and an online journal can have similar competitive acceptance rates, yet a print journal is limited to a certain number of pages per issue, which means an accepted text may not be published as quickly. Given the same scenario, because online journals are more flexible in dealing with digital space as opposed to paper-based pages, they may be able to publish in a timely manner more of their competitively accepted pieces per issue.

Moreover, some online journals provide forums for new sub-specialties emerging within fields. *Kairos*, for example, offers a venue where technorhetoricians can focus specifically on ideas related to teaching, learning, and writing in computer and web-based environments. For another example, *Computers and Composition Online* provides a forum where scholar-teachers can discuss the effects of new media on literacy practices. An online journal, then, might be the more appropriate choice for which these candidates might compose and publish their research.

Scholars also believe that publishing in online journals can potentially broaden the audience base and increase reader interaction. For example, Elizabeth Pass emphasizes that paper journals are circulated among a small group of interested scholars and may not have impact beyond their own field, whereas because they are accessible via a wide range of search engines, online journals have the potential to reach broad audiences—including across disciplinary borders where much work in composition studies is being conducted (see also Burbules, Langston, and Sweeney).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Although search engines such as JSTOR and LION may increase accessibility to articles in some print-based journals, the accessibility is often based on an institution-based subscription service. A majority of the online journals in the subfield of Computers and Writing (*Kairos*, *Enculturation*, *The Writing Instructor*, *Computers and Composition Online*) provide free accessibility. Readers from other disciplines, as well as those outside the academic environment may be more inclined to browse journals with unlimited accessibility; additionally, they may find these selections available both with a library search engine and a general search engine like Google or Google Scholar.

Seth Katz, in “One Department’s Guidelines for Evaluating Computer-related Work,” suggests that because online texts are exposed to a potentially broader audience, they offer an efficient and motivating opportunity for scholarly exchange:

...an online publication can lead to follow-up discussion more quickly and easily than can a print publication: while an exchange of letters and response pieces, or even face-to-face conference sessions may follow a print publication, an online publication can immediately lead to both asynchronous and synchronous discussion, debate, and response pieces of any length, all of which may be logged, archived, hypertextually linked, and cited in subsequent texts.

The easy-link access to authors of online journal publications also provides the opportunity for an extension of the scholarly discussion that traditional scholarship hopes to achieve. Articles in print journals often include authors’ email addresses and so provide direct access for reader feedback and communication. However, Katz suggests that the added convenience and ease with which scholars can directly access one another in the online environment may lead to more immediate communication.<sup>6</sup>

The most compelling case that scholars appear to make for choosing to publish in reputable online journals involves a belief in the value-added aspect of incorporating the technological—hypertext and hypermedia—allowances of the online medium, in other words, moving beyond print-based online texts toward web-based online texts. Simply using the online medium for disseminating print-based texts is, to many web-published authors, a blatant disregard and misappropriation of the medium for the kinds of allowances it offers—allowances that, if used effectively,

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<sup>6</sup> Katz’s perceived advantage brings up some important questions: Could quicker follow-up be construed as less reflective? What would be the benefits of publishing these comments immediately in, say, journal weblogs so that scholars can read others’ reflections while the text is fresh in their minds?

combine to create a different, potentially more powerful reading experience.<sup>7</sup> For example, the online medium makes possible the use of visual and aural presentation modes such as hyperlinked nodes, three-dimensional graphics, audio, animation, and video, which are not options for inclusion within print-based texts. Additionally, the ability to offer immediate access to online primary sources through hyperlinks can invite “re-analysis for validation” and help contextualize various points of an argument in a way that would be impractical and certainly not as easily accessible in a print-based text (Burbules 278).

Scholars also point out that print-based online texts talk about issues while web-based online texts have a unique opportunity to enact them. Pass, for example, argues that writing about web-writing issues in print is “somewhat artificial” and that writing about web-writing issues in a webbed environment “allows the creator of the rhetorical space to demonstrate instead of merely to describe” (52). This is a significant allowance that, as the analysis in chapter 4 will show, has emerged as a conventional characteristic of web-based texts, namely, the ability for form to enact content in ways that enhance the meaning and experience of the text.

Despite the anti-scholarly stigma, some scholars believe the ability to use the technological allowances of the medium in their compositions justifies their efforts to present ideas in this medium. Therefore, a main goal of my study is to generate an understanding of how the incorporation of these allowances helps to achieve

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<sup>7</sup>Hypertext scholar Jakob Nielsen, for example, argues that print-based online texts “miss some of the opportunities for taking advantage of the new medium” and that these texts “would suffer the disadvantages associated with forcing users to read large amounts of text from computer screens” (“Multimedia and Hypertext” 64).



traditional scholarly goals in new, legitimate ways and, therefore, how such incorporation redefines scholarship for the online environment.

### **The Perceived (Il)legitimacy of Online Journal Publications**

A current illustration of the perceived value of online journal publications demonstrates the need for identifying and articulating the scholarly value of these texts. “Chronicle Forums” is an open-access e-mail discussion group mediated by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. A recent thread on this forum entitled, “Online Academic Journals: Legitimate or Not?” began with this question: “For members of search committees, in particular, how would you react to someone who has ‘published’ in an online peer-reviewed journal. Would you even count this as ‘real’ publication?” (July 5, 2006).

The responses from *Chronicle* readers are mixed: Some advise applicants to take into account a personal and institutional context (“learn about review standards at your institution in advance;” “see where successful people in your field publish”). Others suggest what they consider to be the benefits of online journals (“cost less,” “are more accessible,” “have a broader impact”). Still other responses focus on the need for equitable judgment regardless of the medium (“it’s not the medium but the peer review process that counts,” “we just need to see that the same standards and rigor are upheld as with print journals”).

The largest trend in responses, however, depicts a cautious and skeptical perception of online publications, as the following statements indicate:

- I think an online publication or two might add some zip to a CV that has plenty of more traditional publications, but don’t put too many eggs in the virtual basket just yet.

- Unless you have an unusual or compelling reason, why choose online over print? Why create additional risk?
- [We] junior folk are too new to make new policy, and the tenure-track (or aspiration to it) is not the time to go against the grain, however outdated it may be. Why take the risk?
- Until the senior people are doing it, junior scholars might justifiably be afraid to. When you are on the tenure track, you really have to maximize the contribution that every single article makes to your case.

These responses reflect what appears to be a generally-held perception within the academy that online journal publications—whether print-based or web-based—are not valued as highly as print-based publications within a tenure, promotion, and review portfolio and constitute a risk not worth taking. Several factors contribute to the perception, including, as the focus of the above responses indicate, the reputation of the venue. One significant concern regarding a perceived difference between print and online venues emerges in this particular question: “Is the review process similar in rigor to traditional print journals?” Underlying this question is a need to know whether the journal relies on non-biased (“blind”) expert reviews, whether the reviewers assess the online texts by the same scholarly standards of traditional print journal articles, and whether the journal has a competitive acceptance rate. The answer to this question depends on the form of text under evaluation. If the online journal publication follows a print paradigm—replicating a print-based text in the online venue—as many tend to do, tenure, promotion, and review participants and journal decision makers will be familiar with the implicitly well-known criteria and likely will be able to understand and defend the legitimacy of the text more easily. However, if the online text is web-based (i.e., incorporates the unique allowances of the online medium), scholars may not be familiar with the criteria used to assess the text as scholarly and may not be able to articulate the value of the text. Most notably,

none of the participants in the “Chronicle Forum” discussion specify exactly what they mean by “online publication.” This lack of distinction and ensuing ambiguity in the discussion appear to be both endemic and unquestioned in the relevant literature, as chapter 2 shows, and demonstrates a general lack of well-defined and consistently used terminology in referring to the general category of online texts. It also emphasizes the challenge to change the perception; because criteria for web-based texts are not widely known and articulated, it is difficult to determine whether the same standards are upheld among texts in both print and online media.

The implications of this widespread perception directly affect junior scholars who specialize in research and teaching with technology and whose work would seem to fit best within online venues devoted to these topics. These scholars by necessity and relevance may include online journal publications (both print-based and/or web-based) in their academic portfolios, yet they are challenged to defend the scholarly value of their texts to an extent not required of those who publish in traditional print venues.<sup>8</sup> But on what basis do they explain work that exceeds conventional boundaries of print scholarship and cannot be assessed fairly through traditional scholarly criteria? Moreover, how do they explain their non-conventional work in understandable terms for tenure, promotion, and review committee members—many of whom may not have experience evaluating these new texts in the context of their own research?

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<sup>8</sup> Clancy Ratliff, for example, acknowledges this inequity in her academic Weblog. In an entry dated 12/9/05, she reviews her NCTE-sponsored panel at MLA 2005 titled, “Digital Scholarly Publishing: Beyond the Crisis” and notes that even the peer review processes of online journals must be extensively defended as legitimate and rigorous. She asks, “Do assistant professors who are up for tenure have to give this kind of apologia for print publications?”

Answering these questions requires an understanding of the criteria used to assess web-based texts; this, in turn, requires an understanding of how the criteria are grounded in traditionally-accepted standards of scholarship as well as how they exceed traditional standards. Several scholarly discussions detailing the differences between print and online writing, and many handbooks or “rhetorics” of web-writing offer isolated descriptions and composing guidelines, but alone they do not provide adequate measures or explanations for how to understand and defend the scholarly value of web-based online texts. Because criteria have not been made explicit, even journal decision makers and external reviewers may not fully be aware of the manner or traditions in which their decisions are grounded regarding scholarship standards for the online medium.

### **The Purpose and Method of the Dissertation**

By exploring the traditional and non-traditional characteristics that constitute a unique and evolving form of online text, I address the gap in knowledge and understanding of how and why web-based online journal publications in the Computers and Writing subfield are, indeed, scholarly. I used the following method. First, I conducted a general survey of a large, random sampling of “webtexts” published in *Kairos*. From the survey, I identified several common characteristics—both conventional and non-conventional—that were present in these texts. Drawing from these characteristics, I developed an assessment tool—grounded in traditional standards of scholarship as well as emerging standards for effective web writing—in order to explore trends that demonstrate the extent to which these characteristics fail to meet, meet, and extend traditional scholarly standards. I used this assessment tool

to conduct a rhetorical analysis of a select subset of *Kairos* webtexts. The findings from my analysis lead to a set of criteria that Computers and Writing scholars can use to create a framework for assessing web-based online journal publications. I offer one such example assessment heuristic in chapter 5. A major implication of identifying and articulating these criteria is that it can provide a vocabulary—derived from both traditional scholarly values and non-traditional web-based values—that can help tenure, promotion, and review participants and online journal decision makers understand and defend the scholarly legitimacy of web-based online journal publications.

### **The Object of Study: A Rationale for Analyzing Kairos “Webtexts”**

The scholarly online journal, *Kairos*,<sup>9</sup> has distinguished itself within the subfield of Computers and Writing as the first and longest-running online venue to publish web-based scholarly arguments, or “webtexts,” as they are identified within the journal. It is a refereed journal that explores the intersections of rhetoric, technology, and pedagogy—topics that influence and support the very purpose of this study. *Kairos* has been the object of study by researchers who want to understand better the nature of online publications (e.g., Kalmbach, Ball “Show, Not Tell” and “A New Media Reading Strategy,” Walker “Hyper.Activity”). A close examination of the characteristics that comprise the webtexts published over the past decade in *Kairos*, including the trends that emerge based on the rapid pace of technological advancement, provides a basis for establishing explicit assessment criteria.<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup> *Kairos*'s most recent issue is always located at <http://www.kairos.technorhetoric.net/index.html>.

<sup>10</sup> While it is true that *Kairos* only accepts texts designed specifically for the web, as is stated on the journal's cover page, part of the goal of this study is to explore what this statement means, given the

archives of the journal, which extend beyond ten years, provide a rich source for analyzing these characteristics and trends longitudinally.

In her comparative study of online and print journals, Pass identifies three main categories of scholarly online journals in the subfield of Computers and Writing that publish texts along a continuum from closely print-based to completely non-traditional. These three categories include: (1) traditional print journals that have been moved online and journals that were established online but as of this writing merely replicate print conventions (e.g., *Computers and Composition Online*,<sup>11</sup> *The Writing Instructor*, *Enculturation*); (2) journals that retain some characteristics of the print tradition but differ in substantial ways through the use of the affordances of the online medium (e.g., *Kairos*); and (3) journals that do not resemble print journals at all (e.g., *Vectors*, *Pre/Text*).

Online journals that replicate print-based conventions, which represent the first category, typically do not use the allowances of the medium beyond the ease of dissemination that it provides, and therefore they do not offer sufficient evidence of the changes that occur from print to web-based writing. Indeed, the texts published within these journals should be relatively easy to defend as scholarly within a tenure, promotion, and review portfolio, especially given that they can be printed offline with few to no changes in the argument structure and can be assessed through traditional scholarly criteria. Because print-based texts can be examined and defended as

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tendency toward a plurality of definitions for “hypertext,” “web-based text,” “online text” and other labels in literature that are used to refer to digital scholarship.

<sup>11</sup> Between 2006 and 2007, *Computers and Composition Online* has published a few texts that move beyond print-based conventions, indicating a possible shift in the acceptance and exploration of new presentations of scholarly arguments in an online journal that until recently has subscribed to a print paradigm. *The Writing Instructor*, which has been offline for about two years for a redesign and which has come back online in November 2007, also appears to remain primarily print-based in its “new” format.

legitimate scholarship through familiar criteria, the explanation of their scholarly value would focus primarily on the credibility of the venue itself (e.g., a rigorous peer review process, reputable board of reviewers, and competitive acceptance rate).

Online journals that disassociate largely from the print tradition, which represent the third category, are an extreme opposite of the first category. They offer a different kind of challenge from the one taken up by this study. Texts within these journals tend to move beyond print-based conventions in ways that render them unrecognizable as scholarship. Often these texts appear to focus more on an exploration of the artistic or stylistic possibilities associated with manipulating text, graphics, spacing, movement, and other technological allowances than on the presentation of what has been understood as scholarly content. While much can be learned from these formal experimentations, this study is concerned with the ways in which form and content combine to create new forms of scholarly presentation.

*Kairos* represents the second category of journals. According to the “Welcome to *Kairos*” cover page, the journal seeks to “push boundaries in academic publishing” while simultaneously “bridg[ing] the gap between print and digital publishing cultures.” A journal that maintains a scholarly presence while pushing traditional boundaries of print scholarship is the ideal choice for determining the extent to which the definition of scholarship is stretched, but not “snapped” beyond the academic community’s historically acceptable parameters. As a self-labeled transitional journal, *Kairos* is the most relevant choice for this study because it provides a starting place for sketching a portrait of transitional, mid-range, currently common types of web-based online journal publications. Indeed, studying pieces

published in *Kairos*'s first ten years offers a stepping stone to needed examinations of more experimental online texts, including the technologically more innovative new media pieces that the journal has begun to publish and likely will publish more frequently in the future. Therefore, studying *Kairos* enables an analysis of transitional online texts, whose characteristics need to be identified and defined before those of newer media-based texts. This study adds to the current understanding of web-based scholarship and more peripherally may inform concurrent research into new media scholarship.

My selection of *Kairos* as a relevant object of study for determining parameters of online scholarship also is based on the journal's reputation as both a site of serious scholarship and a welcoming platform for experimentation with the unique allowances of the online medium. A number of factors confirm my selection of this journal as a legitimate venue for scholarship including (1) claims about the journal's reputation from editors and scholars in the field; (2) the composition of its editorial board as including many of the prominent Computers and Writing scholars; and, most relevant for the purposes of academic reward, (3) its unique, collaborative peer-review process. The journal's explicit goal to push the boundaries of academic publishing makes it a viable choice for analysis. The balancing act of tradition and innovation—or convention and experimentation—is a defining and distinguishing characteristic of the journal and its published texts, as my analysis in chapter 4 will demonstrate; this balancing act helps to solidify *Kairos*'s reputation, according to Patricia Webb Peterson in "Writing and Publishing in the Boundaries: Academic Writing in/through the Virtual Age," as "setting the bar" for online scholarship.



Similarly, as *Kairos* editorial board member Michael Spooner asserts, the journal “does a far more interesting job in using the potential of the Web than other electronic journals do” (E-mail, April 6, 2006).

During the more than ten years of its existence, *Kairos* has built a reputation as a top-tier online journal in Computers and Writing specifically and English Studies generally. Peterson describes the reputation that *Kairos* has built: “Cited extensively in print journals as well as linked to in online courses, articles, references lists, and bibliographies, *Kairos* has become widely known and respected in the field of rhetoric and composition as the premier online journal.” A recent discussion thread on “Techrhet”<sup>12</sup>—one of the leading E-mail listservs serving the Computers and Writing community—addresses the “ranking” of *Kairos* for the purpose of inclusion in a tenure portfolio (November 12-13, 2006). Several well-known scholars contributed suggestions for describing the journal. Senior co-editor Doug Eyman contends that *Kairos* is the “most cited online journal in the field” and notes that the acceptance rate for the extended academic arguments (webtexts published as part of the “CoverWeb” and “Features” sections) is close to 12%, indicating that publication is highly competitive. Editorial board member James Kalmbach acknowledges that the journal has been a remarkable success, producing 21 issues over ten years. Similarly, journal co-editor Cheryl Ball defends *Kairos* as “the most longstanding online journal...continuously publishing every year since its inception.” Ball states that the current readership (as of Fall 2006) including international participation, has topped 44,000 per month, and she echoes Peterson’s assertion that *Kairos* is “the premier online journal in its field.”

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<sup>12</sup> [techrhet@intervarsity.org](mailto:techrhet@intervarsity.org)

Readership numbers, acceptance rates, and citation information provide some relevant measures for traditionally evaluating the journal as a reputable scholarly venue; other measures include the composition of the editorial board, the reputation of authors published, and the rigor of the peer review process. Regarding the first measure, the editorial board and contributing authors are academics and scholars who are well-recognized both for their work published in *Kairos* as well as in traditional print journals. The board members also include talented graduate students who are building their reputations as technorhetoricians.<sup>13</sup> The current editors and board members are cited often in online discussion listservs such as “techrhet” and “h-rhetor,”<sup>14</sup> as well as within this study. They include, among others: Gail Hawisher, Cynthia Selfe, Anne Wysocki, Johndan Johnson-Eilola, and James Kalmbach. *Kairos*'s reputation as a Tier 1 journal in the subfield of Computers and Writing is comparable to that of *College English*, a Tier 1 journal in English Studies.

Arguably the most important criterion that tenure committees use in judging the scholarly validity of a journal is the rigor of the peer review process. If a highly regarded print journal with a reputable board acknowledges and values a given text as worthy of scholarly publication, then the chance is greater for a review committee to look favorably upon the publication as part of a tenure portfolio. This is because, as Peterson acknowledges, traditional print journals have established a widely practiced and accepted method of peer review. Joseph Gibaldi, editor of the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*, describes a typical journal review process: First,

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<sup>13</sup> In fact, *Kairos* was originally conceived and managed by a group of graduate students; this junior level of scholar is and always has been represented on the editorial board as a way of professionalizing new colleagues and learning from them.

<sup>14</sup> See [techrhet@interversity.org](mailto:techrhet@interversity.org) and [listserv@h-net.msu.edu](mailto:listserv@h-net.msu.edu).

the journal editor(s) reviews the manuscript, and, if found viable for the venue, the manuscript is then sent to two or more “consultant readers” who blindly review the manuscript and recommend whether it should proceed in the publication process with or without revisions (8). This process is assumed to be implicitly understood by most scholars, and the information in the submission guidelines of scholarly journals within English Studies suggest that it is widely practiced (see, for example, *College English*, *Computers and Composition*, *College Composition and Communication*).

In satisfying their claim to “bridge the gap,” between print and online cultures, during the time period under study, *Kairos* has incorporated a peer review process that meets and, arguably, exceeds traditional scholarly conventions by achieving multiple goals of scholarly exchange simultaneously. Specifically, the process involves three tiers or levels of review. In the first tier, editors pre-review submissions and forward potential publications to the entire editorial board. In the second tier, the board members review and discuss the submissions in a listserv forum, arriving at consensus-based recommendations regarding which submissions they believe should advance to the next level of review. Once the submission advances to the third tier, a select group of board members are assigned to work collaboratively with the author(s) to prepare the submission for publication.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Greg Siering uses the term “blind” to refer to the anonymous *mix* of the participating board members’ comments in any given review. The author submitting the webtext knows who comprises the board (this information is made public through a link on the *Kairos* cover page) and can find out who viewed the submitted website and from which servers; however, the author does not know “who said what” because the comments are compiled and sent to the author without names attached, unless a reviewer asks to be revealed. At the same time, from the board member’s perspective, the process is not blind; web addresses and URLs are easily traceable—so the reviewers, with a little effort, can figure out the identity of the writer. In “So Ya Wanna Be and Editorial Boarder,” Nick Carbone notes that while *Kairos*’s process is not exactly blind, the interactive component helps to alleviate any favoritism—either for or against the writer—for which a traditional blind review is designed. He comments that “the ‘blind read’ can turn colleagues into pit bulls who do no more than tear and gnash a

The unique aspects of this review process, which I will discuss in greater detail in chapter 2, are that (1) texts are read and discussed by more than the traditional two or three reviewers, and (2) the process is conducted entirely through E-mail discussions. Nick Carbone, former editorial staff member and editorial board member of *Kairos*, views this “dialogic consideration of submissions” as integral to the growth of the computers and writing community, particularly because it motivates scholars to question, defend, and ultimately reach a consensus on whether a particular submission represents well their concept of web-based scholarship (“So Ya Wanna Be”). The archives of these discussions alone, were they to be made public, would be valuable for determining agreed-upon characteristics of online scholarship. Peterson believes that *Kairos*’s decision to make public an explicit description of their peer review process demonstrates their desire to help tenure, promotion, and review committees view the journal as a rigorous platform for scholarship. Additionally, publishing a detailed description of the peer review process is an attempt to clarify what may often be perceived as mysterious and arbitrary, particularly within the online medium.

The review process also demonstrates the effort *Kairos* makes to be “scholarly” in traditionally understood ways through the incorporation of this and several other print-based conventions in the journal’s overall format. After all, if the journal’s infrastructure resembles at least some of the infrastructure of traditional, reputable print journals, the chances are greater that the journal will be perceived as a serious scholarly platform. Additional conventions (or “nods to the academy and its

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piece to bits,” and that the *Kairos* peer review process seeks to achieve the more important goals of peer review, including “collegiality, respect, encouragement, sound advice, and honesty” through the collaborative consensus of the reviewers.

grizzled tenure process” as Carbone asserts) include issue archives, a standard table of contents, incorporation of citations, and a fairly regular publication schedule (including a fall and spring issue, at minimum, almost every year since the journal began). The topics listed on the “Submissions” page include traditional foci of study in the areas of Rhetoric and Computers and Writing—empirical research reports, theoretical essays, and discussions of practical classroom applications—which also appear in traditional print journals, such as *Computers and Composition*. Additionally, the research methods used by contributing authors echo those found in traditional print publications in the subfield of Computers and Writing.

But perhaps the most controversial aspect of *Kairos* in terms of its acceptance as a scholarly forum—and that which distinguishes this journal as a forerunner in scholarly online publication—is its goal to “push boundaries in academic publishing.” *Kairos* claims to publish “webtexts,” which are defined in the submission guidelines of the journal as “texts authored specifically for publication on the World Wide Web.” In “Facing the Future of Electronic Publishing,” Eyman asserts that while *Kairos* was not the first peer-reviewed online journal in the humanities, it was the first to “specifically engage new media (hypertext) in a dialectic relationship with the scholarship being presented: submissions to *Kairos* were required to be in ‘native’ hypertext—that is, they were to use the medium as an integral part of the message, not merely as a vehicle for distributing linear essays.” This goal marks *Kairos* as the first online journal in the subfield of Computers and Writing where authors are required and given the opportunity to publish texts that experiment with the unique allowances of the medium.

The webtexts published in *Kairos*, as my analysis in chapter 4 will show, do not simply replicate the kind of scholarship that is found in print journals; they make use of several hypertextual and some hypermedia allowances of the medium, including multi-linear structures, contextualizing links, and the inclusion of sophisticated graphics, images, and navigational icons. In some of the more innovative webtexts, the form is designed to enact the content, thereby creating what hypertext scholars determine is an enhanced experience of the text and the potential for a synergistic understanding of the argument. A trend in recent issues is the publication of webtexts that incorporate multi-media elements such as audio, video, and animation to compose, enhance, and present arguments.

The current submission guidelines<sup>16</sup> (as of September, 2007) also describe another innovative or boundary-pushing component of the journal, namely a freedom of form: “We do not suggest an ideal standard; rather we invite each author or collaborative writing team to think carefully about what unique opportunities the Web offers.” These guidelines specifically make the author, not the editors or editorial staff, responsible for the design of their texts. Other online journals, as Kalmbach notes in “Reading the Archives: Ten Years of Nonlinear (*Kairos*) History,” edit submissions into consistently formatted templates, relinquishing little to no editorial control over the final form. *Kairos*’s relatively hands-off editorial policy encourages authors to experiment with varied forms; thus, it has implications for determining the future look and feel of online journal publications. Somewhat akin to pinning a wave to the sand, *Kairos*’s authorial freedom offers an interesting challenge for scholars to identify a consistent set of characteristics that begin to define “online scholarship.”

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<sup>16</sup> *Kairos*’s archived issues include access only to current submission guidelines.

For these reasons, *Kairos* is a rich source of analysis and an appropriate selection as the journal of focus for this study.

### **Significance of the Study**

This dissertation offers an assessment framework for understanding and defending the scholarly value of web-based online journal publications in the subfield of Computers and Writing. The significance of the study is tied directly to the goals of this project, which include identifying and defining characteristics of scholarship as it exists within online journal publications, and articulating explicit, if tentative, criteria for assessing the value of these texts as evidence of scholarship for the purposes of tenure, promotion, and review. Articulating criteria through a vocabulary grounded in relevant conventions of traditional scholarship as well as emerging conventions of effective web-based writing can help those who are unfamiliar with these new forms to understand the basis of their scholarly value.

A clear articulation of criteria can benefit many groups of scholars within the Computers and Writing subfield. The most obvious beneficiaries are junior scholars who are in the process of compiling portfolios and making cases for their scholarly competence and publications. Concurrently, those committee members as well as external reviewers who are faced with the challenge to accept online journal publications as viable evidence of a candidate's scholarship or to justify why and how the scholar's work falls short of scholarly standards need such criteria. Online journal editors and editorial board members who also are responsible for justifying their publication decisions—and for maintaining consistency in publication standards—also would benefit from a clear articulation of criteria. An understanding of what

constitutes scholarship in web-based online journal publications and in what ways the work measures up to traditional print scholarship is crucial for these groups.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, candidates already are expected to defend their work to some extent as part of the tenure, promotion, and review process. While policies may change from institution to institution, candidates are usually either required or given the opportunity to make a case for their scholarly achievement as part of the tenure, promotion, and review process. For example, candidates for tenure, promotion, or review at the University of Maryland—the institution recording this dissertation—are required to include as part of their dossier a personal statement in which they describe their scholarly accomplishments. This additional platform to defend the scholarly rigor and relevance of a candidate's work appears to be especially useful for Computers and Writing scholars who cannot rely on an easy acceptance of their web-based, non-conventional forms of presenting scholarly research.

Reviewers such as external consultants for tenure, promotion, and review committees as well as journal decision makers also are required to comment on the scholarly contribution of the candidate/author and would benefit from an explicit articulation of criteria for explaining the value of the work under review. For example, Gibaldi notes that it is common practice for journal editors and reviewers to explain their reasons for rejecting submissions: “Consultants are typically encouraged to give specific reasons for their recommendations, to describe reservations in as

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<sup>17</sup> Because Computers and Writing is a subfield at the margins of English Studies, scholars specializing in this area may face a tenure committee comprised of literature or composition specialists who are less familiar with the subfield's scholarship. These committee members may not immediately identify a journal—whether print or online—within the subfield as reputable, or may question the validity of the text based on preconceived notions about the stability or credibility of online work.



much detail as possible, and to suggest ways to improve the manuscript” (9). Authors may be more receptive to decisions that are justified from clearly articulated criteria. Moreover, authors who are privy to these criteria will have a better understanding, prior to submitting a text, of what is expected in a scholarly online journal publication and for particular journals in the Computers and Writing subfield.

Finally, the significance of the study—and the motivation for defining the scholarly nature of web-based online journal publications—is apparent when viewed through the lens of the traditional rhetorical concept of stasis theory. Stasis is an invention strategy for identifying points of contention within a debate (see classical descriptions in Quintilian’s *Institutes of Oratory*; Cicero’s *De Oratore*, Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* [Book III]; and more modern interpretations in Sharon Crowley’s *Ancient Rhetoric for Contemporary Students*, and Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg’s *The Rhetorical Tradition*). Stasis theory, according to Crowley, provides a set of questions which, when asked systematically, can help writers determine where the disagreements exist within the overall debate, what assumptions and values are commonly held regarding the issue in question, and what support or evidence may be necessary to make the case (33-5). Four main questions form the general divisions of argumentative claims, including conjecture (e.g., does it exist?), definition (e.g., what is it?), quality (e.g., is it good or bad?), and procedure (e.g., what action should be taken?).<sup>18</sup> Traditionally, rhetors progress through these questions in order—beginning with conjecture—to establish which claims regarding any given issue are not commonly accepted and require additional evidence in order to move forward

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<sup>18</sup> In addition to the reference texts mentioned above, descriptions of stasis theory can also be found in handbooks and theoretical texts on classical rhetoric.

with an argument at the procedural stage. Within this study, the overriding issue of whether web-based online journal publications should be granted the same status as print publications within tenure, promotion, and review proceedings—a procedural claim—rests on the assumption that web-based texts are, indeed, legitimate forms of scholarship—a qualitative claim—which requires an understanding of the nature of web-based texts—a definitional claim. In other words, the question of whether web-based online texts should be accepted as evidence of a candidate’s scholarly accomplishments cannot be answered or argued satisfactorily unless the questions regarding the value and nature of these texts are addressed. A definitional argument regarding what non-traditional conventions and characteristics comprise online texts and what scholarly characteristics they share with traditional print texts can help to provide a basis for the larger issue of acceptance of these texts as legitimate scholarship. Therefore, the process of defining terms is at the center of this study.

### **Defining Terms**

A lack of a familiar and consistent terminology for discussing the scholarly attributes of online texts contributes to the challenge of perceiving such texts on equal or similar grounds with print scholarship. Terms associated with growing areas of expertise in Computers and Writing—such as hypertext, hypermedia, interface design, typography, and hyperlinks, to name a few—are not part of the familiar terminology of print-based scholarship. In “Fanning the Flames,” Janice Walker argues that non-conventional technology-related work “needs to be justified in terms that tenure and review committees can understand.” If true, then identifying and articulating assessment criteria that incorporate familiar terminology where applicable

and build a vocabulary for discussing the new or unfamiliar aspects can help tenure, promotion, and review committee members to understand the value of online scholarship.

A main goal of this dissertation, then, is to offer a vocabulary or clearly defined set of terms for discussing the type of discourse under analysis in this study, namely online texts. An “online text” is a categorical term used broadly within the relevant literature to describe any text published online, from a print text that is coded for online distribution (including a PDF version of a print text) to a native hypertext, which incorporates the full potential of the web environment to create a new form of presentation. Terms such as “hypertext,” “web-based text,” “webtext,” “digital text,” and “electronic text,” to name a few, often are used interchangeably with “online text” as evidenced in scholarly citations throughout this dissertation (see, for example, Janice Walker, Katz, Rickly, Burbules, and Krause). It is only within the context of a scholar’s writing that the meaning underlying the use of a term becomes apparent. This ambiguous usage of terms adds to the challenge of identifying and assessing the value of online scholarship. Below, I define the terms incorporated most often in this dissertation—all of which fall into the general category of “online texts”—for their use within the context of this study: “hypertext,” “webtext,” and “online journal publication” (an overarching categorical term that encompasses the forms “print-based text,” “print-like text,” “web-based text,” and “new media text”).

### **Hypertext**

A hypertext is the seminal form of online text in that it determines the foundational features of the emerging forms of web-based and new media texts. Ted

Nelson coined the term in the 1960's in his often-cited book, *Literary Machines*; however, the term has yet to be defined with clear consensus (Pass 68). Hypertext theorists such as J. David Bolter, Ilana Snyder, and George Landow offer general descriptions based on some of the agreed-upon characteristics: a hypertext is a series of text chunks or “nodes” connected by “links” which offer readers multiple pathways through large amounts of information. Additional contextualized descriptions of hypertext abound in the literature, particularly through comparisons between print and online writing. The essential feature of a hypertext is the linking capability that allows a multi-linear organization of text. Theorists suggest that links—connections among discrete sections of text—are association-based, and the movement through the text is determined by the reader's choices rather than a set, hierarchical sequence, as is the case with print texts. Additionally, a true or “native” hypertext has no beginning or end and can be manipulated by readers participating in the construction of the text by adding links and nodes. Hypertext can be distinguished from “hypermedia,” which combines multi-media forms of presentation such as video, audio, and animation in addition to text to create meaning. While none of the *Kairos* webtexts I analyzed in this study can fairly be called “hypertexts” in the truest sense of this definition, some of the more commonly used characteristics of hypertext (e.g., multi-linearity, link-node structure) provide a basis for the differences between print-based texts and web-based texts, which I will review in more detail in chapter 3. These differences provide some parameters for defining assessment criteria for online scholarship that incorporates hypertextual and hypermedia technologies.

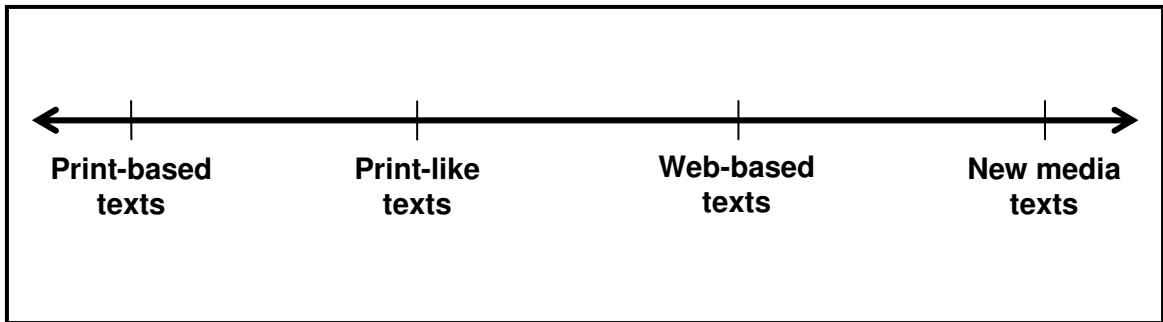
### **Webtext**

*Kairos* uses the term “webtext” to describe the type of online text the editors strive to publish in the journal. *Kairos*’s definition of webtext can be found on the Submissions page from the current Guide for Prospective Authors: “*Kairos* publishes ‘webtexts,’ which means projects developed with specific attention to the World Wide Web as a publishing medium.” In the context of this study, I use the term “webtext” in reference to *Kairos*-published texts and not to online texts more generally.

### **Online Journal Publications**

In “Hypertext, Form, and Scholarly Argument,” Byron Hawk identifies four typical forms of texts found in most online journals. These include (1) print-based texts coded in a single page for online display; (2) “print-like” texts separated into nodes and linked together; (3) texts that incorporate more hypertextual qualities, such as a multi-linear design that changes the traditional experience of reading the text; and (4) “hypermedia” texts that incorporate multi-media such as audio, video, and animation to enhance or make meaning through non-alphabetic elements. Hawk’s categorization provides a useful starting point for making distinctions among the types of texts published in *Kairos*. In addition, his description of online texts based on the extent of their reliance on hypertextual and hypermedia elements implies that these texts can be located along a continuum. Figure 1.1, which I developed as part of this study, offers a visual representation of this continuum.

### **Figure 1.1: A Continuum of Online Journal Publications**



Online journal publications located to the left of this continuum use fewer of the technological allowances of the online medium than those to the right. Texts located to the far left, identified within this study as print-based texts, closely follow a print paradigm and use the online medium mainly for distribution.

Example 1.1 illustrates a print-based text, which is single-screened—in other words, readers navigate the text by scrolling through a single node rather than linking to multiple nodes. At the top of the text, the author has included a chart of jump links which, when selected, allow the reader to skip down the screen page or node to that particular section—a handy allowance of the online medium, but not one that changes the linear design of the text. A good indication that a text mainly follows a print paradigm is that it can be easily printed and read off line without significant changes to the familiar experience of reading a linear text. Example 1.1 is from Dickie Selfe’s “English Studies and the University Experience as Intellectual Property: Commodification and the Spellings Report,” published in *Computers and Composition Online*, Spring 2007.

## Example 1.1: Print-Based Text

Public Abstract	Spellings Report	Accrediting Agencies
English Studies and the University Experience as Intellectual Property	Access to Higher Ed	Access?
Commodification	Transparency and Accountability	Our Reactions
Terminology	Financial Aid	References

**English Studies and the University Experience as Intellectual Property: Commodification and the Spellings Report**

**Dickie Selfe, The Ohio State University**

**Public Abstract**

In 2005 Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings commissioned a group largely composed of business representatives to study higher education and recommend changes in national policy and direction. The group documented and suggested policy changes to address some disturbing trends including the rising cost of higher education. Today, increasing numbers of students can't afford college even though studies show that it is one of the best financial investments people can make. Although it pinpoints important problems, the Spellings commission's report offers a program to address the rising cost of education and fails to acknowledge the fact that, over the last fifteen years, states have systematically decreased the percentage of funding for public colleges and universities. As a result land grant institutions, for instance, have become increasingly dependent on private funding sources such as tuition, alumni contributions, and corporate research. They will be forced to act more and more like private schools.

Perhaps most important, the report misrepresents both students and faculty, treating them as commodities and undervaluing them and their work. Students, for example, are described as units of wealth that the university produces for the economy, without mentioning their value as citizens and family members. Faculty are misrepresented as well, described as "complacent" and uncaring, even as those in my discipline

The two types of texts toward the middle of the continuum, the print-like and web-based texts, respectively move farther away from print-based conventions by incorporating more of the hypertextual allowances of the medium. The “print-like” text is analogous to what scholars have described as a “caterpillar text” or “tour-guide

text.”<sup>19</sup> This type of text begins to transcend a purely print paradigm by incorporating elements of a link-node design (e.g., chunking text into smaller, divided sections, and connecting those sections usually with a guided “back/next” link structure), but it does not yet take advantage of the more experimental allowances of hypertext such as a multi-linear, non-guided design. Example 1.2 illustrates this type of online text. The back↔next directional link options on each page connect the text with one linear path. The reading experience, while necessitating active clicking between segments of text, is not significantly changed from that which would occur in the print medium and therefore does not require a shift in traditional assessment criteria. This example of a print-like text comes from Melissa Graham Meeks’s “Wireless Laptop Classrooms: Sketching Social and Material Spaces,” published in *Kairos* 9.1, Fall 2004.<sup>20</sup>

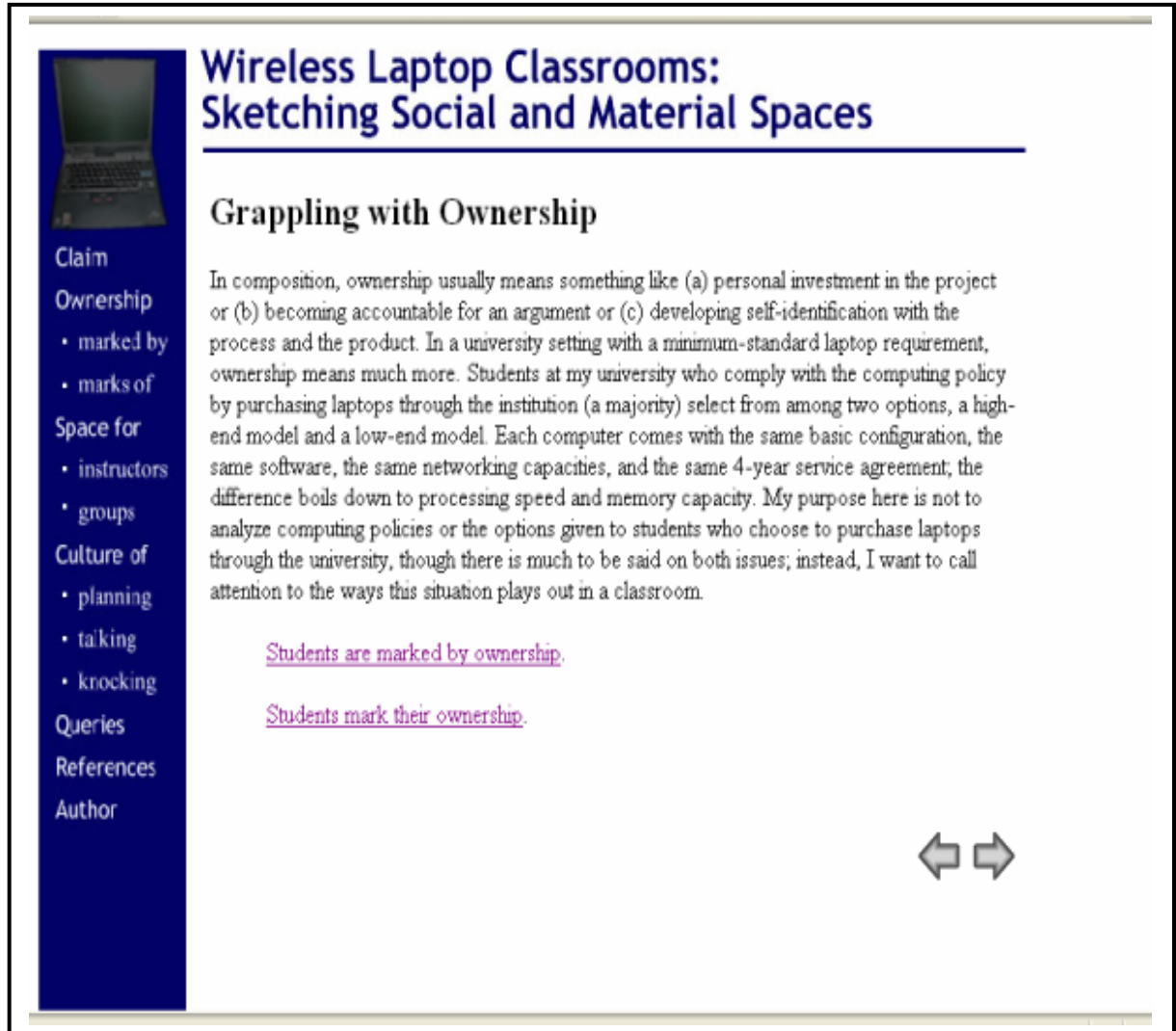
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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Landow, “Hyper/Text/Theory” and Kolb.

<sup>20</sup> According to *Kairos* senior co-editor, Douglas Eyman, the use of screenshots in this dissertation is within the realm of fair use for scholarly purposes.



## Example 1.2: Print-Like Text



The screenshot shows a web-based text interface. On the left is a dark blue vertical sidebar with a laptop image at the top. The sidebar contains a list of navigation items: Claim, Ownership (with sub-items: marked by, marks of), Space for (with sub-items: instructors, groups), Culture of (with sub-items: planning, talking, knocking), Queries, References, and Author. The main content area has a title 'Wireless Laptop Classrooms: Sketching Social and Material Spaces' and a sub-header 'Grappling with Ownership'. The text discusses ownership in composition and university settings. Two underlined links are present: 'Students are marked by ownership.' and 'Students mark their ownership.'. At the bottom right of the content area are two grey double-headed arrows.

In contrast to these other examples, the web-based text, located third from the left along the continuum in figure 1.1, incorporates a multi-linear design, with chunked nodes and multiple internal and external links that offer associative connections and additional context that would not be possible in a more sequentially and spatially limited, print-based design. Because of the multi-linear design and the potential for the form to enact the content, web-based texts require a shift in traditional assessment criteria. Example 1.3 illustrates this type of online text. The


use of embedded links as well as the lack of a pre-formed or guided path through the text gives it a multi-linear design. The print-like and web-based texts that form the middle of the continuum are the kinds of texts found most often in *Kairos*, as Kalmbach concludes, and as the analysis in chapter 4 confirms. Interestingly, both of these kinds of texts, as well as the new media text, were published in the same issue, demonstrating the wide variety of formal designs *Kairos* webtexts can assume. This example of a web-based text comes from Meredith Zoetewey's "Disrupting the Computer Lab(oratory): Names, Metaphors, and the Wireless Writing Classroom," published in *Kairos* 9.1, Fall 2004.

### Example 1.3: Web-Based Text

#### introduction

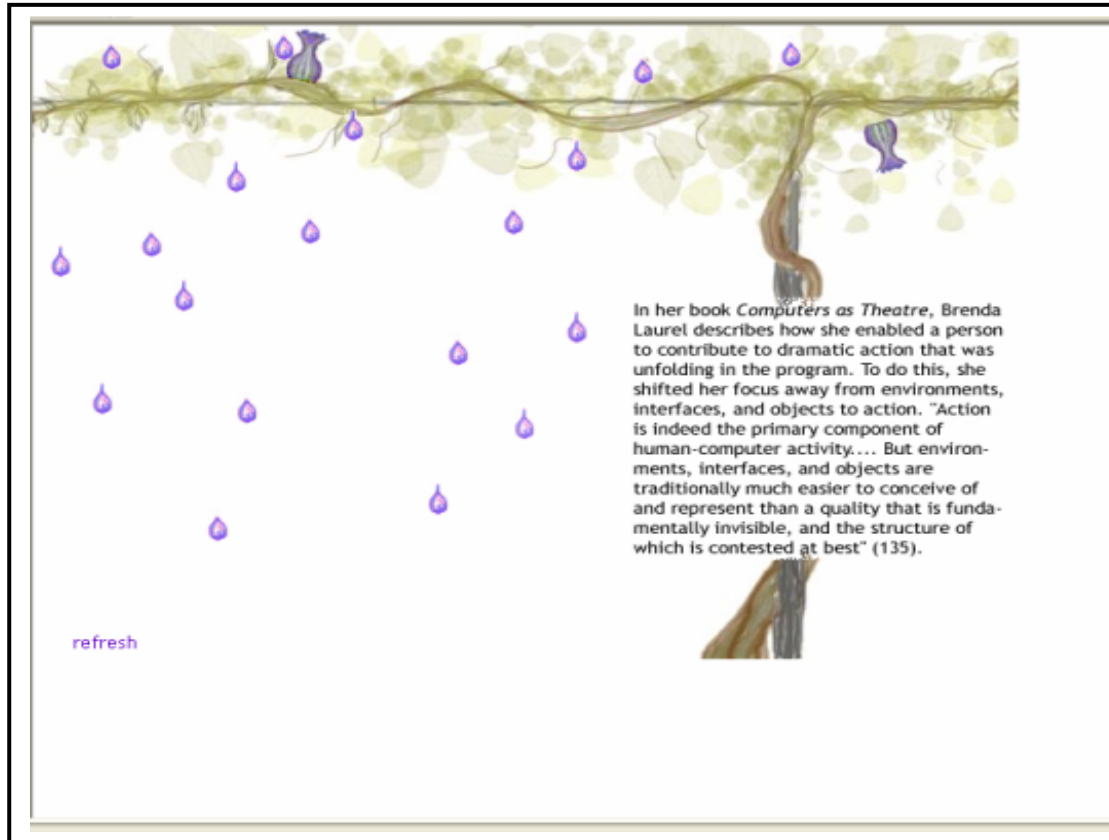
Classrooms, like the institutions in which they are housed, aren't particularly easy to change. They're backed by centuries of tradition. Once built, classrooms have a long shelf life. Thus, discussions about reinventing classrooms are more apt to focus on reconfiguring bodies (into circles and so on) or rearranging inorganic objects, such as furniture (Mirtz, 2004) and desktop computers (Myers, 1993). Portable technologies have invigorated discussions of classroom space, however, by calling the need for a fixed place into question. The proliferation of wireless connectivity has signaled to some the obsolescence of conventional (wired computer) classrooms (Alexander, 2003; Strauss, 2003). Others maintain that physical campus settings like **classrooms become even more crucial** in the face of developing technologies. But we have not considered how the discursive structures surrounding the environments in which we teach with portable technologies can make these sites more or less hospitable to writing instruction.

Are otherwise traditional classrooms outfitted with laptop carts and wireless connections still just "classrooms"? Or has the "computer lab" now been distributed across campus? Are these places hybrids? Something else all together? This webtext grapples with **naming** these leaky places by considering metaphors that may be **repurposed** or created to describe wireless instructional settings. I unpack the **computer lab(oratory)** metaphor (arguably the most likely choice to be carried over from wired experience, as I explain) and the **assumptions** that accompany it, in part by sharing a **story** from my own experience. I also weigh the advantages and drawbacks of selecting other metaphors as names for new learning environments enabled by portable technologies. This analysis, I hope, will compel those reinventing traditional classrooms with laptops and wireless connections to recognize this move as an opportunity to rewrite these places in empowering ways.



Texts to the far right of the continuum in figure 1.1, which Hawk identifies as “hypermedia texts,” are often labeled by Computers and Writing scholars—including *Kairos* authors Ball and Madeleine Sorapure, among others—as “new media texts” and will be referred to as such within this study. These texts are currently the most radical or non-conventional type of online texts due to their incorporation of multiple forms of media, including advanced graphics, audio, video, and animation. This use of non-textual elements to present arguments challenges the traditional reading and writing experience and requires new strategies for interpreting and making meaning. For *Kairos*, the trend in the past few years (2003-present) has been increasingly frequent publication of new media texts. Example 1.4 illustrates this type of online text. From this still image can be seen the use of non-alphabetic elements, such as animated graphics, which underlie the meaning of the text. This example of a new media text comes from Ellen Cushman’s “Composing New Media: Cultivating Landscapes of the Mind,” published in *Kairos* 9.1, Fall 2004.

### Example 1.4: New Media Text



It is important to note that the notion of technological “boundary-pushing” is defined relative to time period. The same characteristics that were considered boundary-pushing in 1997 when *Kairos* published its premier issue have become, in 2007, conventional—even basic—within the current published webtexts. Some scholars contend that *Kairos* does not currently push boundaries, as the journal proclaims, and that it should publish more texts that take advantage of the “innovative potential” of new media technologies (Ball 407). The nature of technology, however, suggests that as time passes, what is now experimental technology will become more conventional and new boundaries will be established that once again will be challenged by newer experimental webtexts. The quick pace of technological change complicates the identification and articulation of scholarly online criteria, and it

underscores the need for the criteria to be grounded in foundational principles that can both stand the test of time and assist in the development of criteria for even more technologically innovative work.

Thus, the dichotomy between printed/print-based online texts and web-based online texts becomes obvious in the experience of assessing those texts as scholarly. The nature of design—or its formal properties—remains relatively constant in traditional print scholarship and therefore assessment criteria are well known, proven, and fairly permanent. However, evolving technologies that allow for new and unique designs in web-based online texts continually challenge efforts to define legitimate online scholarship.

This dissertation addresses the need to identify and articulate criteria for the middle of the continuum as presented in figure 1.1. Although current literature suggests a strong need for also assessing new media texts as scholarship, these highly experimental texts are not yet as prevalent as web-based texts, and thus they are not the focus of this project. When foundational assessment criteria for the less experimental web-based texts have been articulated, tested, and tailored successfully to real-life tenure, promotion, and review situations, then adapting criteria to new media texts most likely will be a simplified process.

Finally, current literature in the subfield of Computers and Writing includes discussions of other less formally produced types of discourse on the web. Some scholars believe, for example, that Weblogs, Wikis, and contributions to professional asynchronous discussion lists should be viewed as scholarship for tenure, promotion, and review purposes. In this dissertation, however, I focus specifically on the types

of researched and formally developed texts most closely associated with the traditional scholarly article submitted for a tenure, promotion, and review portfolio.

### **Overview of the Findings of the Study**

Based on evidence from my analysis, I found that a balance of tradition and innovation characterizes the representative subset of analyzed *Kairos* webtexts. These texts meet traditional scholarly standards associated with content; they incorporate main argumentative claims, contextualize those claims within the greater field of knowledge, incorporate documentation to support those claims, and convey their ideas in a formal, traditionally scholarly tone. The texts diverge from traditional conventions primarily in their ability to experiment with form through the use of hypertextual and hypermedia capabilities inherent to the online medium. A small percentage of the webtexts I analyzed move beyond familiar reading strategies by incorporating and presenting content in new media such as audio, video, and animation. However, a majority of the texts are formally distinct in traditionally recognizable ways. These texts can be defined as “transitional scholarship,” and their legitimacy as valid scholarly contributions to the field can be assessed through an assessment approach that accounts for the emerging form-based conventions.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

I organize this dissertation into five chapters, including this introduction and overview of the project. In chapter 2, I provide a rationale for analyzing the characteristics of online journal articles and the need for a revised assessment tool to legitimize this emerging and transitional form of scholarship. In this chapter, I review the relevant literature regarding perceptions of online scholarship and the

limitations of print-based assessment strategies for online texts. Scholars in hypertextual studies offer numerous discussions regarding the many differences between print and online writing, especially noting new strategies of reading and writing in texts that take advantage of the hypertextual and hypermedia allowances of the medium. However, little consideration is given to the implications of these differences for determining the scholarly value of texts that move beyond traditional, print-based conventions. My discussion in chapter 2 emphasizes the need for an extension of the traditional (print-based) scholarly assessment framework.

In chapter 3, I describe my method for creating an assessment tool to identify common “scholarly” characteristics of online texts. I describe the process of constructing a series of statements to form a tool for assessing the extent to which a select group of web-based journal articles (1) follow traditional print-based scholarly conventions; (2) diverge from traditional conventions; and (3) follow emerging conventions of web-based writing. Additionally, I outline the parameters for selecting a representative subset of “webtexts” published in the online journal, *Kairos* as the data for my analysis. Finally, I describe the manner in which I applied the assessment tool in order to conduct a rhetorical analysis of this select group of webtexts.

In chapter 4, I present my findings from the rhetorical analysis. I divide the analysis into three main sections as outlined above: (1) adherence to print-based conventions; (2) divergence from print-based conventions, particularly in matters of formal design; and (3) adherence to emerging web-based conventions. I begin each section with a numerical sketch (presented in separate tables) of online scholarship

based on the representative set of webtexts, using figures that show the results for each webtext. Additionally, in each section, I provide a qualitative discussion of the function of the convention (e.g., the extent of adherence to and/or divergence from the convention) as well as the potential value of diverging from print-based conventions toward new standards for “online scholarship.” I conclude this chapter with a summary of the characteristics that appear to define *Kairos*-published webtexts as online scholarship.

Finally, in chapter 5, I present the implications of these findings for future research. I discuss how this project can benefit tenure, promotion, and review participants and journal decision makers within the Computers and Writing subfield through the development of an example heuristic for assessing and defending the scholarly legitimacy of web-based online texts. Moreover, I suggest how future research with larger samples of web-based online texts, particularly the currently emerging forms of new media texts, can reveal generic trends in the nature of online writing.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review: The Scholarship of Online Texts**

### **Overview**

In this chapter I review contemporary published literature that addresses the nature of scholarship in online texts, particularly for the purpose of fulfilling scholarly research and publication requirements associated with tenure, promotion, and review in the subfield of Computers and Writing. I ground the need for this study in observations emerging from a review of the pertinent literature. There is a pervasive perception among some scholars and administrative committees that online publications are inferior to traditional print scholarship despite over a decade of publication in online journals. The Modern Language Association (MLA) and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC)—two of the major governing associations in the English Studies field—recognize that online writing, particularly web-based arguments published in refereed online academic journals, is increasing publishing opportunities. These associations have charged several committees to prepare guidelines for assessing the scholarly value of web-based publications. Undoubtedly, online writing is expanding the boundaries of print-based media and engaging groups of scholars in discussions that attempt to resolve issues of parity between print-based and web-based publications.

The literature I review in this chapter collectively points to the need for (1) identifying and defining characteristics of scholarship as it exists within web-based online journal publications and (2) articulating the currently implicit assessment criteria that account for the unique characteristics inherent in these new forms of

presenting scholarly research. To this end, I argue that a shared vocabulary informed by traditional print-based conventions and emerging conventions of effective web-based writing can provide a grounding rationale for constructing an assessment framework and can help scholars who may be unfamiliar with these new forms to understand better the basis of their scholarly value.

In the first section of this literature review, I provide an historical context for this study with references that span a ten-year period and show that there exists a pervasive perception that web-based publications are borderline scholarship compared to print-based texts. In the second section, I examine the efforts to address the perception and evaluation of online scholarship made by the two governing associations in English Studies, the MLA and the CCCC. In the third section of this review, I examine how individual scholars have attempted to influence the scholarly assessment of online publications, and I discuss the prominent issue of establishing quality control measures through peer review. In the final sections, I review traditional scholarly conventions as well as emerging conventions of web-based writing and argue that assessment criteria grounded in these conventions will increase awareness of these texts as legitimate scholarship. Additionally, I review scholars' limited efforts to identify characteristics of texts published in the reputable online journal *Kairos* and argue that a closer analysis of *Kairos* "webtexts" can lead to a better understanding of the common "scholarly" characteristics that comprise web-based online journal publications.

## **The Scholarly Legitimacy of Online Texts**

Online publications are currently not seen by many English studies scholars as being as 'worthy' as the more tactile publications that appear in paper journals and books.

-Steven Krause, 2002, "Where Do I List This?"

In academic settings, it can still be difficult for individuals and groups to produce digital scholarship, or to gain acceptance of such work as scholarly (i.e., worthy of tenure and promotion).

-Joyce Walker, 2006, "Hyper.Activity"

Online texts are perceived by some English Studies scholars as lacking scholarly value, particularly as evidence for advancement in the field. As seen in the quotations above, both Steven Krause in 2002 and Joyce Walker in 2006 illustrate that time has not changed the perception. A prominent bias throughout the past decade is represented by scholars who assert that tenure, promotion, and review candidates should avoid the risk associated with including the more "experimental," non-traditional texts in their portfolios and that online texts included as part of curriculum vitae are valued more as professional development work than "serious" or "formal" scholarship. For example, in his 1997 article, "The Politics of Electronic Scholarship," Todd Taylor contends that, given the current standards of evaluation, time invested in online scholarship by junior scholars on the tenure track is valued only as a means to an end. He writes that "investing time in online scholarship may be worthwhile for a number of reasons, but unless this investment results in a conventional publication, it will not be endorsed or rewarded by the current systems that determine hiring, tenure, and promotion" (198). Taylor asserts that the exploration of experimental online scholarship should be undertaken solely by "established scholars" (206). He implies that junior scholars must prove their

competence within the established system before they can move outside of conventional boundaries.

Similarly, Janice Walker and Sibylle Gruber acknowledge that junior scholars face a tenuous decision: either abandon the pursuit of technologically and rhetorically innovative forms of scholarly communication—at least until their academic positions are secure—or risk a possible advancement rejection based on the inclusion of this often-labeled “alternative scholarship” in a tenure, promotion, and review portfolio. In her 1997 article, “Fanning the Flames: Tenure and Promotion and Other Role-Playing Games,” Walker argues that in order to receive credit for online scholarship, junior scholars are attempting to lessen the perceived risks by “emulating the more traditional off line work and putting it online.” In other words if scholars want their work to be seen as scholarship, they feel the need for it to mirror the accepted print-based conventions of scholarship. Gruber, in her 2000 article, “Technology and Tenure: Creating Oppositional Discourse in an Offline and Online World,” observes that the challenge merely begins with the scholar’s attempts to publish non-traditional texts, let alone to include them in a tenure, promotion, and review portfolio:

Authors who try to transform accepted conventions in their work and who try to create an oppositional and experimental voice are faced with serious publishing problems, especially if they do not yet have the name recognition so often necessary for getting alternative work accepted. (49)

The implication of Gruber’s assertion is clear: If scholars specializing in issues relating to technology have difficulty publishing their non-conventional work, they will have difficulty making a case for their advancement.

In the opening analogy of his 2001 online article, “The State of Publishing in Online Journals,” Michael Palmquist illustrates the widespread and seemingly unquestioned nature of the skeptical perception regarding online texts: “This just in: nine out of ten doctors prefer print to electronic publications. The doctors I’m referring to, of course, typically have their offices in colleges or university English departments. And their preferences are deep, strong, and largely uninformed.” Palmquist claims that this perception is “shaping the profession in unfortunate ways” such as, for example, by dissuading scholars from exploring online publications, at least until they achieve tenure.

The perception that online journal publications are devalued can also be seen through the decisions made by journal editors and authors regarding formats for presenting discussions that focus on the use of technology. For example, in 2000, the print journal *Computers and Composition* devoted a special issue to the topic of tenure and technology. Guest editors Susan Lang, Janice Walker, and Keith Dorwick compiled a number of discussions, many of which built on panel presentations aired at the 1997 Computers and Writing Conference. To that end, *Kairos* historically has reserved one issue each year for remediating presentations from the conference proceedings, and it would have provided an optimal technology-rich venue for these discussions. However, Lang, Walker, and Dorwick made a conscious decision to present these discussions in a traditional print-based forum. In their introductory “Letter from the Guest Editors,” they discuss their motives for selecting a print venue:

What became obvious to a number of us was that these discussions of tenured positions, alternative careers to the academy, and the changing nature of academic employment deserved further consideration; given the preference of most tenure and promotion committees, at least some

of this discussion needed to occur in print media that could easily be copied and distributed to members of candidates' departments. (2)

The editors (and authors who chose to publish in this traditional print venue) clearly believe that print versions of the discussions would be better received by tenure, promotion, and review committees, thereby supporting the perception that print is the preferred medium for demonstrating evidence of scholarship. Gruber, for example, acknowledges in her article in this special issue that committees are “hesitant to give appropriate credit for participating in online discussions, an article published online, or software developed collaboratively” (42).

One of the few empirical studies to date, “Should You Publish in Electronic Journals,” conducted by Aldrin Sweeney in 2000, reveals that the common attitudes regarding the scholarly value of online journal publications are both skeptical and ambiguous. In this study, Sweeney reports on a survey of university administrators and faculty within the Florida State University System. Responses to two of the survey questions illustrate a subtle bias against online journal articles within tenure, promotion, and review proceedings. First, in response to the request to agree or disagree with the comment “the peer-review process is as thorough in electronic journals as with paper (hard copy) journals,” respondents were almost equally divided in their opinions: 37% neither agreed or disagreed, 34% either agreed or strongly agreed, and 29% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Sweeney observes that the qualitative responses submitted by the undecided group—the largest consensus at 37%—indicate a general lack of awareness or familiarity with the review processes that are instituted in online journals. For example, one respondent states: “Don’t

know—if they are just electronic versions of the traditional journals, there should be no difference.”

Second, in response to the request to agree or disagree with the comment “electronically published articles should be counted in the tenure and promotion process,” the results show that a majority of respondents—67%—agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, suggesting that, at least in theory (based on Sweeney’s use of the hypothetical “should”), this community of scholars agree that online scholarship in this form should not be discounted in TPR proceedings. However, while the data indicate a favorable reception of online publication, the representative comments that Sweeney chooses to include in his article indicate that very few departments actually may have formal guidelines regarding the treatment of online publications. For example, one faculty participant states, “We do not have formal policies or guidelines concerning e-journals specifically. Our informal policy is to grapple with the question as it comes up in promotion and tenure decisions, yearly evaluations, and promotion and tenure progress reports.” Similarly, another faculty participant’s comment demonstrates the ambiguity associated with the acceptance of online scholarship: “Judging from comments made by our dean at a recent tenure and promotion meeting, it was unclear as to what position the dean really takes. If there are policies, I must have missed seeing them. A void that needs correcting, for sure!” The lack of formal attention in addressing the treatment of these texts suggests that faculty and administrators in this study either have not been faced with a need in the recent past or are not comfortable committing to a written policy on the acceptance of online journal publications as scholarship. If a department’s formal guidelines

represent its members' values, then arguably the omission of explicit guidelines to address the treatment of online publications demonstrates the lack of attending to or valuing of this type of work.

Aside from Sweeney's limited survey of one university's perspective on this perception about publishing in online journals, a lack of empirical evidence to support his respondents' comments suggests an anecdotal nature to this perception of online scholarship; in other words, a "colleague-of-a-colleague" was denied tenure and/or was dissuaded from including online texts in a tenure, promotion, and review portfolio. And yet several factors point to the serious nature of this issue. First, as I mentioned earlier, the consequences of the perception are significant in that they could inhibit the development of these new forms of texts. Currently, as Ball (and several other online scholarship critics—see Burbules, Joyce Walker "Hyper.Activity," Peterson, and Krause) observe: "most authors who do publish online in scholarly, peer-reviewed journals publish texts that do not break print-bound conventions and rarely travel into an apparent experimental realm of scholarship" ("Show, Not Tell" 404). The consequences may underlie a larger cyclical problem: the perception that these texts are not legitimate scholarship discourages promising scholars from producing them, which, in turn, leads to a scarcity of good models to explore for understanding their value as scholarship. Unfortunately, such consequences can limit new forms of scholarly academic research, which starkly contrast with traditional scholarly research goals of innovation and exploration.

The proliferation of scholarly discussions on the assessment of technology-related work for professional advancement purposes is another factor that



demonstrates scholars' concerns regarding the perception of online texts as sub-par scholarship. Over the past ten years, among many other published discussions, two reputable journals (*Kairos* and *Computers and Composition*) and a multi-journal collaborative project (*Enculturation, Kairos, Academic Writing, CCC Online*) devoted special issues to the general topic of tenure and technology. The topic continues to receive attention within the current literature, which suggests that scholars are still in the process of seeking ways to address the perceived lack of acceptance of online scholarship.

A third factor that demonstrates the serious nature of this skeptical perception regarding publishing in online journals is the formal involvement of the field's major governing associations, the MLA and the CCCC. These associations have recognized the need to officially address the treatment of online texts by assigning special committees to examine the scope of this perception within English Studies and the wider Humanities disciplines. The committees have issued guidelines for assessing the scholarly value of work with technology and urge the scholarly community to address the assessment of this work more explicitly in their own tenure, promotion, and review guidelines. Clearly, the associations' input on this issue provides strong evidence of the reality of the perception. Recently, in December 2006, the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion released a survey report with several updated statistics and recommendations that demonstrate the continued need for relevant assessment criteria. Specifically, the report notes: "The survey findings suggest that work presented in electronic formats is still in the process of gaining the recognition necessary for it to fulfill expectations and

requirements for tenure and promotion.” According to the committee’s Executive Summary, over 40% of English Departments in degree-granting institutions across the United States admit to having no experience evaluating online scholarship. It is not surprising, then, that some junior scholars still have hesitations about including online journal publications in tenure, promotion, and review portfolios; their attitudes toward these texts are understandable, given that almost half of the surveyed English Studies scholars have indicated they have not encountered these new forms of scholarship in assessment situations. A closer examination of the governing associations’ efforts to address the evaluation of online scholarship reveals the progress made toward changing the perception, as well as the challenges that still exist.

### **Governing Associations’ Efforts to Evaluate Online Scholarship**

Over the past decade, both the MLA and CCCC have issued statements to guide tenure, promotion, and review committees and candidates in creating more receptive environments for the equitable evaluation of online scholarship—work that is identified as “not fitting neatly” into traditional categories of scholarly evaluation. Both of the associations’ committees acknowledge the importance of establishing profession-wide guidelines to address the changes brought about by the growing use of technology. Specifically, in the 1998 “Promotion and Tenure Guidelines for Work with Technology,” the CCCC Committee on Computers and Composition defends the exigency of their investigation: “In preparing these guidelines, we have tried to address the fact that at this moment in our profession, the pace of technological change in unprecedented computer-mediated communication (CMC) is reconfiguring

the ways in which scholarly knowledge is produced and disseminated.” Similarly, in the 2000 “Guidelines for Evaluating Work with Digital Media in the Modern Languages,” the MLA Committee on Information Technology contextualizes the purpose of their intervention:

Digital media have created new opportunities for scholarship, teaching, and service, as well as new venues for research, communication, and academic community. Information technology is an integral part of the intellectual environment for a growing number of humanities faculty members. Moreover, digital media have expanded the scope of textual representation and analysis to include, for example, image and sound. These innovations have considerably broadened the notion of “text” and “textual studies,” the traditional purview of modern language departments.

In stating their purpose, the committees recognize that (1) technology-related work in the Humanities is a permanent and growing interest, (2) technology is changing the traditional methods of presenting knowledge and research, and (3) the field needs to stay abreast of these changes and explore the merit of this work for individuals and for the collective knowledge base of the broader academic community.

The MLA and CCCC statements share several suggestions. First, both committees recognize the importance of departments setting expectations early in the tenure, promotion, and review process about whether work with technology will be given fair consideration. Specifically, the MLA Committee writes: “When candidates wish to have work with digital media considered an integral part of their positions, the expectations and responsibilities connected with such work and the recognition given to it should be clearly delineated and communicated to them at hiring.”

Arguably, much of the perception regarding the prejudice against online texts as legitimate scholarship is driven by junior scholars’ lack of information; the MLA

Committee makes an important recommendation in urging departments to articulate their positions clearly on the treatment and acceptance of online publications at their institutions. Similarly, the CCCC Committee writes: “It is important that tenure and promotion committees work with departmental hiring committees to insure that expectations for work with technology and online scholarship be communicated to prospective new hires.” The committee further recommends that departments be clear about “whether and how work with technology and online scholarship will be considered in the tenure and promotion process.” Such an articulation would enable junior scholars to make informed decisions about whether to pursue certain forms of online scholarship at that particular institution.

Second, both committees address the importance of establishing a fair environment for judging this relatively new, non-traditional, and therefore less-familiar scholarship by urging departments to enlist qualified reviewers to evaluate candidates’ work with technology, even if departments must seek external help. The CCCC Committee, for example, states: “It is important that the candidate’s work be evaluated by persons knowledgeable about the use of computer technology.” Both committees recognize the general lack of familiarity with technology-related work, particularly among tenure, promotion, and review committees that may often include senior scholars and literature specialists who may not have the experience necessary to evaluate this work fairly. Indeed both committees seem to presume that “qualified reviewers”—journal editors and editorial board members—are familiar with criteria for assessing the scholarly value of this work; such a presumption suggests a shared knowledge of explicit criteria. The MLA and CCCC Committees also seem to

suggest that tenure, promotion, and review committees will tacitly agree with the journal decisions maker's assessment decisions, because they are understood to be experts in judging this non-traditional scholarship.

A third issue that the MLA and CCCC Committees discuss is the significance of understanding the medium's role in the evaluation process by recommending that the candidate's work be evaluated in its native medium. Specifically, the MLA Committee states: "Since scholarly work is sometimes designed for presentation in a specific medium, evaluative bodies should review faculty members' work in the medium in which it was produced." The CCCC Committee adds: "Printing off web pages, for example, is a poor substitute for evaluating those pages online." While neither committee provides a more descriptive rationale for the significance of this action, one can infer from the recommendation that an awareness and understanding of the changes in the reception and production of texts from print to online environments is crucial for scholars to be able to fairly assess online texts.

Yet another commonality among the associations' guidelines is the recommendation for candidates to be able to articulate the ways in which their work with technology is scholarly both according to and beyond traditional standards. Specifically, the CCCC Committee states: "It is important that candidates find ways to explain their work in terms of the traditional areas of teaching, research, and service, and also to explain carefully the ways in which their work overlaps or redefines those categories." The MLA Committee makes a similar recommendation: "Faculty members who work with digital media should be prepared to make explicit the results, theoretical underpinnings, and intellectual rigor of their work. They

should be prepared to show the relevance of their work in terms of the traditional areas of teaching, research, and service.” This statement continues, both echoing the CCCC Committee’s recommendation and using the same terminology, to describe how the work may “overlap or redefine” traditional categories of scholarship. These guidelines suggest that candidates can make stronger cases for the scholarly value of their work, particularly to a lay audience of tenure, promotion, and review committee members, if they ground their defense in the familiar language and through acceptable standards of traditional scholarship. For example, the MLA Committee recommends that scholars describe the “process underlying the creation of work in digital media.” In other words, the committee suggests that if the product is unrecognizable, then demonstrating that the composition process entails similar goals, methodologies, topics, and writing practices as conventional scholarly publications could bridge the knowledge gap in a way that would gain the adherence of less familiar audiences.

One of the notable differences between the 1998 and 2000 Committees’ guidelines involves who the Committees believe should be responsible for articulating how the work with technology should count. While both Committees urge candidates to “find ways” to explain the scholarly value of their work, the CCCC Committee recommends that tenure, promotion, and review candidates *and* their committee members share this responsibility. Specifically, the Committee states: “...the burden of understanding the technology, the candidate’s specific uses of it, and the importance of such work rests jointly on the committee and the candidate—it is not carried by either party alone.” The MLA Committee, on the other hand, does

not make an explicit recommendation in the 2000 guidelines regarding a shared responsibility among tenure, promotion, and review candidates and committees. This difference in guidance from these governing association committees over the past decade may have contributed to scholars' lack of understanding regarding measures that can be taken to broaden the acceptance of online scholarship.

More recently, the 2006 report of the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion revised their stand with a recommendation that tenure, promotion, and review committee members take a more active role in understanding the scholarly value of technology-related work. Specifically, the MLA report contends that tenure candidates should not have to bear the brunt of defending their work; according to panel leader, Donna Stanton, "the onus is on the department to learn" (Jaschik). While this explicit revision can be read to suggest that tenure, promotion, and review candidates have less responsibility than the committees, it more likely means that tenure, promotion, and review committees—particularly those that are comprised of faculty members who have no intention of pursuing work with technology—need to increase their efforts toward understanding the value of this non-conventional scholarship, particularly as more examples begin to appear in tenure, promotion, and review dossiers.

While it is too early to predict how the recent (2006) MLA recommendations will affect the current perception of online texts, the guidelines issued in 1998 and 2000 do not appear to have made much progress. The current perception is still so pervasive that tenure candidates are publicly sharing cautionary tales about the perils of choosing online texts over printed texts to demonstrate scholarly aptitude for

review and reward (see, for example, the “Chronicle Forum” email discussion cited in chapter 1). Even the current MLA report confirms the implications of such a widespread perception: “...probationary faculty members will be reluctant to risk publishing in electronic formats unless they see clear evidence that such work can count positively in evaluation for tenure and promotion.” In his 2000 article, “A Technorhetorician Can Get Tenure,” Barry Maid expresses his disappointment regarding the ineffectiveness of, specifically, the CCCC Committee’s guidelines in changing public awareness: “...the CCCC document speaks to the candidate about the reality of the situation while trying to educate the department. If the spirit of the CCCC document were truly practiced, I would not have written this article” (13). Because this sentiment can be expressed in 2007 as well, one must ask why the negative perception about publishing in online journals persists. Specifically, how do the associations’ guidelines contribute to a better understanding of the scholarly value of web-based online texts?

First, it is significant to note that the guidelines—in using the labels “work with technology” and “computer-related work”—were designed to apply generally to all forms of online scholarship, a label that includes several new and evolving forms in addition to online journal publications, such as pedagogy- or research-based Web sites, contributions to MOOs or professional email discussion lists, and Weblogs. A distinction needs to be made among these forms, particularly in discussions regarding scholarly assessment, because each of these forms requires a unique assessment approach. Contributions to academic e-mail discussion groups diverge greatly in form and purpose from what the field has come to expect in a formally designed,



conventionally reviewed, and archived publication within a scholarly journal. Moreover, while it appears that online journal publications should not pose as big a threat to the traditional category of scholarly publications as less conventional forms of presenting research (e.g., Wikis, Weblogs, Web sites), the assessment approach entirely depends upon the form of the online text being evaluated. The relatively new form of web-based texts that are published in *Kairos* and are beginning to emerge in other online journals such as *Pre/Text*, *Enculturation*, and *Computers and Composition Online* defy an easy assessment. Unlike print-based texts published online, which can be evaluated through conventional scholarly criteria, web-based texts are new forms of rhetorical presentation that rely on the capabilities of the online medium; these forms require revised assessment criteria that account for these differences. The guidelines reflect a tendency I noted throughout much of the relevant literature for scholars to refer ambiguously to the treatment of online scholarship without acknowledging these distinctions.

Second, the MLA and CCCC evaluation criteria pertain more to the external context of the technology-related work. Specifically, the guidelines suggest who should review the work (experts in the field), how the work should be reviewed (in its native medium); and what special considerations should be made to include the work (for example, that the work may fall into more than one category of scholarly activity—e.g. research, teaching, and service). Aside from the recommendation to discuss the “process” in order to defend the scholarship of online texts, the guidelines do not offer specific criteria for judging the internal scholarly quality of the work in such traditional areas as form and content.

Departments that have adopted their own guidelines based on the associations' recommendations, while making some progress toward the development of a fair process of evaluation, also do not articulate specific criteria to defend the scholarly value of a web-based journal article. The University of Virginia's guidelines, for example, are based on five traditional components of evaluating scholarly work, including: (1) reading and judging the work; (2) looking to outside experts in the same area for their assessment of the work; (3) taking note of the work's formal peer review process from book and journal editors; (4) considering citation of the research in the field at large; and (5) considering the impact the work has had on the general public. At first glance, the initial guideline, "reading and judging the work," appears to be the most promising for providing criteria for judging a web-based text. However, the application of the guideline speaks only to the importance of assessing the work within its native medium. While the other four guidelines provide some direction for exploring how the work can be evaluated generally to fit within the general traditional category of scholarly research, they do not address the specific characteristics of web-based texts and how these can be evaluated.

Moreover, the associations' guidelines are recommendations and do not mandate change; unless departments are faced with these issues directly, they may have little motivation to take even these first steps. Katz, for example, reveals the particular circumstances that "drove" his department to begin revising their guidelines: "Our department decided to add provisional language for evaluating computer-related activity to our TP&R guidelines now largely because this is the first year in which we have candidates for tenure who have done any significant computer-

related work.” Even for some departments that have developed preliminary guidelines based on the Associations’ recommendations, not much has changed. Indeed, Katz admits that his department, ten years later, has not finished revising its tenure and promotion guidelines and that “online publication remains suspect” as evidence of scholarship within his department (E-mail, January 29, 2007).

In departments where guidelines are either non-existent or are just beginning to emerge, the burden of explaining such texts’ scholarly value will mostly likely continue to fall solely on the candidate, despite the MLA’s latest recommendation. Although certainly all candidates—whether they submit traditional or non-traditional work for a tenure, promotion, and review portfolio—need to explain the value of their work, scholars who submit web-based online journal publications, given the frequently unfamiliar characteristics of these unique texts, appear to face a more challenging defense. Indeed, despite both MLA and CCCC recommended guidelines for all participants in tenure, promotion, and review procedures to take a more active role in understanding the scholarly value of online work, candidates who are directly engaged with these kinds of web-based publications are in the best position to educate those who will judge their effectiveness.

### **Scholars’ Efforts to Evaluate Online Journal Publications**

The associations’ guidelines provide one approach to assessing the value of “work with technology” in general. Individual scholars who have written extensively about tenure and technology provide additional perspectives that point to the need for further exploring criteria for assessing online scholarship. Among the issues that emerge in the associations’ recommendations, two figure most prominently in related

scholarly discussions. The first issue regards the need to establish credibility of online texts through peer review processes that are recognizable and valued. The second issue involves the need to establish the legitimacy of online texts through two related processes: (1) grounding criteria in familiar conventions of scholarship, while (2) accounting for the changes in rhetorical presentation from the print to the online medium. These concerns demonstrate the major efforts that have been proffered thus far to support the legitimacy of online scholarship. However, as the following sections show, these efforts reinforce the need for defining the nature of, and articulating explicit assessment criteria for, these new forms of web-based scholarly arguments.

### **Using Peer Review to Establish Credibility**

Scholars identify a lack of credibility associated with texts disseminated in an open-access publishing space as one of the predominant factors contributing to the skeptical attitudes toward scholarship presented in online formats. For example, Peterson writes, “many authors are concerned that because the Internet frees publishing from the traditional gate-keeping systems that the quality of online work will not match that of print.” The notion that anyone can publish anything on the Web without having to achieve an identifiable and defensible set of standards provokes a general sense of distrust regarding online publishing and emphasizes the need for defending online texts as valid, credible, and potentially valuable contributions to a given field. Similarly, Krause acknowledges that the medium affects the perception of online texts as scholarship:

Prior to the web, it was easy to determine what should or shouldn't count as scholarship: if it appeared as an article in a peer reviewed

journal or if it was published as a book by a respectable press, it was definitionally “scholarship” both in the abstract sense of advancing knowledge and in the tangible sense of being worthy to count toward tenure, review, merit, and so forth.

While Krause concedes that the online environment presents an initial challenge to determining the scholarly validity of a text, he acknowledges the importance of the primary mechanism that the academic community has traditionally relied on for validation of scholarship—the peer review process.

Peer review, as such scholars as Krause, Peterson, Sweeney, Baxter, and Palmquist agree, is a significant factor in determining the scholarly value of a text regardless of the medium in which the text is constructed and presented. In a 2003 “Statement on Publication in Electronic Journals,” the MLA emphasizes the usefulness of the traditional referee process in helping to establish scholarly ethos in online journals:

The electronic journal is a viable and credible mode of scholarly publication. When departments evaluate scholarly publications for purposes of hiring, reappointment, tenure, and promotion, the standing of an electronic journal should be judged according to the same criteria used for a print journal. These criteria include the journal's peer review policy, its rate of acceptance, the nature of its editorial board and publisher, and its general profile in the field it covers.

This statement establishes solid criteria for judging the venue of scholarship— notably, the same criteria that are used to evaluate the scholarly validity of traditional print journals. The fact that peer review as a quality control process can help to alleviate skeptical attitudes regarding the quality of work in online journals is not debated. Whether the wider English Studies community believes that a rigorous peer review process is instituted in online journals is debatable. Sweeney observes from the results of his 2000 survey that skepticism regarding the quality of online journal

articles is based on the misconception that the journals either do not have peer review processes in place or include processes that are not as rigorous as ones used in reputable print journals.

In recognition of the need to clarify this misconception, the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of Scholarly Publishing emphasized how important it is for journals to state explicitly their methods of quality control; doing so enables readers to make informed decisions regarding the credibility of the venue:

Most urgently, we need to address the issue of peer review for electronic publication in the humanities, whether of monographs and specialized books or of articles in online journals. It is crucial that electronic publications—including book-length studies, periodicals, editions, and scholarly Web sites—contain a statement about the form of review used to evaluate the quality of work published and that such peer review be comparable in type and standard with that employed by university presses and reputable print journals. Electronic publications included in tenure and promotion dossiers will likely be viewed with suspicion unless a widely accepted system of quality control is in place.

In fact, a majority of the online journals in the subfield of Computers and Writing, including *Kairos*, *Academic Writing*, *The Writing Instructor*, *Enculturation*, and *Computers and Composition Online*, have established and prominently published their processes of peer review so that tenure, promotion, and review committee members can access the information and candidates can more readily defend their publications. As a relevant example that I introduced in chapter 1, *Kairos* includes a very detailed description of its review process accessible through the “Editorial Board” link on the front page of the journal.<sup>21</sup> Specifically, the review process includes three “tiers”:

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<sup>21</sup> This information is the most recent as of April 15, 2007.

### Tier One

When the co-editors receive a submission, they evaluate it, deciding if it is indeed appropriate for *Kairos* and if it is of sufficient quality and scholarly merit to merit entering it into our formal editorial review process. If the co-editors agree, then they promote the submission to Tier Two.

### Tier Two

The entire editorial board discusses the submission for two weeks, coming to a collaborative assessment of its quality and potential to be published in *Kairos*. After the board discussion, three editorial board members will be chosen by the editors (or will volunteer) to write formal review letters, based on the all-board conversation, for the authors. The editors will compile these review letters along with an overview pointing out specific areas of critique to focus on and send this information to the authors (typically within two months of submission).

### Tier Three

The editors work with authors, as needed, to guide/facilitate revisions, based on the editorial board's comments and evaluation. While advancement to this editorial stage is not a guarantee of publication, it does reflect a significant investment in the submission. Our intention is to publish the webtext, if the author or authors complete the revisions requested in consultation with the editors.

In a note between the description of the Tier Two and Tier Three processes, the editors include the following details regarding the movement of a submission through the final stages, including the unique mentoring opportunity that is offered as collaboration among editorial board members and authors:

If a text is accepted (or accepted with revisions), the webtext proceeds to Tier Three. If the text is not accepted, authors who are asked to revise and resubmit may elect to work directly with an editorial board member to ready their text for resubmission to Tier One. (Working with an editorial board member during a revise-and-resubmit assumes that the author will resubmit to *Kairos* but does not guarantee publication.)

This detailed description provides scholars with a clear notion of the rigorous process by which submissions will move through levels of review. It also showcases two

unique aspects of *Kairos*'s review process. First, the process is not completely blind; the editors recognize that domain names are detectable on individual submissions—a challenge not usually encountered by print journals or other more conventional online journals that convert submissions automatically to identical PDF files. Therefore, editorial board members can potentially discover the identity of the author whose work is under review.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, given that editorial board members often mentor authors through the process of revising their texts, knowing an identity at this later, unique stage of the review process is inevitable. James Inman, Senior Co-Editor of *Kairos* believes that blind review is a “complete myth” and that within specific disciplinary studies, anonymity is questionable: “Even if names are removed, scholars can still recognize each other and their research from a particular program” (E-mail, April 10, 2006). Inman asserts that the *Kairos* peer review process is “more ethical and honest” than most traditional peer review processes, in large part due to the collaborative consensus from board members who collectively evaluate each submission's quality and potential for publication. Carbone argues that this collaborative process helps to eliminate some of the perceived bias inherent in a partially-blind review: “The editorial board believes it can provide complete and honest critiques of all submissions; we also believe that knowing who the contributor is, and having them know who we are, requires us to be both more thorough and more judicious.” Similarly, Editorial Board Member Michael Spooner supports the equity of *Kairos*'s process of shared, collective review of submissions: “To read the comments of several board members on each submission makes all of us smarter, I

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<sup>22</sup> Similarly, submitting authors may not know whose reviews were particularly critical in the decision-making process regarding their submissions, but some eventually do learn reviewers' identities if they are matched with the reviewers for text development and revision purposes.



think, and it makes the referee process both rigorous and humane” (E-mail, April 6, 2006). Both collaborative elements of the *Kairos* review process—collaboration among editorial board members at the first stage of review and among editorial board members and authors at the later stage of review—demonstrates the journal’s desire to build and maintain credibility as a legitimate venue for scholarly work. Carbone emphasizes this point: “To be blunt, we want to be taken seriously as a site for quality scholarship, and believe peer review essential to attaining that goal.”

In comparison, as Peterson argues, print journals generally do not include such detailed descriptions and tend to “mystify” the review process. For example, in the “Review” section of the submission guidelines, very little information about the process used in the print journal *Computers and Composition* is made public:

Since manuscripts are submitted for blind review, all identifying information must be removed from the body of the paper. Once files are converted into PDFs, all metadata is automatically removed from the files, and the manuscripts remain anonymous.

While this statement reveals that the review process is blind—an important standard of a traditional referee process—it does not address questions that define the rigor of the process, such as how many reviewers receive an article, how long the process takes, and what kinds of materials authors receive back from the reviewers and editors. Peterson’s explanation of the difference in the level of detail of the descriptions is that print journals are “traditionally accepted as sound scholarly sources” and that “their authority draws less scrutiny by the profession.” She concludes that online journals, given their relative newness and their perceived lack of cache, have a greater need to establish their credibility as serious scholarly venues.

The presence of a clearly articulated and comparably rigorous peer review process in an online journal, according to Katz, should help to alleviate skeptical perceptions about the scholarly value of texts accepted for publication. He writes, "...making the case for the quality of a publication in an online journal which relies on referees to make editorial choices ought to be relatively easy." However, *Kairos* has clearly articulated its process for over ten years, and yet concerns about the validity of web-based texts remain. Although the lack of change may be because *Kairos* is merely one journal among several, clearly there is an incongruity between what the MLA is suggesting and what English Studies departments are accepting.

Peterson contends that the need for online journals to prove their scholarly worth is heightened based on the degree to which the journal publishes non-conventional forms of scholarly arguments. She is one of the few scholars in the relevant literature to recognize the implications of distinguishing between print-based and web-based forms within online journals. It is unclear, for example, even in the MLA's 2003 statement regarding publication in online journals, whether the recommendation applies to both print-based and web-based forms of presenting scholarly arguments. If the text relies primarily on print-based conventions and uses the online environment mainly for dissemination, the assessment is fairly straightforward. However, if the text under evaluation is a web-based text, the assessment becomes more complicated. *Kairos*, then, as the first and among the few online journals in the field to publish web-based texts, has an even greater need to defend its measure of quality control.

### **Accounting for Web-based Texts' Unique Attributes**

Even when the journal in question is peer-reviewed and has gained a reputation for publishing quality work, as noted earlier, scholars must be able to defend the scholarly value of their work. For example, Gruber explains that candidates must be able to articulate why their work should count as scholarship: “Scholars working on innovative online publications, even if the scholarly work is published in peer-reviewed online journals such as *Kairos*, have to justify their decisions to retention, tenure, and promotion committees that are often resistant to innovation and change” (49). She notes that committees often question the quality of publications considered “different,” even if the publication was given a scholarly stamp of approval through being peer-reviewed. In addition, while peer review indicates that knowledgeable experts in the field have determined that the text is valid scholarship, it is unclear on what criteria these experts base their decisions. An implicit set of criteria for such judgment is not sufficient for helping committees understand the work or for helping scholars articulate a defense for their work. In contradiction of his earlier statement that online journal publications appear to be easy to assess, Katz identifies the challenges that his department faced in drafting guidelines for evaluating computer-related work:

The language remains extremely implicit: for example, whereas we can and do say in our guidelines just what constitutes a “publication” and how one publication is to be weighted against others and against other research, teaching, and service activities, we cannot as yet say definitively what constitutes an “online publication” (e.g. contribution to a refereed online periodical; contribution to a permanently archived online conference; substantive contribution to a moderated online discussion group, whether archived or not) and what it is worth.

Tenure, promotion, and review committee members can achieve more confident decisions and candidates can make more stable defenses if they have a better understanding of the scholarly value of web-based texts and if that understanding is informed by an assessment strategy that accounts for the texts' unique attributes.

### **Grounding Assessment Criteria in Traditional Conventions of Scholarship**

In order to increase understanding of the scholarly value of web-based texts, several scholars point to the need for building on a vocabulary that is already familiar to the community of scholars within the field. As stated earlier, the MLA and CCCC Associations' guidelines recommend that scholars adequately relate their work to existing criteria and show how the work overlaps or redefines traditional criteria. Similarly, in "The Tenure of the Oppressed," Rebecca Rickly remarks that a conscious awareness of the acceptable standards of scholarship can help scholars make a more convincing case that their work should be accepted on similar, though not identical, grounds: "Our challenge is a rhetorical one: understanding the values of our institution, and situating our work accordingly, using the discourse community of our institution to ground our thinking and language as we cite our activities" (25). In other words, web-based texts that do not mirror accepted print-based scholarly conventions can still be seen as scholarly based on the ways in which they achieve some of the same rhetorical goals underlying the traditional conventions. A review of the well-known, generally-accepted standards that determine the scholarly value of traditional print-based texts can provide members of the Computers and Writing community with a shared, institutional vocabulary upon which to build more specific criteria for assessing the unique and emerging medium-influenced conventions of so-

called “scholarly” web-based texts. My analysis in chapter 4 demonstrates the extent to which a select subset of *Kairos* webtexts incorporate both traditional and non-traditional means of presenting scholarly arguments.

An influential study on the assessment of scholarship within the academy, “Scholarship Assessed: Evaluation of the Professorate,” offers one model for judging scholarly performance based on a universally-applicable set of standards. Charles Glassick, Mary Huber, and Gene Maeroff compile information from several sources—including interviews with editors of thirty-one scholarly journals and fifty-eight university presses—regarding the criteria used to determine the scholarly merit of manuscripts, proposals, submissions, and more. Among the multiple lists and guidelines, the authors discovered that scholarly activity is guided by six shared themes: clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique. These six standards offer a conceptual framework for identifying and evaluating print-based scholarship. The authors incorporate prompts for each standard represented in their model as follows:

Clear goals

Does the scholar state the basic purposes of his or her work clearly?  
Does the scholar define objectives that are realistic and achievable?  
Does the scholar identify important questions in the field?

Adequate Preparation

Does the scholar show an understanding of existing scholarship in the field? Does the scholar bring the necessary skills to his or her work?  
Does the scholar bring together the resources necessary to move the project forward?

Appropriate Methods

Does the scholar use methods appropriate to the goals? Does the scholar apply effectively the methods selected? Does the scholar modify procedures in response to changing circumstances?

### Significant Results

Does the scholar achieve the goals? Does the scholar's work add consequentially to the field? Does the scholar's work open additional areas for further exploration?

### Effective Presentation

Does the scholar use a suitable style and effective organization to present his or her work? Does the scholar use appropriate forums for communicating work to its intended audiences? Does the scholar present his or her message with clarity and integrity?

### Reflective Critique

Does the scholar critically evaluate his or her own work? Does the scholar bring an appropriate breadth of evidence to his or her critique? Does the scholar use evaluation to improve the quality of future work?  
(36)

This heuristic reflects the expectations inherent in traditional scholarly publications. Specifically, journal articles are expected to contain an argumentative claim (establishing clear goals), a review of the literature (establishing adequate preparation), a statement of method (appropriate methods), and so forth. Scholarly arguments are expected to make a substantial contribution to the field and follow a standard linear arrangement of key parts (introduction, concession/refutation, conclusion), with each part achieving certain goals (for example, the introduction should establish the claim and the context of the argument). Joyce Walker and others concede that arguments that incorporate these conventions in familiar ways are more likely to be valued as scholarship ("Hyper.Activity," Ball "Show, Not Tell" and "A New Media Reading Strategy," Peterson, Katz).

Additional sources to consider for references to print-based standards of scholarship—and ones that are most relevant to this study of online scholarly journal articles—include prominent print journals in the subfield of Computers and Writing. Peterson notes that a journal designates "acceptable scholarship" based on the

identification of a list of preferred topics, formats, and styles within its submission guidelines. The well-regarded print journal *Computers and Composition*, for example, includes the following “Editing Philosophy and Profile” in its “Guidelines for Editors and Authors:”

Not only do the editors of the journal look for articles that have sound theoretical and/or pedagogical bases, but they strive to publish articles that in their very writing demonstrate the high-quality writing the discipline teaches. This is generally accomplished through a coherent organization, well-developed arguments, well-written sentences, and accurate documentation. Authors should introduce subject matter within the context of those interested in computers and composition, using terms and cultural references that either are commonly understood within our international community or are carefully explicated within the article itself. . . . Because the journal has primarily an academic audience, it is generally scholarly and more formal than magazines; yet, it strives to avoid a preachy or labored tone.

These guidelines establish a number of scholarly standards for the texts published—and thereby deemed “scholarly”—within the journal: arguments should be grounded in theory or pedagogy; the writing itself should be clear, logical, coherent, grammatically correct—all the well-known conventions associated with traditional definitions of effective print writing; documentation should be incorporated in a fair and consistent manner; terminology should be familiar and appropriate to the audience or otherwise defined within the context of the argument; and the tone should be formal.

While the submission guidelines of reputable print journals establish explicit standards of scholarship, it is through an analysis of actual texts published within the journal that scholars can find more implicit standards. In her analysis of the rhetorical presentation of a text published in *Computers and Composition*, for example, Peterson identifies several formatting, typographic, and stylistic

conventions that are seemingly transparent to scholars and which, she asserts, are representative of a majority of print-based scholarly arguments. For example, she indicates that the articles are mainly textually-based with little to no incorporation of pictures and graphs, while the text is organized in standard paragraph form with white space at the margins. The front pages prominently feature titles of texts and names of authors. The text uses both “professional” fonts and headings/subheadings to arrange portions of the text and to establish parts of the argument. Long source quotations are arranged and formatted visually according to APA style (highlighting others’ research), and authors’ credentials—including institution and publishing history—are listed at the end of the text (arguably a specific convention of this journal). A consistent, uniform layout appears throughout the journal. Peterson asserts that these “formatting” conventions contribute to the scholarly ethos of a text in that they “emphasize scholarly tradition constructed by/through our learned expectations of print journals.” In other words, they establish expectations for readers in ways that mark these texts as scholarship.

A majority of these standards are echoed in the field’s guides to scholarly publishing. For example, Gibaldi’s *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* establishes the qualities that distinguish all effective scholarly prose:

Effective scholarly writing, then, depends on clarity and readability as well as on content. The organization and development of ideas, unity and coherence of presentation, and fitness of sentence structure, grammar, and diction are all essential considerations, as is the correctness of the mechanics of writing—capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and so on. (64)



Here Gibaldi identifies the interdependence of form and content. Both must work together to produce an effective scholarly argument. He asserts that attention to these formal and stylistic conventions helps writers establish scholarly ethos:

In a large field such as ours, adherence to these codes allows your writing to be taken seriously, whether by referees who decide the publication of your work or by readers whom you ultimately hope to convince with your evidence and arguments but who are otherwise unacquainted with you. Indeed, it is through the confines imposed by a commonly acknowledged set of practices that readers can judge the competence of your methods and the individuality of what you offer.  
(xvi)

Many of these traditional scholarly standards that have guided the writing and assessment of print-based texts also apply to web-based texts, as the analysis in chapter 4 confirms; however, the notion of form presents the most significant break from the scholarly tradition. Form in print-based scholarship is transparent to the extent that Peterson identifies above; one of its main functions, as Gibaldi alludes, is to satisfy reader expectations and develop scholarly ethos. It contributes to the meaning of the text by providing a recognizable container that calls for the content to be taken seriously, and within that recognizable, traditional container, form can be manipulated to create and enhance meaning. On the other hand, form in web-based scholarship can contribute to the meaning of a text in a slightly different way, as chapter 3 and 4 describe. The technological capabilities of the online medium create an environment where the form can be used beyond conventional expectation-setting functions to enhance the meaning of a text by, for example, mirroring or enacting the content in ways unique to the online medium.

## **Emerging Conventions in Online Rhetorical Presentation**

Conventions of print arguments help to establish reader expectations; any work that pushes against such conventions risks being misunderstood by readers because it is different from the norm or the expected. And yet, over time, as readers become more familiar with these non-conventional texts, their expectations may shift and begin to be satisfied through emerging conventions that govern the effective presentation of scholarship in the online environment. Indeed, as the popularity of web-based writing gains momentum, scholars have begun to identify guidelines of effective web writing.

These guidelines, ranging from the mid-1990s to date, are presented in both print- and online- published “rhetorics” of hypertext writing. Some of the rhetorics, which provide foundational principles for effective web writing, include Alysson Troffer’s “Writing Effectively Online” (an extended rhetoric of online writing published in the August 2000 issue of *Computers and Composition Online*); Jakob Nielsen’s “Alertbox” (an ongoing column on Web usability that has been published online since 1995) and *Multimedia and Hypertext: The Internet and Beyond* (a print text published in 1995 that lays the groundwork for much of the subsequent ideas regarding hypertextual writing); Marc Millon’s *Creative Content for the Web* (a print text published in 2000 that provides guidelines for creating effective content for the Web); Patrick Lynch and Sarah Horton’s *Web Style Guide* (a print text published in 1999 with an accompanying web site last updated in 2004 [<http://webstyleguide.com/>] that offers practical guidance for Web authoring); and George Landow’s “The Rhetoric of Hypermedia” (a seminal article on principles of reader orientation, first published in 1989).

Some sections of these rhetorics function as prescriptive grammars of online writing, offering “do’s and don’t’s” regarding such elements as link density, node placement, and site map design to name a few. Other sections focus more on the rhetorical aspects of writing for online audiences and making choices specifically to accommodate readers in this environment. Moreover, while some sections devote attention to matters of writing style (e.g., “use short declarative sentences for easier screen reading”), a majority of the rhetorics focus primarily on form-based issues unique to the online medium. It is important to note, also, that these rhetorics were not designed intentionally for guiding scholarly writing. In fact, almost all refer throughout the texts to developing business and classroom or personal web sites. However, they provide standards for evaluating the quality of online texts based on what is considered to be effective writing and informed rhetorical uses of the hypertextual allowances of the online medium, and therefore can be applicable to the assessment of scholarly online texts.

The majority of conventions that emerge from these rhetorics are directly related to the unique medium-enabled allowance for multi-linear design structures. They acknowledge that web-based texts that incorporate multi-linear designs can offer unique ideas, but unless these ideas are accessible through reader-friendly navigation strategies, they are useless because they are unobtainable. In *Multimedia and Hypertext*, Nielsen presents a framework for creating reader-friendly online texts. He offers five parameters of “hypertext usability” that directly influence the choices authors make in constructing the navigation design of the text. In her guidelines,

Troffer reviews Nielsen's parameters and provides a helpful summary, cited in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1 Jakob Nielsen's Five Parameters of Hypertext Usability**

Jakob Nielsen's Five Parameters of Hypertext Usability	
1. Easy to learn	When a hypertext is easy to learn, readers quickly understand its navigation options and other basic commands to locate information. They can also easily learn the basic structure of the hypertext network. Moreover, each topic in the network contains information that is easy to read.
2. Efficient to use	When a hypertext is efficient to use, readers can find information quickly, or at least soon discover that what they seek is not present in the network. Also, when readers arrive at a topic, they can quickly orient themselves and understand its meaning as it relates to their point of departure.
3. Easy to remember	When a hypertext is easy to remember, readers can return after some time away and still recall its general structure. In other words, they can still find their way around the network. They can also recognize landmark topics and special conventions used for these topics as well as links.
4. Nearly error-free	When readers experience few errors with a hypertext, they rarely follow a link only to find they did not really want to go there. Even if readers do erroneously follow a link, they can easily return to their previous location. In addition, readers can easily return to any previous location if they decide to abandon some lengthy digression.
5. Pleasant to use	When a hypertext is pleasant to use, readers are subjectively satisfied with using the network. They are rarely frustrated or disappointed when following links. Moreover, rather than feeling constrained, they feel in control and that they can freely traverse the network.

These parameters are useful in that they provide a rhetorical framework for the conventions that have emerged in Nielsen's as well as other rhetorics of online writing. Constructing an online text that is easy to learn, efficient to use, easy to

remember, nearly error-free, and pleasant to use involves close attention to reader orientation. Multi-linear structures can be disorienting for readers who are accustomed to the linear guidance of print-based texts. In “The Rhetoric of Hypermedia,” Landow notes that hypertext writing requires new means of orienting readers, including helping readers to determine their present location in the text and to understand that location’s relation to the rest of the material in the text (44). The most often agreed-upon conventions presented in these rhetorics address orienting the reader through the incorporation of navigational devices, informative link text, and discrete nodes.

Scholars unanimously agree that readers of web-based texts are more likely to become disoriented if they cannot envision how the text should be navigated (Troffer, Landow “The Rhetoric of Hypermedia,” Lynch and Horton, Millon, Nielsen “Hypertext”). One way authors of web-based texts can assist reader orientation is to provide navigational devices—site maps, tables of content, menus, or matrices—that show the extent of the web and provide direct link access to the main nodes of the text. Landow, for example, suggests that authors include “webviews” to allow readers a clear view of their navigation options: “By conveying information about the documents linked to the documents one has activated, the webview shows readers their present position in relation to other materials and also furnishes an efficient means of traveling to them” (47). Additionally, in *Web Style Guide*, Lynch and Horton agree that visual representations of the text are “an easy way to give readers a clear sense of the extent, organization, and context” of content within the text (47).

Another strategy for assisting reader orientation involves the incorporation of clearly worded links. Links, as Troffer notes, are “one of the great benefits of reading online” because they allow writers to create multiple associations among topics within the text and allow readers to determine the order in which they prefer to view the topics. In order to help readers move among nodes, Landow suggests that link text should follow a rhetoric of arrivals and departures—text that sets clear expectations as to what readers will find at the end of a link (“The Rhetoric of Hypermedia” 55-8). Millon also acknowledges that link text should be carefully constructed in order to enhance reader orientation: “Links should be created from significant or meaningful words and phrases and they ought to be placed within a contextual framework that helps the user to know where he will be taken.” Similarly, Troffer states: “Carefully chosen link text gives readers contextual cues concerning where each link leads.”

Creating a reader-friendly text also involves attention to the limitations of screen reading and the ensuing need for thoughtful node construction. Nielsen has completed several usability studies that suggest readers often scan online texts and that constructing scannable text will facilitate the online reading experience. Several guidelines are in agreement. Lynch and Horton, for example, assert that “concise chunks of information” are better suited to online reading: “Long Web pages tend to disorient readers; they require users to scroll long distances and to remember what is off-screen” (24). In other words, they suggest that readers will be able to retain information better if it is broken into discrete segments. Similarly, Millon agrees that, “users find it difficult and tiresome to access information that requires excessive

scrolling.” The consensus is that material should be organized into discrete, self-contained “chunks” or nodes of information to assist with online viewing and to enable multiple associations among separate but related segments of content. Troffer, for example suggests that web authors create “short, self-contained topics that do not require any particular sequence to be understood.” These are just some of the many web-based writing conventions that have emerged over the past ten years. In chapter 3, I provide additional descriptions and examples of these and other web-based conventions.

### **Identifying Characteristics of *Kairos* Webtexts**

Of all the efforts made to address the evaluation of online scholarship, perhaps the most relevant effort in line with the argument of this study involves the exploration of texts deemed “scholarly” by virtue of being published in what is considered to be a scholarly online journal. The problem is that few online journals to date publish the type of online texts that fully incorporate the hypertextual allowances of the medium. This dearth of models creates a challenge for scholars who are attempting to explain their unprecedented work to tenure, promotion, and review committees. In “Show, Not Tell,” Ball claims that web-based texts that take advantage of the full potential of the online medium still represent a minority of the texts available on the Web (404). Carbone agrees that scholars do not yet have many models to explore for constructing texts that truly incorporate the hypertextual nature of the Web: “When writing a print essay we don’t even have to think anymore of where to look for a model, inhabited as we are by the genres we’ve read, but if one wants to write a native hypertext...where does one look?”

It is easy to find models of traditional (printed) scholarly writing judged by well-known and agreed-upon standards; Carbone finds that “fixed” models of web-based writing are not as common due to the evolving nature of technology and thus the forms that make use of that technology. Katz acknowledges the difficulty of identifying assessment criteria for these forms: “...we are caught between tradition and transition, attempting to evaluate a technology and practice with which we have inadequate experience and which keeps evolving as we watch.” The technological capabilities that influence formal design elements as well as multiple modes of presentation (i.e., audio, video, animation) are constantly evolving, making “model” texts conventional rather than innovative within short periods of time.<sup>23</sup> This fluid nature of web-based online texts is a defining characteristic, and it underlies the need for an assessment framework to evolve with new media offerings.

While models of online texts are not as prolific as print-based texts, *Kairos* and the webtexts published within the journal, as chapter 1 establishes, provides rich data—over ten years of archived web-based online scholarship for analysis. To date, only a few studies have been conducted that explore the type of webtexts published in *Kairos*. One such study, cited frequently in this chapter, is Peterson’s “Writing and Publishing in the Boundaries: Academic Writing in/through the Virtual Age.” In her comparative analysis of published “texts” from concurrent issues of *Computers and Composition* and *Kairos*, Peterson identifies some significant characteristics of webtexts revealed through differences in rhetorical presentations in the print and

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<sup>23</sup> Moreover, few traditions or common expectations exist in such an evolving form as new media texts, where the methods of making meaning are unfamiliar to a majority of English Studies scholars whose primary means of constructing knowledge traditionally has been through the written word (Ball 405).



online medium. Based on her observations, she argues that a defining element of the *Kairos* webtexts under analysis is their ability to combine verbal and visual elements for rhetorical effect:

While there is some regularity to the layouts of the articles in terms of headings, ways of moving through the articles (directional arrows and other markings that help users navigate through the text), general page layout etc., each article integrates words and visual elements in different ways, depending on the argument of the article.

For example, in her analysis of one of the webtexts from *Kairos* 6.2, Erin Smith's "Reading and Mis[s]reading the *eneriwomaninterface*," Peterson observes that moving words on the page act as a "visual picture" and that the combination of word/picture or visual/verbal creates meaning within the text in ways not possible in print. Peterson also observes that in some texts, "the user can chose [sic] different paths through the text," which suggests that another potentially significant characteristic of webtexts is a reliance on the multi-linearity inherent to hypertextual writing.

Additionally, Peterson observes that several of the texts in this particular issue of *Kairos* rely on familiar rhetorical strategies, such as linear writing, plain backgrounds with black text, and sources cited at what would be considered the end of the text (e.g., a Works Cited section offered within the final node of a linear text). She finds that elements such as topic and tone are "clearly located in the academic realm." Therefore, another characteristic of webtexts that Peterson identifies is their incorporation of certain significant print conventions that signal a scholarly feel. Peterson's observations from this issue of *Kairos* lead her to conclude that some online journal publications challenge print conventions but that, more often, "scholars

who do publish online write in a format that is fairly traditional so that they do not meet as much resistance.” As I noted earlier in this chapter, the perception exists that authors who want their work to be seen as scholarly must adhere to accepted print-based conventions of scholarship.

Peterson makes important observations relative to the time period of her study in 2002 and lays the groundwork for considering innovations in more recent webtexts. However, while her exploration serves the purpose of isolating the differences in rhetorical presentations of publications in two different media, it is limited in that she looks at webtexts in only one issue of *Kairos*. The pace of technological change, particularly in hypertextual capabilities, as well as the experience gained from testing new forms and new ways of presenting arguments in the online environment also limits the usefulness of her findings. Rather, looking at trends longitudinally can help scholars determine some enduring or core characteristics that define all or most online texts and can lead to stronger predictions about what scholarly online journal publications may look like in the future.

Jim Kalmbach’s 2006 discussion (published as a *Kairos* webtext) titled, “Reading the Archives: Ten Years of Nonlinear (*Kairos*) History,” provides a more comprehensive account of the trends that have emerged in the first ten years of *Kairos*’s published webtexts. Kalmbach analyzes over 230 webtexts and delineates eight distinct categories of hypertext design—from simple linear structures to more sophisticated multi-media presentations—that authors have used to organize and present their arguments. Based on his analysis of the number of webtexts within each category over the ten-year period, he concludes that a majority of webtexts are still

largely informed by a print paradigm and only within the last few years have more sophisticated hypertextual design structures emerged. Specifically, he divides the work published in *Kairos* into three main “eras”: “Beginnings: Moving Beyond Print,” Volumes 1-4; “Adolescent Exuberance: The Computers and Writing Issues,” Volumes 5-7; and “Coming of Age: New Media and Beyond,” Volumes 8-10 (“Conclusions: The Three Ages of *Kairos*”). In the “Beginnings” era, Kalmbach observes this was “a time of great diversity and experimentation, where no one form of hypertext ever appeared in more than about a third of the webtexts in a volume.” He also notes that in this first era, the texts are “more visually conservative, hiding their experimentation behind the metaphor of the seminar paper.” The Adolescent Exuberance age, he observes, was a time of “great enthusiasm and growth” in which more webtexts were published than in any other era due to the mass publication of webtexts from the Computers and Writing conference, an action that was motivated, Kalmbach notes, by the pressure to publish “huge issues.” In the final era, “Coming of Age,” Kalmbach identifies “a dramatic increase in the sophistication and an increasingly more confident balance between text, visuals, design, media, and navigation.” He credits the slow but steady evolution of webtexts to scholars’ increased experience with the technology as well as an increased awareness of the rhetorical effects of incorporating capabilities of the medium. In an extended footnote regarding the issue of tenure, Kalmbach appears to portray the longstanding perception among scholars in the Computers and Writing subfield that traditional-looking scholarship is a safer submission within academic portfolios. He writes:

When critiquing the look of online webtexts written in 1996 (or 2006 for that matter), we need to keep in mind the importance of faculty

status committees as audiences for these texts. Many of *Kairos*' authors have been graduate students, adjuncts, and untenured faculty members, and while they may write their webtexts for colleagues in computers and writing, composition, and technical writing, these texts are also being read and evaluated by colleagues who have likely never published online work. My experience on such committees has been that my colleagues are well-meaning and want to treat people fairly; still, even though one's colleagues may recognize the peer review process *Kairos* uses and its high regard in the field, they usually lack the background to evaluate webtexts and making your online piece look as if it could be printed can't hurt.

Kalmbach's study, one of a series of *Kairos*-reflective webtexts published in the special ten-year anniversary issue, provides a viable rubric for classifying the hypertext designs of webtexts. His conclusions are perhaps representative of the slow change in attitude toward the acceptance of non-conventional (web-based) forms as scholarship. As attitudes begin to change, and as the stigma of publishing research online slowly fades, authors may feel more confident about publishing work that challenges traditional boundaries. However, scholars can also gain confidence through the ability to articulate how their new forms can be valued as scholarship. A closer look at the characteristics that define scholarly webtexts can provide the basis for further development of criteria for scholarly assessment. Until these new forms can be explored for the characteristics that render them scholarly, it will be difficult to articulate criteria to support their legitimacy as evidence of scholarly activity.

Peterson's and Kalmbach's studies begin to articulate some of the significant characteristics of web-based journal articles published in *Kairos*. In contrast, several discussions within the literature devoted to online text assessment focus primarily on the assessment challenges associated with the more non-traditional forms for scholarly writing (e.g., asynchronous and synchronous discussion groups/listservs,

Web sites, Weblogs, and Wikis). Such discussions tend to bypass a more familiar and conventional form of scholarly publication—the online journal essay or article (see, for example, Katz, Rickly, and Janice Walker). The consensus among those authors is that all of these unique and emerging forms challenge the boundaries of what is deemed “acceptable scholarship” for the purposes of advancement in the field; however, as this dissertation argues, an examination of the least radical of these forms—the online journal article—may help to determine core characteristics of online scholarship that can be extended to these more experimental forms.

Moreover, several recent discussions have emerged in the last five years that focus on the assessment of “new media texts,” online texts that rely on multi-media elements to present arguments and make meaning (Ball “Show, Not Tell” 405). Scholars including Ball, Richard Rice, Sorapure, and Janice Walker argue that these experimental texts make meaning through multiple media in addition to or in place of alphabetic text and that they require new criteria for assessing their scholarly value. Scholars are particularly uncomfortable assessing these more experimental texts in part, as Sorapure asserts in “Between Modes: Assessing Student New Media Compositions,” because English department faculty do not feel qualified to judge the effectiveness of various modes—audio, video, animation—within a multi-modal discourse. Similarly, Ball argues in *A New Media Reading Strategy*, that readers struggle to understand the semiotic nature of these texts because they are “more accustomed to assigning meaning to linguistic elements than to multimodal elements” (5).

While new media texts, as Kalmbach observes, are a growing trend in online journals like *Kairos*, this type of webtext is, as yet, rare. However, there appears to be a significant effort within the literature to explore the more radically different forms without first addressing the form that bridges the gap between familiar and unfamiliar presentations of scholarly research. Articulating criteria for web-based texts—texts that take advantage of the hypertextual allowances but may not yet incorporate hypermedia elements—is a necessary first step in understanding how to assess the scholarly value of online texts.

Most recently, *Kairos* editors Ball and Beth Hewett have recognized the need to help readers understand how *Kairos* webtexts make meaning and why they are valued as scholarship. In the “Logging On” section of issue 11.1, an online equivalent of a “letter from the editor” where the motivation and execution of key aspects of the particular journal issue are discussed, the editors acknowledge the persistent challenge associated with texts that move beyond familiar boundaries of scholarship: “Many outside readers (and probably even a few *Kairos* readers themselves) still need help ‘experiencing’ and ‘evaluating’ the kinds of digital work we publish” (“Resolutions”). Ball and Hewett express a strong belief about the need to articulate ways in which webtexts are assessed and valued, making it one of their top three missions for the 2006-2007 publishing year:

*Kairos* authors and readers are poised to be leaders in this area, and so, with the MLA’s new report, our kairos has presented itself. The journal’s third new mission-initiative this year is, perhaps, its most important. We must begin to articulate how and why the scholarship that *Kairos* publishes IS scholarship (in cases when, for some readers, that issue may be debatable) and why it should be valued, not only for our authors and readers, but to those who make national guidelines or policies regarding what academia should hold important.

In order to help readers explicitly understand how and why the journal values web-based scholarship, they have created a new section called “Inventio,” which was introduced in the August 2007 12.1 issue. *Kairos*’s Inventio will feature a webtext that can be followed from “inception to publication.” It will offer one webtext selected by the editors, a detailed compilation of the editorial board’s collaborative reviews of the webtext, the author’s revised webtext based on the reviews, and an introduction composed by the Inventio Editor describing and synthesizing all the sections. The editors think that revealing the scaffolding of a webtext’s construction will help readers and writers better understand the scholarly composition of these webtexts:

We believe that publishing a text with descriptions of its editorial process will accomplish a major goal that *Kairos* authors have been searching for: It will help readers (and tenure committee members) understand how the editors and editorial board reads and values (and, thus, finds significant scholarly merit in) innovative, nontraditional, and sometimes highly multi-mediated webtexts.

Ball and Hewett further state that “authors whose work appears in Inventio will have built-in arguments for tenure cases, if needed, as well as built-in-interpretations for readers who want to learn how to better read innovative texts.” Such goals are admirable, and Inventio may yield strong research into composing processes. However, as Inventio has yet to publish its first webtext, its true value for revealing criteria for identifying and articulating scholarship in web-based online journal publications remains to be seen.

### **A Summary of the Efforts to Explore the Legitimacy of Online Texts**

In addition to the governing associations' attempts to address concerns about the acceptance of online texts for tenure, promotion, and review purposes, technorhetoricians and other scholars involved in discussing the value of online scholarship have taken important first steps toward changing the ways in which the broader English Studies community views online scholarship. By considering such issues as establishing the importance of a publicized and rigorous peer review process in online venues as well as building a vocabulary for discussing the value of these non-traditional texts, scholars have attempted to increase awareness and understanding of the scholarly context surrounding this non-conventional form of presenting research. Additionally, some limited explorations of webtexts published in *Kairos* begin to establish a picture of the characteristics that comprise scholarship within a reputable online venue.

Although these discussions have contributed to the understanding of scholarly assessment of online texts, this study attempts to approach the problem from a different perspective. By examining and identifying characteristics that constitute web-based online journal publications through a rhetorical lens, this study can add to the understanding of the nature of web-based online scholarship. Furthermore, this study suggests that an explicit articulation of assessment criteria—a re-vision of traditional scholarly criteria—that accounts for the unique characteristics inherent in these new forms may help Computers and Writing scholars to reconsider the scholarly value of these texts for tenure, promotion, and review purposes.



## **Chapter 3: Method for Constructing an Assessment Tool**

### **Overview**

In this study, I argue that web-based texts—online texts that use hypertextual and/or hypermedia allowances of the medium to present their research-based arguments—cannot be assessed with the same criteria used to assess traditional print scholarship. Rather, these texts call for extended standards of scholarship that are still in the process of evolving. Scholars in English Studies, particularly within the subfield of Computers and Writing, are increasingly confronting these kinds of web-based online texts in tenure, promotion, and review situations and require a more informed understanding of how these texts are “scholarly” in both traditional and non-traditional ways. I used, therefore, a rhetorical analysis to identify salient textual and hypertextual characteristics of a representative group of web-based online journal publications—specifically, “webtexts” published in the reputable online journal *Kairos*. This analysis provided a set of explicit criteria for determining the legitimacy of these unique forms of online scholarship.

This chapter describes the method I used to develop an assessment tool for identifying common characteristics of webtexts that meet and extend traditional scholarly conventions. I begin by describing the research questions that have guided the study and gave rise to the need for certain methodologies. I then outline the process by which I generated a criterion checklist and converted the checklist into a more formal assessment framework by grounding the criteria in expert-recognized rhetorically-based strategies of effective writing for both print-based and web-based

media; this process provided a measure of trustworthiness to the tool. Although, questions of reliability and validity are not specifically addressed in this exploratory study, the descriptive framework outlined here should be useful for replicating the processes of this study and for creating more “objective” assessment instruments. Finally, I describe the process by which I applied the assessment framework to a select subset of *Kairos* “Best Webtexts” and summarize the results of the analysis.

### **Research Questions**

I have posed three questions to serve as the research agenda for this study:

1. *What are some of the common characteristics found in scholarly online journal publications?*
2. *In what ways do Kairos webtexts both adhere to and diverge from traditional scholarly conventions?*
3. *In what ways do Kairos webtexts follow emerging conventions of web-based writing? Specifically, (a) do these emerging web-based conventions meet familiar goals of scholarship, albeit in presently unfamiliar ways, and (b) what value do these emerging web-based conventions add toward creating a new genre of scholarly online text?*

I was influenced in the development of the research questions by a specific type of rhetorical criticism that Sonja Foss calls “generic criticism.” In this approach, the critic “seeks to discover commonalities in rhetorical patterns across recurring situations” in order to understand the rhetorical practices that distinguish a particular genre (193). The genre of focus in my study is the scholarly journal publication. I analyze Kairos webtexts—a specific type of web-based online scholarly journal

publication—to determine how this type of online text both fits and diverges from the genre of scholarly journal publication. Foss suggests that genres influence the ways in which readers respond to a particular artifact (text):

When a generic form is used by a rhetor, it creates expectations in the audience members, who perceive and evaluate rhetoric in terms of generic classifications and expect a particular style and certain types of content from particular types of rhetoric. If the rhetoric does not fulfill these expectations, the audience is likely to be confused and to react negatively. (201)

As I noted in chapters 1 and 2, some academics have a skeptical perception of online work. Foss’s comments suggest that divergence from traditional conventions may disrupt readers’ expectations. Conceivably, such disruption of expectations may account for this skepticism. Foss also suggests that these divergences, while initially confusing, may create a positive experience for readers by adding a certain rhetorical value to the artifact under analysis. Arguably, this potential “added value” may help to convert skepticism regarding the scholarly legitimacy of this type of online work. In chapter 1, I assert that the assessment of online texts involves, foremost, a definitional argument. Because genre analysis helps to define a potentially new genre (web-based scholarly journal publications) based on a comparison to antecedent genre (print-based scholarly journal publications), this approach is useful for constructing an argument regarding the defining features of web-based online scholarship.

The purpose of this study is to understand better the scholarly value of a specific type of online text; the means of achieving this understanding involves comparing online scholarship to the already valued form of print-based scholarship. The goal is to determine whether and how online texts can be valued as legitimate

forms of scholarly discourse on parity with traditional, print scholarship. The research agenda of my study reflects this critical approach.

### **The Relationship between the Research Questions and Methodology**

*What are some of the common characteristics found in scholarly online journal publications?* To address my first research question, I conducted a general survey to explore the characteristics that appeared most frequently in a wide sampling of *Kairos* webtexts. The goal of this exploration was to gain a sense of the defining qualities of these online texts and to identify an initial set of criteria for distinguishing these online texts as a discrete genre.

*In what ways do Kairos webtexts both adhere to and diverge from traditional scholarly conventions?* To address my second research question, I conducted a review of traditional scholarly conventions reflected within print-based journal publications. The submission guidelines for prominent print journals, the work of Gibaldi, and that of Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff provided a framework for identifying those conventions most often followed within webtexts. If webtexts, for example, effectively followed at least some conventions of print scholarship, they would by association appear to be more scholarly. Additionally, I explored whether and how the webtexts appeared to move beyond traditional conventions based on their incorporation of the online medium's unique allowances.

*In what ways do Kairos webtexts follow emerging conventions of web-based writing? Specifically, (a) do these emerging web-based conventions meet familiar goals of scholarship, albeit in presently unfamiliar ways, and (b) what value do these emerging web-based conventions add toward creating a new genre of scholarly*

*online text?* To establish new criteria for assessing the scholarly value of texts that move beyond traditional conventions, my third research question considered the function and added value (e.g., Foss’s notion of “added rhetorical value”) of emerging web-based conventions. The works of Lynch and Horton, Morkes and Nielsen, Millon, and Troffer were particularly useful in identifying emerging rhetorical conventions of online writing within webtexts.

### **Selecting Webtexts for Analysis**

As data for analysis, I selected a representative group of web-based online texts, which were webtexts published within the first ten years of *Kairos*’s existence as a scholarly online journal, beginning with issue 1.1 published in Spring 1996 and ending with issue 10.2 published in Spring 2006. For this time period, the archive includes 22 issues and more than 300 webtexts. See table 3.1 for an overview of the *Kairos* archive for this time period.

**Table 3.1: *Kairos* archive overview, 1996-2006**

Year of Publication	Issue	Title/Topic
1996	1.1 Spring	<i>Online Writing Labs</i>
	1.2 Summer	<i>Pedagogies in Virtual Spaces</i>
	1.3 Fall	<i>Electro-Pedagogies</i>
1997	2.1 Spring	<i>Tenure and Technology</i>
	2.2 Fall	<i>Gender and Electronic Discourse</i>
1998	3.1 Spring	<i>Copyright, Plagiarism, and Intellectual Property</i>
	3.2 Fall	<i>Computers and Writing 1998</i>
1999	4.1 Fall	<i>Hypertext Fiction/Hypertext Poetry</i>
2000	5.1 Spring	<i>Technology and K-12 Language Arts</i>
	5.2 Fall	<i>Computers and Writing 2000</i>
2001	6.1 Spring	<i>Reflection, Pedagogy, and Technology</i>
	6.2 Fall	<i>Computers and Writing 2001</i>
2002	7.1 Spring	<i>Disability and Technology</i>
	7.2 Summer	<i>Technology, Popular Culture, and Teaching</i>
	7.3 Fall	<i>Computers and Writing 2002</i>
	7.x Fall	<i>Multi-Journal Collaboration: Electronic Publishing</i>
2003	8.1 Spring	<i>Issues of New Media</i>
	8.2 Fall	<i>Computers and Writing 2003</i>
2004	9.1 Fall	<i>The Rhetoric and Pedagogy of Portable Technologies</i>
2005	9.2 Spring	<i>Writing in Globalization: Computers and Writing 2004</i>
	10.1 Fall	<i>Intersections of Online Writing Spaces, Rhetorical Theory, and the Composition Classroom</i>
2006	10.2 Spring	<i>New Writing and Computer Technologies: Computers and Writing 2005</i>

During its first ten years, *Kairos* organized publications into five main sections: CoverWeb, Features, Praxis, Interviews, and Reviews.<sup>24</sup> Two of these sections—CoverWeb and Features—are rich for analysis in that the publications organized within these sections focus primarily on original research and interpretation

<sup>24</sup> These five sections are present in a majority of *Kairos* issues within the ten-year period. However, the issues published as proceedings of the Computers and Writing conferences often do not include this organizational breakdown of sections. Additionally, the journal has undergone several changes over this ten-year period, in part due to technological advances and the fluid nature of the medium, and in part due to the organic nature of a journal that may still have been finding its stride as a pioneer platform for publishing web-based texts. These changes will be noted as they affect the analysis. For example, as of the January 2007 11.2 issue, which is not included in this study, *Kairos* sections have been revised and reorganized into four main sections: Topoi, Praxis, Interview and Reviews, while in the 12.1 issue of August 2007, the Inventio section was added.

of texts and data, and therefore share more similarities with a traditional scholarly journal publication. In order to gain a sense of the patterns that have emerged over time, webtexts from the 1996-2006 CoverWeb and Features sections comprised the primary data for this analysis.

### **Constructing the Assessment Tool**

The process of constructing the assessment tool for this study was iterative and inductive. To generate a list of “scholarly indicators”—common features that might confirm the scholarly nature of these texts—I began with a general survey of over 100 randomly selected webtexts published in the CoverWeb and Features sections of *Kairos*, reviewing them chronologically from earliest to most recent. Although I observed some diversity in formal design, I identified several features common to a majority of the texts. For example, many texts include, among other features, direct links to authors’ email addresses; some variation of dark font on a light background (e.g., a traditional print-based design of black font on white background); use of images, graphics, and icons; headings and subheadings depicting parts of traditional arguments such as “introduction” and “conclusion”; references; quotations and ideas from other scholars; links to online references; navigational aids such as graphic or textual webviews; and field-specific terminology.

I converted this checklist of initial observations into a test draft of an assessment tool by matching indicators to traditional print-based and emerging web-based standards. The assessment tool draft evolved into a set of descriptive and evaluative statements that reflected indicators of scholarship as perceived by scholars in traditional textual and hypertextual studies. The descriptive statements addressed

the presence of commonly observed features (scholarly attributes) within the select group of webtexts and typically required yes/no responses. For example, one statement set considered whether the webtext includes a graphic webview; another considered whether the webtext includes an explicitly labeled references node. The evaluative statements addressed the effectiveness of incorporating a particular print or web-based convention and also required yes/no responses. For example, one statement set considered whether the webtext follows a clear rhetoric of arrivals and departures, while another considered whether the nodes within the text are self-contained and contextualized. These evaluative statement sets reflected judgments based on presumably objective standards that have been discussed and agreed upon by various hypertextual scholars (see Troffer, Millon, and Nielsen “The Alertbox”).

I re-tested the assessment tool by surveying an additional ten randomly selected *Kairos* webtexts. The purpose of this process was to incorporate observations unaccounted for in the original draft of the tool and to ensure both wide and detailed coverage of characteristics that, if recurrent in a number of webtexts, may help to identify and define characteristics of web-based online scholarship. For example, I found that the original test draft failed to include a statement set regarding the way in which the webtext makes meaning. However, it became apparent that the way in which authors make meaning in these texts directly affects the extent to which readers can follow the arguments; the test reviews suggested that meaning could emerge through text alone, through text and graphics, or through text and multiple media such as audio, video, and animation. The response to a statement of this nature provides a better sense of the kinds of technological allowances being used—and



most likely being accepted or encouraged by readers in this medium—to present research arguments. Additionally, the test draft included a statement regarding the presence of documentation—such as a references node—within a webtext. Through further investigation of these ten additional webtexts, I found that authors presented documentation in various conventional and unconventional ways, and, therefore, I revised the statement set to consider the specific presentation of documentation in webtexts. This iterative process for developing and testing the statement sets enabled me to construct a more detailed assessment tool that highlighted the nuanced distinctions and similarities among these webtexts.

Finally, I organized the completed assessment tool into two categories, each of which contains a set of focus areas into which the descriptive and evaluative statement sets are organized. Category A considers the extent to which readers can recognize traditional print-based scholarly conventions within webtexts. This category reveals key similarities in scholarly communication between print and online media. Category B considers the extent to which webtexts extend traditional scholarly conventions as well as incorporate emerging conventions of web-based writing. This category reveals key differences in formal design brought about by the use of hypertextual and/or hypermedia capabilities of the online medium; it shifts the focus of traditional scholarly criteria toward the inclusion of non-conventional, web-based criteria, thereby providing evidence that webtexts are new forms of scholarship. A rationale for each of the focus areas and statements within the “final” assessment tool follows.

### **Assessment Category A: Print-based Conventions**

Traditional, print-based conventions governing scholarly writing are well known and generally accepted by the English Studies community; one need only look at the similarities in submission and style guidelines of journals such as *College English*, *Computers and Composition*, and *College Composition and Communication*. Texts that adhere to these conventions are more likely to be recognized and valued as legitimate scholarship because they fall within expected genre conventions. Print-based conventions most often reflected in submission guidelines for academic journals involve four significant aspects of scholarly arguments: content (what is argued within a text), arrangement (how the content is formally organized), documentation (how the content is supported and contextualized) and tone (how the content is delivered). It is important to identify traditional conventions of scholarship within webtexts in order to establish familiar criteria upon which to assess these non-traditional forms. Additionally, it is important to question whether a traditional convention perhaps functions in a non-traditional manner and whether a rhetorical value is added in the shift to the non-traditional form. As the discussion below shows, more comprehensive criteria to account for the changes inherent in online argument presentation can be added to this familiar assessment framework.

#### ***Content***

Scholarship is foremost defined by its content. Among the six shared themes that authors Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff claim are universal to traditional scholarship, three reflect the significance of achieving a sufficient level of information and knowledge development. The three themes—clear goals, adequate preparation, and appropriate methods—represent essential content-based

characteristics of effective scholarly research arguments. Specifically, clear goals are established through the presence of an explicit argumentative claim; adequate preparation is demonstrated through a review of the relevant literature in which the argument is placed in the context of existing research; and appropriate methods reflect the use of methods of research consistent with an ideology of knowledge-building in the field.

I divided the first focus area in Category A of the assessment tool into three sub-sections with statements that address the issue of content based on the three above-mentioned scholarly themes. I designed the statements in this way to explore the extent to which webtexts incorporate traditional scholarly content. The nature of the content is significant because it provides some evidence for determining whether a webtext is more scholarly substance or technological “bells and whistles,” or a rhetorically valid contribution of both.

1. Content

a) Clear goals

- (1) The webtext includes an explicit thesis or argumentative claim within a primary node of the text (e.g., abstract, introduction, overview, or other prominently placed opening node).
- (2) The webtext does not include an explicit thesis or argumentative claim within a primary and prominent node of the text.
- (3) Other

b) Adequate preparation

- (1) The main argumentative claim of the webtext is contextualized within relevant scholarly research in the field.
- (2) The main argumentative claim of the webtext is not contextualized within relevant scholarly research in the field.
- (3) Other

c) Appropriate methods

- (1) The webtext employs a research method that is commonly accepted in the field.
- (2) The webtext employs a research method that is not commonly accepted in the field.
- (3) Other

### ***Arrangement***

The arrangement of a discourse, as Sharon Crowley observed in *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*, often depends on the genre. Each genre carries a particular “formula” for arrangement. Readers familiar with a particular genre can more easily follow an argument based on knowledge of the organizational conventions associated with that genre (171). Print-based research articles typically reflect Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff’s scholarly goals as evidenced by a conventional division of content into segments that include an abstract or introduction of the argument outlining the main claim, a review of relevant literature, a description of the research methods employed, a review of the results or findings of the study, an analysis or discussion of the results, and a conclusion that summarizes the main argument. Additionally, content in scholarly articles can be divided into traditional parts of an argument including an introduction, narration, partition, concession, refutation, and conclusion.

The division of content into these common parts of scholarly research arguments is one convention of the print-based process of arrangement that I identified within *Kairos* webtexts. The other significant aspect of arrangement, inherent in Crowley’s use of the term “formula,” involves the order in which the parts are organized. Traditional research-based arguments follow the pattern of parts in sequence, offering a single, linear read through the text. (Clearly, section headings

such as “introduction” and “conclusion” denote the beginning and ending moments, respectively, of an argument.) However, online texts that incorporate multiple navigational link choices provide a multi-linear read through the text and may divide content by topics or themes that contribute to the overall argument rather than by the conventional divisions discussed above. As I noted in chapters 1 and 2, scholars assert that the most significant distinction between print and web-based texts appears in their formal structure (Bolter *Writing Space*, Landow *Hypertext*, Snyder).

Category B discusses in detail the aspects of arrangement that are based on a multi-linear design made possible by the hypertextual allowances of the medium. The second focus area in Category A of the assessment tool considers the extent to which webtexts follow a conventional arrangement of content based on a division into discrete parts.

## 2. Arrangement

- (1) Content of the webtext is divided into traditional and easily recognizable parts of a scholarly argument (introduction, narration, partition, concession, refutation, and conclusion) or common segments of a scholarly research article (introduction/summary of the problem, literature review, methodology, findings, and conclusion).
- (2) With the exception of an introductory or overview node, content of the webtext is not divided into traditional parts of a scholarly argument or scholarly research article.
- (3) Other

### ***Documentation***

Documentation is a recognized convention that establishes ownership of ideas. Its use demonstrates writers’ desire to fit their ideas into the larger network of ideas within the community of scholars and beyond; using and following standards of documentation also builds the author’s ethos with the audience. Documenting one’s

sources is the well-known academic method for entering a scholarly conversation by reacting to other scholars in the community and by providing readers with the information necessary to find referenced sources. While documentation styles may vary from journal to journal depending on editorial style preference—for example, the MLA or the American Psychological Association (APA)—the goal of documentation is the same: to identify direct quotations and ideas originated by someone other than the author and to provide specific information regarding how readers can find the original source should they want to pursue the information first hand. Readers of print-based texts expect to find a formatted list of referenced sources at the end of the text. This conventional placement may or may not be followed in web-based texts. Some web-based texts, for example, may incorporate links within main content nodes to full online sources.

In print-based texts, the incorporation of direct quotations, paraphrased material, and internal citations is recognized through formatting conventions. In comparison, webtexts may incorporate typographical and design elements in less conventional ways, thereby challenging readers' expectations regarding the presentation and citation of others' words and ideas. For example, cited quotations may be formatted in the screen margins apart from the main text blocks; they may be designed in contrasting fonts, styles, or colors from those of the author's words; they may appear and disappear across the screen, juxtaposed against the main text then fading as a visual acknowledgement of their other-authorness; or they may simply appear as link text to a reference node thereby indicating information cited from another source. Moreover, the formatted citations, whether embedded in the text or

listed in the references page, may be unconventionally designed through similar typographic or design experimentation. For example, an in-text citation may be a link directly to a reference node.

Regardless of whether traditional conventions associated with documentation are followed, authors can still achieve rhetorical goals of differentiating their words and ideas from others' words and ideas in the online environment. The third focus area in Category A of the assessment tool, which is divided into four sub-sections, explores the extent to which webtexts incorporate print-based documentation styles or new strategies for citation and documentation.

### 3. Documentation

#### a) Citation style

- (1) A majority of citations within the webtext (incorporation of others' words and ideas directly and/or indirectly through quotation and/or paraphrase) follow a conventional style (e.g., embedded within sentences or indented depending on length).
- (2) A majority of citations within the webtext do not follow a conventional style.
- (3) Other

#### b) In-text documentation style

- (1) A majority of in-text documentation within the webtext follows a conventional style for presentation (e.g., adherence to a style dictated by a professional association—APA or MLA).
- (2) A majority of in-text documentation within the webtext follows a conventional style for presentation but may include links to reference nodes or external online sources.
- (3) A majority of in-text documentation within the webtext does not follow a conventional style for presentation.
- (4) Other

#### c) Placement of references node

- (1) The references node is located at the “end” of the text through a visually-suggested placement as a final main link choice on a matrix, menu, or other hierarchical overview device.
- (2) The references node is accessible through a link from a final or conclusion node.

- (3) The references node is accessible through embedded navigational links from the main text.
- (4) Single entry references are accessible through embedded navigational links from the main text.
- (5) Other

d) Style: references

- (1) The webtext includes a references node that follows a professional association style (e.g., APA or MLA) consistently.
- (2) The webtext includes a references node that follows a professional association style consistently but that also includes some links to full online sources.
- (3) The webtext includes a references node that does not follow a professional association style consistently.
- (4) Other

***Tone***

A writer's formal (as opposed to informal) or "scholarly" tone is a key indicator of traditional print-based scholarship within the academy. Writers who wish to be viewed as serious scholars use the language or specialized terminology of the discipline and heed conventions of diction, punctuation, and spelling (Gibaldi). One potential byproduct of a medium that encourages fast-paced communication through venues such as "webchats," instant messaging, synchronous conferencing, and other quick-time publishing programs is a blurred distinction between writing and talking resulting in the possibility of informal, more conversational or disjointed discourse (Yates). Scholars identify a quality of "orality" related to the inherent hybrid nature of texts constructed in the online medium for both synchronous and asynchronous online conversations. For example, Lester Faigley understands such texts to use a "hybrid" form of oral speech and traditional written language; such oral characteristics that one might see in these texts include, as Walter Ong identifies, the additive and redundant qualities of give-and-take and circumlocution.



How much of this tendency toward informality in such areas as diction, punctuation, and syntax carries over to webtexts? Arguably, the formal, asynchronous, and reflective process of composing, editing, and publishing a print-based scholarly article precludes or at least lessens the possibility of an informal, inconsistent or non-standard tone within the discourse.<sup>25</sup> However, the opportunity in web-based texts to add a variety of contextually relevant digressions through links off the main text creates an environment where a less formal or non-standard tone may be tolerated, particularly if the informal digressions reside on the borders of the main argument. The online medium challenges the assumption that scholarly texts must reflect a formal tone within every node of the webbed text. Focus area 4 in Category A of the assessment tool explores the extent to which the webtext incorporates a formal, scholarly tone:

#### 4. Tone

- (1) The tone of the webtext is formal (uses field-specific terminology, formal grammar, and other conventions of formal writing).
- (2) The tone of the webtext is formal but may include some nodes or segments of nodes (e.g., incorporates links to digressions from the main argument, navigational instructions, or other non-content-focused info) containing less formal writing.
- (3) Other

### **Assessment Category B: Web-based Conventions**

Web-based online texts are distinguished from print-based online texts through their use of hypertextual and/or hypermedia allowances of the medium.

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<sup>25</sup> “Formal” tone is a somewhat relative factor; Rhetoric and Composition as a field has defined its academic style as clear, accessible, and as close to ordinary language as possible, eschewing the jargon and passive constructions of false objectivity that some academic fields deploy. It is interesting to note, however, that in their discussion of tone for submissions, *Computers and Composition* editors specifically say there may be a more jargon-like tone in their journal.

These new forms cannot be assessed adequately by traditional scholarly standards. In order to expand the notion of what can be considered “scholarly,” online texts need to be assessed for the use of conventions that emerge specifically from the unique allowances of the medium. Scholars have developed several handbooks or “rhetorics” of online writing from which emerging conventions of web-based texts can be drawn (Lynch and Horton, Morkes and Nielsen, Millon, Troffer). Much of this literature regarding strategies for effective online writing focus on the following seven areas: structural design, form/content relationship, navigational design, link strategy, node strategy, visual design, and multi-media incorporation. These rhetorics of online writing demonstrate that, while the ways in which writers present their ideas and meet audiences’ needs are distinct and require distinct approaches, basic rhetorical principles of writing to communicate effectively to an audience remain in place regardless of the medium.

### ***Structural Design***

Multi-linearity is one of the defining characteristics that distinguish a print-based text from a web-based text. An online text that incorporates a multi-linear structure—a structure comprised of multiple nodes with multiple pathways of access to those nodes—allows readers to choose their own paths through the text. As I stated in the “Defining Terms” section of chapter 1, online texts can be assessed along a continuum from strictly linear to fully multi-linear. In brief review, print-based texts, which are coded for online viewing and published on the web in the same form as the printed version, limit readers to one linear path through a single node. Print-like texts, which include “tour guides” or back/next directional icons, are often

comprised of multiple nodes and make use of the link for navigating between the nodes. However, these texts mainly follow a print paradigm in that, by default, they guide the reader through a single, linear path.

The structural design of web-based texts offers a greater degree of multi-linearity from minimally to fully multi-linear. A text that is minimally multi-linear offers readers slightly more choices in creating their own linear readings through the text. A key feature within a minimally-multi-linear web-based text is the presence of a “visually-suggested” arrangement through one or more of the following strategies: numbered nodes; explicitly labeled parts of a research argument (e.g., introduction, methodology), which suggest a natural order; or a hierarchical arrangement of topics in menus or matrices, thereby encouraging readers to follow a conventional top to bottom or left to right reading order. In contrast, a fully multi-linear web-based text offers many possible paths through the text to the extent that the text changes from reader to reader or even reading to reading (see Bolter *Writing Space*, Landow *Hypertext*, Snyder). This type of web-based text incorporates several navigational links that change the direction of the text depending on the readers’ selections.

A notable challenge to the assessment of structural design within an online text is the tendency for these texts to combine navigational options, thereby rendering a text that is both print-like (linear) and web-based (multi-linear). In “Reading the Archives: Ten Years of Nonlinear (*Kairos*) History,” Kalmbach distinguishes these options as “primary” and “secondary” navigational structures. For example, a text may offer a primary multi-linear navigation option through multiple points of entry to several main nodes while also including a secondary guided option within a particular

grouping of sub-nodes for readers who wish to follow a more linear/author-directed path through the content. Focus area 5 in Category B of the assessment tool considers the extent to which webtexts incorporate multiple structural designs as well as multi-linear structures made uniquely possible by the hypertextual allowances of the medium.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Because traditional research-based arguments rely on a sequential form dictating the order in which parts of an argument should be organized, the use of the hypertext form to advance a persuasive line of thought may seem contradictory. However, several scholars including J. David Bolter, David Kolb, Locke Carter, Bruce Ingraham, and Tom Formaro, agree that the hypertext form supports the development of argument structures that do not rely as much on sequential order. Although the order in which the reader will approach a web-based argument is not within the writer's control, writers can employ some hypertextual strategies of argumentation that may visually guide the reader through the main parts of the argument, including prominent placement of nodes that advance key aspects of the argument and adjacent placement of nodes that would generate a greater rhetorical effect if read together in order (Carter). Through the creation of this form of "visually-suggested order," the structure becomes a substitute for those parts of traditional print texts that cue transition and orientation within the form of the argument (169).

## 5. Structural design

### a) Structural options

- (1) The webtext includes one prominent structural design/navigation option.
- (2) The webtext incorporates multiple structural design/navigation options.
- (3) Other

### b) Type of structural design (select all that apply)

- (1) The structural design of the webtext is linear with few to no navigational choices (print-based).
- (2) The structural design of the webtext is guided (print-like).
- (3) The structural design of the webtext is minimally multi-linear based on a visually suggested sequence (minimally multi-linear/web-based).
- (4) The structural design of the webtext is multi-linear with multiple non-guided navigational choices (fully multi-linear/web-based).
- (5) Other

### ***Form/Content Relationship***

The potential for form and content to contribute equally to the meaning of the text is another unique capability of the online medium. In print-based texts, arguments are presented in conventional forms that have become almost transparent to readers (Bolter *Writing Space*). Readers typically know what to expect when they browse a scholarly argument within a print journal. In “The Impact of Hypertext on Processes of Reading and Writing,” Davida Charney asserts that structural conventions facilitate readers’ cognitive processes for understanding and integrating the information within the text. In these cases, an online text is simply presenting the content, most often through a print-based or print-like structure. Content in a print-based text is presented in a familiar, consistent form; the reader’s focus is more on *what* is being said than on *how* it is being presented.

In a web-based text, however, by virtue of active participation in selecting links and nodes, readers are forced to look at the structure or form of the text rather than through it and to consider how the form is part of the message. A formal or form-based enactment of the content occurs when the organizational structure of the web-based text demonstrates and/or reinforces the content of the text. Some examples of the form enacting the content include a web-based text designed as a Wiki that discusses the use of Wikis in writing classrooms (see, for example, Garza and Hern); a specifically structured web-based text that argues for the importance of orientation in navigational design and uses the same design to guide navigation of the text (see, for example, White); or a web-based and/or new media text that incorporates multi-media elements in order to argue for the power of multi-media to create meaning in a text (see, for example, Anderson). Content can also be enacted through a unique interface metaphor, in other words, a framing device—such as a DVD interface complete with remote control menu—that is distinct from a book or other print paradigmatic form and that contributes to the impact and memory of the argument (see, for example, Rice and Ball). A form-based enactment of content in this manner cannot easily be replicated in print-based texts.

In addition to the potential for formal enactment of content, web-based texts often incorporate a rationale that explains the formal design of the text and how the text enacts the content. This rationale is usually included in a textual overview or introduction to the text (see the following section regarding navigation design). The formal design of a print-based text is determined by well-known generic conventions to a point at which the form, again, becomes transparent—something to look

“through.” The form enhances meaning by meeting familiar expectations. The design of a web-based text, on the other hand, has a greater potential to be non-conventional, unexpected, and unique. An explanation of the formal structure of the text helps to support the meaning behind the structure and the way in which it enhances the content. It is important to note that web-based texts are still relatively new; as these structures become more common and more familiar, an explicitly stated rationale for the design, which has emerged as a convention of web-based writing, may eventually become unnecessary. Focus area 6 in Category B of the assessment tool considers the extent to which the webtext develops a significant form/content relationship as well as the presence within the webtext of an explicit rationale for the text’s formal design.

6. Form/content relationship

a) Form/content fit

- (1) The form of the webtext enacts the content.
- (2) The form of the webtext presents the content.
- (3) Other

b) Rationale for the formal design

- (1) The webtext includes an explicit statement regarding the formal design of the text.
- (2) The webtext does not include an explicit statement regarding the formal design of the text.
- (3) Other

***Navigation Design***

In traditional print texts, readers expect to follow a linear arrangement of content with transitional elements that enable seamless movement through the text from beginning to end. In web-based texts, readers enter a new reading/writing space—one that challenges traditional reading expectations through a multi-linear design that presents content in often unfamiliar and unconventional ways. One of the

most commonly cited goals of web-based writing is to create a navigational design that is easy, efficient, and appropriate for readers (Carter). Several conventions associated with navigation design are identified within the literature on effective web-based writing (see, for example, Lynch and Horton, Morkes and Nielsen, Millon, Troffer) and can be used to accommodate readers new to this environment.

The design of a navigation system depends upon the goals of the text and the needs of the readers (Pullman). A text designed to be more exploratory will function best through a navigation system that allows more freedom for the reader at multiple points along multiple paths. Comparatively, a text that has a persuasive agenda will entail a purposeful and well-indicated structure of links and paths to entice readers through specific nodes and possibly in a specific order. No matter the goal of the text, navigation design directly affects reader orientation. Authors of hypertextual pieces, such as webtexts, are challenged to find ways to orient readers in order to help them read efficiently and find their way around the text (Landow “The Rhetoric of Hypermedia” 43). Readers can become “lost in hyperspace”—a disorienting experience in which readers cannot determine where they are in relation to the information contained in the text, or how to return to a previously viewed node or find a node they think exists (Conklin 38). A significant method for enhancing reader orientation includes the incorporation of an overview or introductory node, textual or graphic webviews, and explicit navigation directions—instructions for moving through the text.

An effectively designed overview (often labeled “overview,” “starting point,” or “introduction”) provides a context and exigence for the main argument, much as in



a print-based introduction. However, distinct from a print-based introduction, a web-based overview also tends to provide form-based information, such as a textual or visual representation of the structure of the text as well as directions for navigating the text. Visual representations—or “webviews”—of the structure within the hypertext, such as concept or site maps and directories (for example, a menu bar) are immediately accessible to readers and help readers understand their current location within the structure of information. Moreover, a consistent visual design (e.g., consistent placement of navigation links within each node or a consistent use of color to indicate, for example, main topic nodes) provides readers with cues for navigating the text (see the sub-section on visual design for further information regarding this strategy). Hypertext authors may flaunt conventions associated with clear navigation for a specific rhetorical effect, such as purposely creating an exploratory or disorienting reading experience enacted by the form, several examples of which exist in hypertext fiction. However, scholars seem to promote facilitating navigation and preventing disorientation as a rule of thumb (Carter 44).

A majority of rhetorics of online writing emphasize several aspects of navigation design—in addition to those discussed directly in this section—that contribute to the construction of an effective web-based presentation, including strategies for constructing links, nodes, and overall visual design. While all are inter-related (a clear link strategy, for example, contributes to a solid navigation design as the discussion below will show), each can be explored for its specific role in helping

to construct a “reader-friendly” text.<sup>27</sup> Focus area 7 in Category B of the assessment tool explores the extent to which webtexts incorporate an effective navigation design:

7. Navigation design

a) Overview

- (1) The webtext includes an overview or starting node that contextualizes the main argument.
- (2) The webtext does not include an overview or starting node.
- (3) Other

b) Textual or graphical webviews

- (1) The webtext includes textual or graphical webviews that provide direct link access to main nodes as well as show a fair extent of the web.
- (2) The webtext does not include textual or graphical webviews.
- (3) Other

c) Navigation directions

- (1) The webtext includes directions for navigating the text.
- (2) The webtext does not include directions for navigating the text.
- (3) Other

***Link Strategy***

Links make possible the unique “contextualization”—the inclusion of relevant or related information that provides additional context for the argument—afforded by the online medium. Linking to external primary source material on the Web as well as internal contextualizing nodes can potentially enrich a text’s reading by offering additional layers of information for readers at varying levels of knowledge and interest in the subject. Regardless of where the links lead, readers are much more likely to view contextualizing material when it is easily and readily accessible by simply activating a link. The link is the main vehicle for movement within a web-

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<sup>27</sup> While developments in web-authoring tools like Front Page, for example, provide some built-in design help for authors, these tools still require some knowledge of navigation design, particularly as it accommodates the specific content of the web-based text. In other words, authors should have some sense of what a reader-friendly text should look like and how the rhetorical situation may affect the design choices in order to use the formatting techniques of a web-authoring tool.

based text. Clear navigation design is dependent upon the construction of an effective link strategy so that readers have informed options for moving through the text.

Landow determines that “the very existence of links conditions the reader to expect purposeful, important relationships between linked material” (“The Rhetoric of Hypermedia” 42). Scholars tend to credit Landow’s notion of a “rhetoric of arrivals and departures” as the cornerstone for designing an effective link strategy (see Bolter “Hypertext and the Rhetorical Canons” 107, Nielsen “The Alertbox,” Snyder, Carter). In an effective rhetoric of departure, the author sets clear expectations in the link text and surrounding context regarding what readers can expect to find when they click on the link. In an effective rhetoric of arrival, the writer satisfies those expectations with relevant content.

So important is the concept of linking within online texts that, for its early years, *Kairos* developed a special position—“links editor”—to oversee the incorporation and function of links within webtexts, as well as a set of guidelines—a “Links Policy”—for assessing link strategies within web-based texts. Nick Carbone supports the guiding principle of the policy, which is aligned with *Kairos*’s practice of granting freedom to authors: “The policy creates a consistent sensibility, a rhetoric—or rationale, if you prefer—of linking that can be followed from piece to piece, issue to issue, while at the same time allowing for both authors’ needs and an ever changing technology.” Some of the guidelines include: “All links should contribute to the possible meanings and readings of the texts; linking for the sake of linking is discouraged”; “Authors should attempt to make clear where links are going so that readers may make informed navigational decisions”; and “Links to external

nodes should point, to the best of the author's knowledge, to stable sites and resources.”

The issue of stability in reference to external linked material highlights a unique problem encountered in the online environment. Particularly as texts age, the links to external source material may not remain active. In his study titled, “Hyperlink Obsolescence in Scholarly Online Journals,” James Ho provides several examples of the types of broken links readers may encounter: the link may lead nowhere (e.g., activating the link leads to a “404” or “object not found” error message); the link may lead to a subscriber log-in page, thereby limiting access to the material intended for view; or the link may lead to a homepage of a magazine or publisher rather than to a specific article. All of these possibilities are frustrating to readers who have begun to rely on a free and accessible connection to external web sources, and they may lessen the added value of this type of contextualization made possible by the webbed environment. In response to a *Kairos* “Frequently Asked Question” regarding the challenge of maintaining link stability, Greg Siering admits that dead links, particularly in archived texts, are a problem: “There is just no practical way to ensure all those links work forever.” However, Siering encourages authors to include an “External Links” page which works as an annotated bibliography of links: “These pages list each outbound link within a hypertext and provide a brief description of the target site and the reason for the link.”<sup>28</sup> While this strategy provides some useful information for the reader, Siering implicitly concedes

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<sup>28</sup> For example, in Thompson's “Speaking of the MOOn,” the first entry on her “list of external links” node is as follows: Mary Daly's Homepage: [http://www145.ai.net/mary\\_daly/index.html](http://www145.ai.net/mary_daly/index.html). Offers information on her life (personal statements and abbreviated Curriculum Vita), her books (titles, reviews, and [places to order](#)), and [her speaking engagements](#). Maintained by Anne-Marie at the [Women's Bookshelf](#).

that it cannot replicate the experience of encountering the primary source provided through the link contextualization.

The language of the links policy emphasizes the importance of constructing links rhetorically. In “Linking Styles and Strategies,” Siering describes the theory underlying *Kairos*’ link policy: “Much of the cognitive structure and the epistemological underpinnings of a webbed document rely on how the hypertext tool of the *link* is used; how an author connects the nodes in a hypertext says much about how he or she expects a reader to accept, engage, or appropriate the text.” He asserts that attention to hypertext style is a crucial aspect of any hypertext writing because the style “influences how a reader can interact with a text.” The reader’s power to make meaning is made possible through the availability of link options.

Unfortunately, if writers fail to provide an effective rhetoric of departures and arrivals as part of their link strategy, the reader, Siering argues, “is forced to make rather uninformed decisions when navigating a hypertext” and therefore risks becoming disoriented and unempowered. As a means of enacting the links policy, Siering published a rubric for assessing the style in which the author connects nodes within a hypertext. The rubric includes questions such as “If links are buried in the text, does the author typically link from individual words or entire phrases?” and “Can readers tell where the next node is going conceptually?”<sup>29</sup>

As evidenced by some of the shared language in this rubric, Siering supports many of the ideas that hypertext critics espouse for the creation of an effective link strategy; therefore, it can be argued on the basis of *Kairos* editorial policy that standards for web-based scholarship include attention to these online conventions.

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<sup>29</sup> A complete list is located within the “Submissions” link from the current *Kairos* home page.

Focus area 8 in Category B of the assessment tool considers the extent to which a webtext incorporates links and follows an effective link strategy according to the standards outlined above:

8. Link strategy

a) Type of link contextualization *(select all that apply)*

- (1) The webtext includes one or more links to external content (including links to online references from the references node). [ECL – external context links]
- (2) The webtext includes one or more links from content nodes to the references node. [IRL – internal references links]
- (3) The webtext includes one or more navigational links from an overview or main menu to individual nodes. [IONL – internal overview navigation links]
- (4) The webtext includes one or more embedded navigational links between nodes. [IENL – internal embedded navigation links]
- (5) Other

b) Rhetoric of arrivals and departures

- (1) A majority of link text follows a rhetoric of arrivals and departures.
- (2) The webtext includes some blind links that may affect reader navigation.
- (3) Other

c) Link stability

- (1) The webtext does not appear to have any broken or dead links.
- (2) The webtext includes some broken or dead links.
- (3) Other

d) Link reference

- (1) The webtext includes an external links page.
- (2) The webtext does not include an external links page.
- (3) Other

***Node Strategy***

From several web usability studies conducted in the late 1990s, Jakob Nielsen and John Morke conclude that substantial differences exist between reading from the screen and reading from a printed page; hypertext authors attuned to these differences can incorporate screen-reading strategies. For example, in their online text, Nielson

and Morke find that screen reading is slower than page reading; readers prefer to scan rather than read word for word from the screen, and they prefer viewing short segments of text rather than scrolling through pages of text. A web-writing convention that has emerged from these reading analyses involves the process of “chunking” or separating content into small sections or nodes, which provides a more reader-friendly experience within this medium, according to Nielsen and Morke (see also Troffer; Lynch and Horton). These hypertext scholars generally agree that nodes should be “bite-size chunks” of information focused on one main topic and neatly contextualized. Troffer observes that “chunking” text breaks up a long strand, allows for more white space, and therefore contributes to an easier screen reading experience.

The strategy of “chunking” content into short segments of self-contained information or arguments contrasts starkly with the typical writing strategies of scholarly research arguments in English Studies, which often are comprised of dense paragraphs connected by transitional topic sentences to create coherence throughout the text.<sup>30</sup> One way authors maintain a sense of coherence within a web-based text is to contextualize the main arguments within each node. Snyder asserts that separate units of text need to be understandable when read alone, need to make sense when read out of order, and need to have some sense of belonging to the greater context and framework of the piece itself (11). Carter agrees that “the chunk is its own kind of writing—it must be self-contained, and it must also be capable of merging stylistically with other nodes that may appear before or after in a given reading” (46).

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<sup>30</sup> “Chunked” text is often used in science fields both in written research reports as well as Power Point presentations of text. The use of chunked text is unique, however, when presented in more formal arguments within Rhetoric and Composition Studies.

In other words, writers can offer brief contextualizing statements that connect the main ideas within each node to the main argument of the text. Focus area 9 in Category B of the assessment tool explores the extent to which webtexts follow an effective node strategy according to the standards outlined above.

9. Node strategy

a) Chunked content

- (1) The text within the webtext is divided into discrete chunks of information within individual nodes.
- (2) The text within the webtext is divided into larger sections of information in which readers are required to scroll through a majority of the nodes.
- (3) Other

b) Self-contained content

- (1) Content within a majority of the nodes is self-contained and contextualized; nodes can be read individually and in almost any order, however some sub-nodes—particularly embedded links that form guided digression chains—may rely on information from an immediately preceding node.
- (2) Content within a majority of the nodes relies on necessary information and transitions from previous nodes.
- (3) Other

***Visual Design***

In “Hypertext Theory and WebDev in the Composition Classroom,” Michael J. Cripps considers the contribution of visual design to the meaning of a web-based text. He writes: “With design decisions for print text largely standardized, it has been easy to miss the potential importance of the visual in the meaning we take from a text.” As with navigation design, decisions regarding the visual design of a web-based text—including the manipulation of elements such as typography and color—depend on the goals of the text and the perceived needs of the reader. In other words, an effective visual design can support and enhance the meaning of the text; visual elements can be used rhetorically to gain the adherence of readers. Karen Chauss



argues in “Reader as User: Applying Interface Design Techniques to the Web,” (*Kairos*’s first Best Webtext award recipient), that the unique interface abilities afforded by the online medium require responsible use: “When writing for electronic media, writers can incorporate an array of graphic elements with greater ease than for print media. Lack of experience, coupled with ease of inclusion, can make for some wildly designed sites which distract rather than support the user.” Furthermore, as Pullman acknowledges, the new responsibilities for web authors necessitate judgment that may not be adequately cultivated: “Twenty years ago page layout and text design were the purview of graphic artists and printers; specialists with specialized knowledge.” Visual design, or “visual rhetoric,” offers a broad range of information regarding the effective manipulation of typography, color, and layout.

One of the significant aspects of typography that is discussed in several rhetorics of online writing is the use of various elements to display text in visually screen-friendly ways. For example, Nielson and Troffer each suggest that Web authors incorporate bulleted points, lists, highlighted or specially treated subheadings/headings, and block text with additional spacing to draw attention to important information. Typical print-based scholarly prose is textually dense and less likely to incorporate this type of visually designed presentation of text.

Additionally, given that a majority of print journals’ typographic styles include black font on a white background, color becomes an important factor in identifying a scholarly “look” and begs the question: Can a text designed with red font on a yellow background, for example, appear scholarly? Indeed, is it sufficiently reader-friendly? Chausse, for example, discusses the rhetorical use of color: “When

used effectively, color can draw the user's attention to important information, show relationships between ideas or objects, and enhance the comprehension, retention, and appeal of the information provided.” One noteworthy convention that assists readers in retention and navigation involves the use of a consistent color to indicate hyperlinks as well as a different color to indicate when a link has been visited or activated. This “feedback” presented through a simple and consistent change in color helps readers identify where they have been and what avenues are still open within the web-based text. The visual design of color in this sense is crucial to effective navigation. Focus area 10 in Category B of the assessment tool evaluates the extent to which the webtext incorporates an effective visual design according to the standards outlines above.

10. Visual design

a) Typographic style

- (1) The webtext incorporates typographic screen-reading strategies through a majority of nodes (e.g., bulleted points, pull-outs, bold/highlighted text, or other graphic presentations of text).
- (2) The webtext does not incorporate typographic screen-reading strategies; it mainly follows traditional typographic conventions.
- (3) Other

b) Background and font color

- (1) The webtext is designed with a dark font (e.g., black text) on a light background (e.g., white background).
- (2) The webtext is designed with non-conventional font and background colors that may or may not be consistent throughout each node.
- (3) Other

c) Link feedback

- (1) The link color shows feedback by changing consistently with link activation.
- (2) The link color does not show feedback.
- (3) Other

### ***Multi-media Incorporation***

The ability to incorporate multiple media within a text is, without doubt, the most significant allowance of the online medium that cannot be replicated in print. The inclusion of audio streams, for example, either in presenting content or providing background sound can arguably add dimension to an otherwise single-sensory text. Similarly, the incorporation of animation, advanced graphics, or video streams can affect the reception of an argument based on a potentially charged pathetic appeal.

Hypertext critics commonly acknowledge that, because of the use of the hypertextual and/or hypermedia allowances of the medium, web-based texts demand new writing and reading strategies (Bolter *Writing Space*, Lanham, Carter, Landow *Hypertext*, Joyce Walker “Hyper.Activity”). These new strategies point to non-textual ways of making meaning. For example, the ability for form to enact content within a web-based text suggests that formal design shares a semiotic role. Additionally, the advent of new media texts—online texts in which the written word is not the primary rhetorical means—changes the ways in which readers and writers understand and construct these texts (Ball “A New Media Reading Strategy”). These new forms require readers to understand how non-textual elements combine with text to make meaning. The primary meaning-making methods in web-based texts fall into four categories: (1) purely textual, in which the meaning is derived solely from the text; (2) textual supplemented with visual elements that may enhance the meaning of the text; (3) textual combined with visual and other non-textual elements—video, audio, animation—that enhance the meaning of the webtext; and (4) textual combined with non-textual elements that comprise, or present, the meaning of the webtext. Focus area 11 in Category B of the assessment tool considers first the extent to which

the webtext incorporates multi-media elements and second the primary ways of making meaning within the webtext.

#### 11. Multi-media incorporation

##### a) Webtext composition

- (1) The webtext is composed mainly of text.
- (2) The webtext is composed of text and graphical elements (images, tables, graphs, icons, etc.).
- (3) The webtext is composed of text and/or graphical elements with multi-media elements such as video, audio, and animation.
- (4) Other

##### b) Semiotic nature

- (1) The primary way through which the webtext makes meaning is textual with or without some graphics that enhance the meaning.
- (2) The primary way through which the webtext makes meaning is textual with multi-media (audio, video, animation) that enhance the meaning.
- (3) The primary way through which the webtext makes meaning is a nearly equal combination of text and multi-media (audio, video, animation).
- (4) Other

### **Applying the Assessment Tool**

I used the statement sets within the assessment tool to conduct a close reading and analysis of a select subset of *Kairos* webtexts. I identified a natural subset of webtexts from the *Kairos* archives through an annual journal award entitled, the “*Kairos* Best Webtext Award.” I selected this subset based on the assumption that webtexts chosen as the “best” would reveal the highest standards for the kind of scholarship that *Kairos* claims to publish. Additionally, because this award has been presented annually since the inception of the journal, it provides a subset of high quality texts that can be analyzed for trends over time, thereby reflecting the technological evolution of the medium. The *Kairos* Best Webtext Award recognizes

the outstanding webtexts of each year of publication and is determined by nominations for any “publicly accessible” webtext (see criteria below). Select *Kairos* staff and board members review the nominated webtexts and choose one winner and one or two finalists each year. The nominated webtexts must meet the following award criteria described on the *Kairos* Awards page:

- All webtexts must be publicly accessible via the World Wide Web. Hypertext and CD-ROM are not accepted.
- Webtexts should reflect the field of computers and composition and may include scholarly examinations of key issues, as published in electronic journals; syllabi and course materials; conference websites and reviews; electronic forums for interaction; resource guides; and more.
- Webtexts should reflect outstanding work in both design and content, as each will be a key aspect of the evaluation process.
- All webtexts considered for award must have been authored and published on the Web during the time period specified in the call for nominations.

Developed in conjunction with the journal’s debut, the first *Kairos* Best Webtext Award was presented at the 1997 Computers and Writing Conference to recognize webtexts created and published online in 1996-1997. At the date of this analysis, the Awards page listed twenty-five webtexts—nine winners (one for each year of the award up through 2006) and sixteen finalists; usually two finalists were chosen per year with the exception of the 2000-01 and 2005-06 award periods. Of these twenty-five texts, sixteen were published in *Kairos* and nine were published elsewhere: two each were published in *Pre/Text*, *Enculturation*, and *Computers & Composition Online*, and three were self-published projects. Because this study focuses on texts published in *Kairos*, I automatically eliminated these nine texts from the sample. Additionally, I also excluded three of the *Kairos* webtexts that would require a different and more complicated assessment approach from the sample.

These three specific webtexts function more as edited book-like compilations rather than stand-alone pieces, and each necessitates a separate analysis from the more typical scholarly-article webtexts that are published in the journal. They include, from earliest to most recently published, “Hypertext Reflections: Exploring the Rhetoric, Poetic, and Pragmatics of Hypertext” by Mike Palmquist, et.al., published in 2.2, Spring 1997; “Computers and Writing 2000,” by John Barber, et.al., published in 5.2, Fall 2000; and “Violence of Text: An Online Academic Publishing Exercise,” by Adrian Miles, et.al., published in 8.1, Spring 2003. I offer a further discussion of the challenges associated with assessing collaborative compilation projects in this medium in chapter 5. The thirteen remaining *Kairos*-published “Best” webtexts became the final data set for analysis. The sampling included at least one webtext from each year that *Kairos* has been published with the exception of 1998-2001 when winners and finalists were published in journals other than *Kairos*. Table 3.2 provides a list of the thirteen “Best Webtexts” that comprised the data set for the ten-year period of study.

**Table 3.2: 13 “Best Webtexts” Selected for Analysis**

<b>Award Date</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Publication</b>
1997 Winner	Karen McGrane Chaus	“Reader as User: Applying Interface Design Techniques to the Web”	<i>Kairos</i> 1.2 Summer 1996 Features
1997 Finalist	Keith Dorwick	“Rethinking the Academy: Problems and Possibilities of Teaching, Scholarship, Authority, and Power in Electronic Environments”	<i>Kairos</i> 1.3 Fall 1996 Features
1997 Finalist	Johndan Johnson-Eilola	“Stories and Maps: Postmodernism and Professional Communication”	<i>Kairos</i> 1.1 Spring 1996 Features
1998 Finalist	Doug Brent	“Rhetorics of the Web: Implications for Teachers of Literacy”	<i>Kairos</i> 2.1 Spring 1997 Features
1998 Finalist	Sandye Thompson	“Speaking of the MOON: Textual Realities and the Body Electric.”	<i>Kairos</i> 2.2 Fall 1997 CoverWeb
2000-2001 Winner	Jeff White	“Hypersuasion and the New Ethos: Toward a Theory of Ethical Linking”	<i>Kairos</i> 5.1 Spring 2000 Features
2001-2002 Winner	Joyce Walker	“Textural Textuality”	<i>Kairos</i> 7.1 Spring 2002 Features
2001-2002 Finalist	Michael Salvo	“Deafened to Their Demands”	<i>Kairos</i> 7.1 Spring 2002 CoverWeb
2002-2003 Winner	Anne Wysocki	“A Bookling Monument”	<i>Kairos</i> 7.3 Fall 2002 Conference CoverWeb
2003-2004 Finalist	Daniel Anderson	“Prosumer Approaches to New Media Composition: Consumption and Production in Continuum”	<i>Kairos</i> 8.1 Spring 2003 CoverWeb
2004-2005 Finalist	Meredith W. Zoetewey	“Disrupting the Computer Lab(oratory): Names, Metaphors, and the Wireless Writing Classroom”	<i>Kairos</i> 9.1 Fall 2004 CoverWeb
2005-2006 Winner	Madeleine Sorapure	“Between Modes: Assessing Students’ New Media Compositions”	<i>Kairos</i> 10.2 Spring 2006 Conference CoverWeb
2005-2006 Finalist	Writing in Digital Environments (WIDE) Research Center Collective	“Why Teach Digital Writing?”	<i>Kairos</i> 10.1 Fall 2005 CoverWeb

My process of applying the assessment tool to this select subset of *Kairos* webtexts was straightforward. I analyzed all thirteen webtexts by responding to each

of the statements that comprise the assessment tool. For example, the first statement in the assessment tool (Category A, focus area 1—“Clear goals”) addresses whether the webtext includes an explicit thesis or argumentative claim in a primary node of the webtext. In responding to this statement, I assessed the opening primary nodes (nodes that appear as main content segments linked directly from an overview or webview) to determine whether the author explicitly states the thesis of the argument. (In traditional print-based texts readers often expect to encounter the thesis within the first few paragraphs of the text.) If the webtext appeared to incorporate a thesis in this conventional way—within an opening, prominent node of the text—then I assess the webtext as following a print-based convention associated with scholarly content (the first checkbox option on the assessment tool). If I found a divergence within the webtext from a particular print-based convention, I explored whether a traditional scholarly goal was achieved in a non-traditional way and whether any rhetorical value was added through the divergence. As a means of considering more comprehensive implications of these findings, I calculated the number of positive responses to each statement and presented these numbers in tables 4.1-4.12 in chapter 4.

### **Summary**

In order to understand more fully how web-based online journal publications can be recognized for their scholarly value, it is crucial to explore the nature of successful (published) online scholarship. I developed the assessment tool and conducted this rhetorical analysis in order to identify and articulate the qualities and characteristics of web-based online journal publications that *Kairos* journal editors determined as having met a certain publishing standard for online scholarship. When



applied to a subset of “Best Webtexts” published in *Kairos*, my assessment framework begins to establish an explicit description of the generic characteristics that constitute scholarly online journal publications. The analysis shows the extent to which these webtexts followed certain field-recognized conventions of scholarship as well as in what ways they diverged from traditional, recognizable conventions and followed emerging conventions associated with web-based writing. I expected to find similarities in the content and differences in form, given that much of the literature on hypertext studies emphasizes the form-based changes that occur through the incorporation of the unique allowances of the medium; as the findings show, my initial impression was relatively correct. I discuss the findings from my analysis with this preliminary assessment tool in detail in chapter 4.

I believe the assessment tool I developed for the study provides at least a partial lens through which function and value of scholarly conventions can be analyzed. The framework contributes to the ongoing conversation among academics, particularly within the Computers and Writing subfield, for understanding and evaluating the scholarly nature of web-based texts written and presented in and for the online medium. The derived heuristic from this exploratory study should be useful to future Computers and Writing scholars in generating the more limited and precise questions needed for more formal and objective research.

## **Chapter 4:** **An Analysis of Findings from the Application of the Assessment Tool**

### **Overview**

In this chapter I present the findings from an analysis of a select group of web-based journal publications within *Kairos*, a scholarly online journal in the subfield of Computers and Writing. By means of the assessment tool discussed in chapter 3, I have analyzed a representative group of *Kairos* webtexts, exploring the extent to which common characteristics within these texts fail to meet, meet, and/or exceed traditional scholarly conventions. The findings from this analysis help to identify explicit criteria for determining the scholarly value of web-based online journal publications within the Computers and Writing subfield.

I divide this chapter into three main segments based on the research questions guiding the analysis. In the first segment, I address the extent to which *Kairos* webtexts follow traditional scholarly conventions. In the second segment, I address the extent to which *Kairos* webtexts diverge from print-based conventions through the use of the unique allowances of the medium. In the final segment, I address the extent to which *Kairos* webtexts follow emerging conventions of web-based writing. I divide each segment into subsections based on the focus areas of the assessment tool. The subsections are accompanied by tables that present the number of texts with positive responses to the assessment statements. Additionally, each subsection incorporates a discussion of the function and added value of the convention or medium-based allowance relevant to the focus area. I conclude this chapter by summarizing the findings from the analysis.

### **Analysis of Print-based Scholarly Conventions in Webtexts**

This segment of the analysis follows the arrangement of the first category of the assessment tool and focuses on (1) the extent to which webtexts follow key print-based scholarly conventions, (2) what the findings may suggest about the persistence of these conventions across media, and (3) how adherence to and divergence from certain print-based conventions help to shape the definition of a new genre of online scholarship. This segment addresses four focus areas that English Studies scholars have identified as major influences for key scholarly print-based conventions: content, arrangement, documentation, and tone. My findings suggest that a majority of webtexts adhere to these particular print-based conventions, though often with slight deviations motivated by the form-based changes associated with incorporating the medium's unique allowances.

Findings are illustrated both through tables and example screenshots. The tables represent each of the main statement sets of the assessment tool (see, for example, table 4.1). The number in the third box from the left indicates the number of selected "Best Webtexts" that displayed content corresponding to the statement. The fourth box from the left identifies those corresponding texts from earliest to latest published, represented by the first three letters of the author's last name (e.g., Cha = Karen McGrane Chauss's webtext: "Reader as User"; Dor = Keith Dorwick's "Rethinking the Academy"). A complete list of the thirteen webtexts selected for analysis can be found in chapter 3, table 3.2. For example, in table 4.1, statement (1), the nine webtexts that responded positively to the first statement include: Chauss, Dorwick, Johnson-Eilola, Brent, White, Salvo, Zoetewey, Sorapure, and WIDE.

## Content

A majority of the thirteen *Kairos* “Best Webtexts” appear to follow three key content-based conventions of print scholarship: (1) “clear goals,” or the inclusion of an explicitly stated and prominently placed thesis statement; (2) “adequate preparation,” or the inclusion of a contextualizing review of literature; and (3) “appropriate methods,” or the incorporation of an acceptable method of inquiry and research. Table 4.1 presents the number of the webtexts that adhere to content-based conventions.

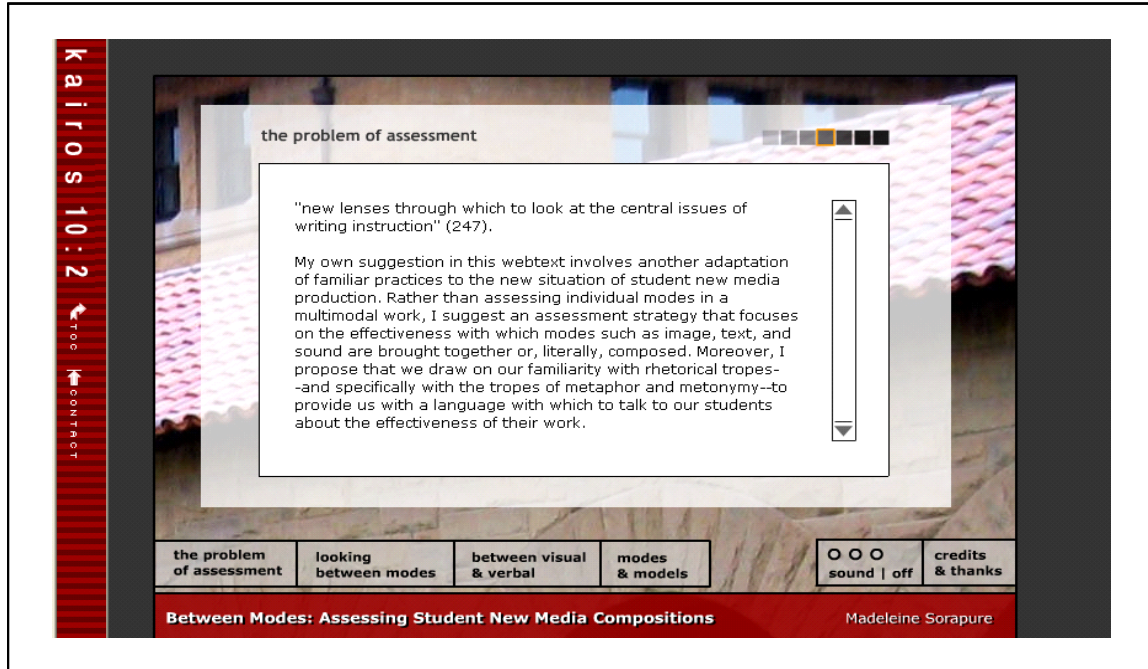
**Table 4.1: Findings from the Analysis: Content**

<b>Content</b>			
<b>a) Clear goals</b>	(1) The webtext includes an explicit thesis or argumentative claim within a primary node of the text (e.g., abstract, introduction, overview, or other prominently placed opening node).	<b>9</b>	Cha Dor Joh Bre Whi Sal Zoe Sor WID
	(2) The webtext does not include an explicit thesis or argumentative claim within a primary or prominent node of the text.	<b>2</b>	Tho Wal
	(3) Other	<b>2</b>	Wys And
<b>b) Adequate preparation</b>	(1) The main argumentative claim of the webtext is contextualized within relevant scholarly research in the field.	<b>13</b>	Cha Dor Joh Bre Tho Whi Wal Sal Wys And Zoe Sor WID
	(2) The main argumentative claim of the webtext is not contextualized within relevant scholarly research in the field.	<b>0</b>	
	(3) Other	<b>0</b>	
<b>c) Appropriate methods</b>	(1) The webtext employs a research method that is commonly accepted in the field.	<b>13</b>	Cha Dor Joh Bre Tho Whi Wal Sal Wys And Zoe Sor WID
	(2) The webtext employs a research method that is not commonly accepted in the field.	<b>0</b>	
	(3) Other	<b>0</b>	

### ***Clear Goals***

The explicit inclusion and prominent placement of the author’s goals for the text helps to satisfy readers’ expectations for learning the author’s argument position early in the text’s reading. One value of such inclusion and placement is that readers who are informed of the argument’s context and path can begin to conceptualize how subsequent supporting points connect to the thesis. In my analysis, nine of the thirteen webtexts incorporate a clear statement of goals within an introductory or prominent node of the webtext. A prominent introductory node is either the opening node of the webtext—the node that appears upon linking to the text—or the first node that can be accessed through the text’s webview—a textual or graphic overview of the contents of the webtext. It is a node that most likely will be visited by readers both because of its prominent placement and because readers are conditioned to begin with the first item in a grouping of options. Examples 4.1 and 4.2 demonstrate the inclusion and prominent placement of clear goals in Madeleine Sorapure’s “Between Modes,” and the WIDE initiative’s “Why Teach Digital Writing.”

### Example 4.1: Screenshot of Sorapure’s First Main Text Node



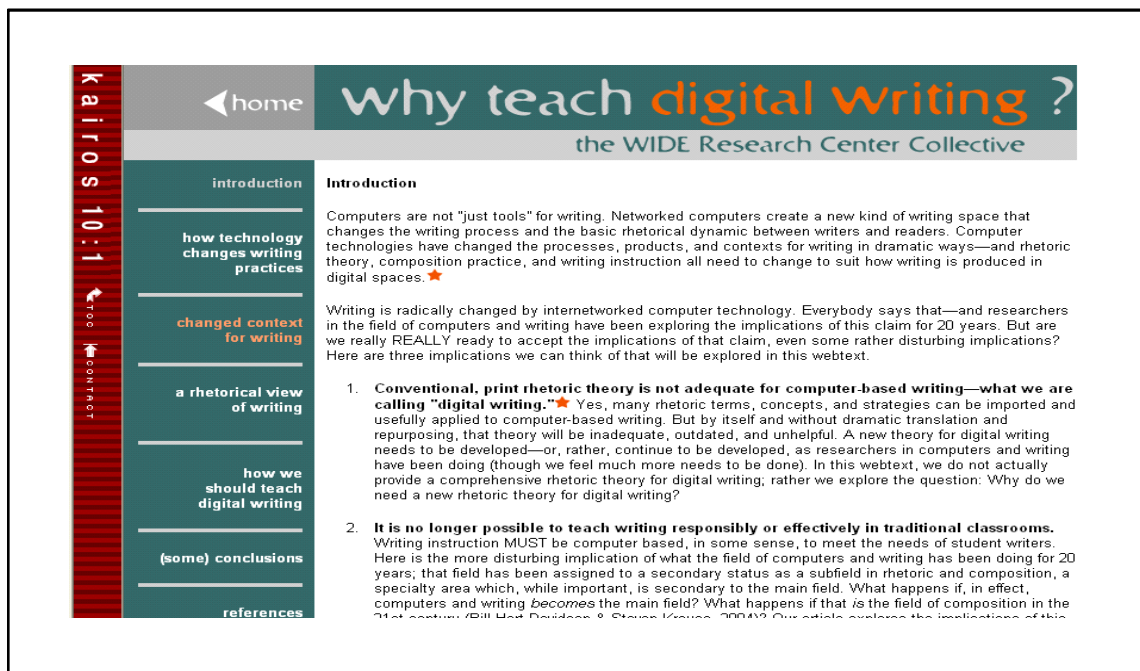
Example 4.1 presents a screenshot of the first main node of Sorapure’s text, “the problem of assessment.” The node is divided into seven linear sub-nodes; the first three subnodes are epigraphic quotations that frame what the author sees as the challenges associated with assessing students’ new media texts. The fourth node, which is the first main text node written by the author and presented in example 4.1, establishes the author’s position and goals for the text:

My own suggestion in this webtext involves another adaptation of familiar practices to the new situation of student new media production. Rather than assessing individual nodes in a multimodal work, I suggest an assessment strategy that focuses on the effectiveness with which modes such as image, text, and sound are brought together or, literally, composed. Moreover, I propose that we draw on our familiarity with rhetorical tropes—and specifically with the tropes of metaphor and metonymy—to provide us with a language with which to talk to our students about the effectiveness of their work.

The author's goals—to adopt a new assessment strategy based on metaphor and metonymy—are clearly stated in this prominent node. Readers can use this information to frame their understanding of how the argument might proceed. This text, like several others in this data set, uses an additional introductory strategy of an epigraph to draw readers into the main argument.

Similarly, the WIDE initiative includes their goals on the first node of the text, as demonstrated in example 4.2.

#### Example 4.2: Screenshot of WIDE Initiative's Introductory Node



The first main node of the text is the introduction; it is explicitly labeled, and it incorporates the authors' goals clearly—to outline the ways in which computer technologies have changed traditional conceptions and practices of writing. The other seven additional webtexts appear to more conventionally incorporate a statement of clear goals. Adherence to this convention is especially significant for texts that offer multi-linear structural designs. Regardless of the order in which

readers choose to follow nodes in these webtexts, they will most likely begin with an understanding of the goals of the text to help frame their reception of the subsequent lines of argument.

Of the remaining four texts in the data set, two of the webtexts do not appear to include prominent, introductory nodes that relay the goals of the text. Sandye Thompson’s webtext “Speaking of the MOOn,” for example, begins with a slideshow sequence of two literary epigraphs that readers eventually come to understand—and perhaps expect, given the familiar function of an epigraph—as foreshadowing the goals of the text. The two quotations—the first by H.D. and the second by Eudora Welty—both underlie the author’s goal in this text to demonstrate the power of word play and the “meaning” power of words in describing and writing one’s self. Examples 4.3 and 4.4 provide screenshots of this opening node sequence.

### Example 4.3: Screenshot of Thompson’s Opening Sequence Node 1





#### Example 4.4: Screenshot of Thompson’s Opening Sequence Node 2



The screenshot in example 4.3 shows the first node readers see when they access Thompson’s webtext from the *Kairos* journal site. This node automatically fades to the node shown in example 4.4. Activating the “Enter my Web” link, seen in this screenshot directly under the quotation box, takes readers to the first main node of the text written by the author. This node functions as a preface to the argument and offers information about the process by which the webtext grew out of a conference presentation and the reasoning why the author chose to mimic a MOO environment—elements of exigence that are often found in an introduction. The only clue that the author provides to the goal of the text is the title of the conference presentation on which this webtext was based: “The Cybernetic Frontier: Pioneering MOOs for the Teaching of Women.” This delayed inclusion and implicit thesis for the text may temporarily disrupt readers’ expectations and affect their immediate comprehension of the author’s intent. And while it is not unheard of for print-based scholarship to

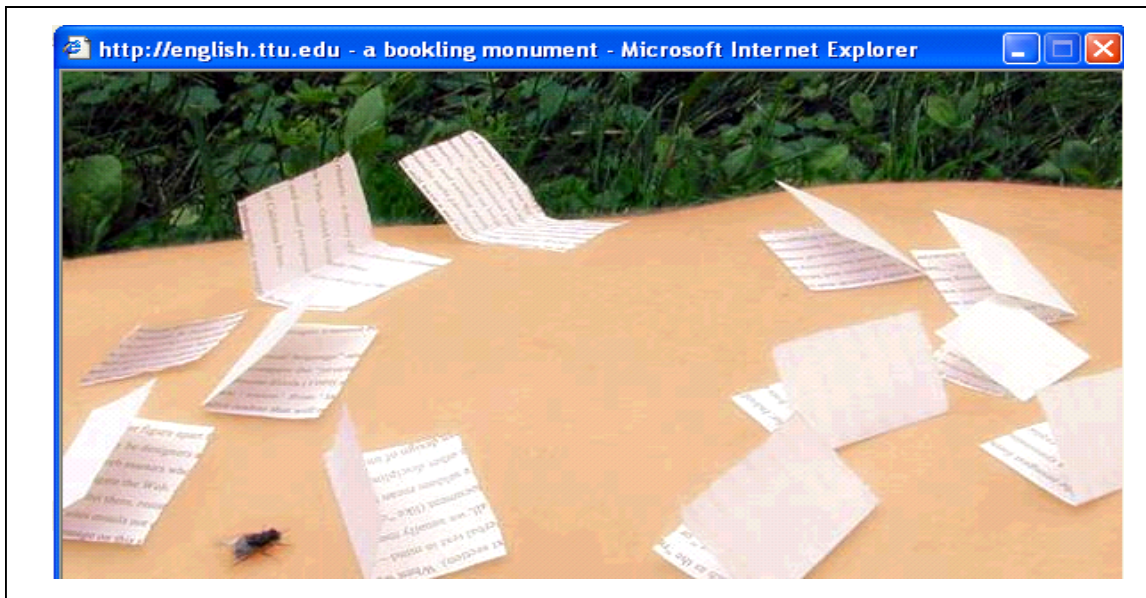
include delayed statements of goals, handbooks of scholarly writing advise writers to provide clear goals at the opening of an argument so that readers can be more receptive to the lines of argument forthcoming in the text (Fahnestock and Secor, Ramage and Bean, Hammond).

Similarly, Joyce Walker's "Textural Textuality" begins with a slideshow of images and text that directly relate to what readers eventually discern as the goal of the text. Again, the main thesis emerges as readers navigate deeper into the webtext. In both cases, it is interesting to note that authors employ a conventional strategy—the epigraph foreshadowing the meaning of the text—in a technologically experimental way—through the use of multi-media (textual slideshow) in order to achieve a similar function of leading readers to an understanding of the goal of the text. An epigraph can lead readers to a better understanding of the argument of the text by underlining the main thesis. However, this conventional framing device does not provide immediate and explicit information regarding the main argument and the author's goal in writing the text.

The remaining two webtexts are unique in that the statement of goals is either challenging to assess or is presented unconventionally based on the multi-modal staging of content. In Anderson's "Prosumer Approaches," for example, the thesis is presented orally within the first minute of the video stream, but never is presented in writing. For readers with strong auditory processing, the thesis may adhere more securely in their minds; for readers who process ideas more effectively when they are presented in written text, more than one viewing and hearing of the video may be needed to catch the thesis, which increases the possibility that it will be missed

altogether. The final text, Wysocki's "A Bookling Monument," is exploratory in nature; the author does not offer conventional regarding where to begin "reading" the text.<sup>31</sup> Example 4.5 offers a screenshot of the webtext's opening node.

#### Example 4.5: Screenshot of Wysocki's Opening Node



The node that establishes the goals of the text is not placed in a visually-suggestive prominent position; if one sees the folded papers as a clock, the introductory node lies at 7 o'clock, directly to the right of the fly. If readers happen to choose this node first, they will encounter the goals as they would in a conventional text. If readers do not select this node first, they eventually may arrive at an understanding of the main goals of the text after piecing together various segments in this exploratory structure (and accessing the key node will most likely confirm this understanding). This finding raises an interesting question: to what extent does the inclusion of a clear,

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<sup>31</sup> Because Wysocki's webtext is a "new media" text—a text that makes meaning in both textual and non-textual ways, the goal may be foreshadowed in the visual image presented on the cover node: folded pieces of paper strategically placed on various parts of the body. The assessment tool developed for this project does not account for these non-textual ways in which webtexts can make meaning.

introductory statement of goals affect a reader's reception and adherence to the argument, particularly in a web-based text that relies on multimedia elements (images, animation) to contribute to the meaning of the text?

My additional observations show that in several webtexts, including Thompson's and Walker's, the thesis statement often is reiterated in main nodes of the text, particularly in the author's inclusion of contextualizing information within the first few sentences of several main nodes (nodes that are links from the webview) and summary statements in the last few sentences of these nodes that connect the node's main point to the larger argument. This form of repetition is a rhetorical strategy in this medium for texts that contain multi-linear structures; repetition gives readers an increased chance of encountering the author's goal, even if the goal is not made explicit in an introductory node of the text.


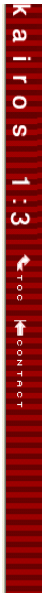
### ***Adequate Preparation***

The goal of scholarship in general is to contribute to an evolving body of knowledge in the field. Scholars demonstrate preparedness to enter the scholarly conversation by building a case on previous research and contextualizing their claim within an ongoing "conversation." By incorporating previous research, scholars can defend the legitimacy of their ideas and demonstrate the importance of their contribution to the growing pool of knowledge. All thirteen webtexts demonstrate adequate preparation by contextualizing main argumentative claims within relevant scholarly research in the field. Each webtext relies on previous research to support claims regarding the originality of the research and the significance of the topic. Given that these texts do follow traditional content-based conventions—through

quotations, reviews of other scholarly texts, and citations—it is helpful to understand where, if at all, they diverge from convention. This analysis shows that while their content is conventional, their placement—that is, their form—is not.

Based on my analysis of the thirteen webtexts, I found that the arguments appear to be contextualized within relevant literature in similar ways to those in print-based texts, namely, through the inclusion of citations from established research. However, the ways in which the citations are presented are distinct due to the unique capability of the online medium for information to be divided into smaller segments or “nodes” and to be made accessible through a multi-linear structure. Walker confirms that citations appearing in the first third of a print-based text typically point to the review of literature (“Hyper.Activity”). However, rather than emerging as a linear narrative, within the first section of a text, as is common practice in traditional print scholarship, a review of literature in a webtext often is scattered over several nodes; accessible through multiple paths; and can be read near the front, middle, or end of a reader’s chosen path through the text. Moreover, the reviews of literature often appear in secondary or sub-nodes—nodes that are hierarchically embedded within other primary nodes and that offer additional context or relevant digressions to the main argument. Examples 4.6 and 4.7 from Keith Dorwick’s “Rethinking the Academy” illustrate this phenomenon.

## Example 4.6: Screenshot of Dorwick's Sub-node 1



### Rethinking The Academy:

#### Native Hypertext

"Native Hypertext" is the descriptor for texts that have been conceived of, and that are distributed by their creators, via electronic means. Their salient characteristic is that they were never intended for use in a print medium. Such texts include a large number of hypertext [links](#) and as a result cannot effectively be "printed out" by readers. That is, they are comprised of texts in which the reader can jump between a number of files - or even servers - and that may, and often do, exist in small chunks called [lexia or nodes](#), such as this one. Native hypertext is not necessarily limited to the World Wide Web though that is one of the leading methods of distributing hypertexts.


Other solutions do exist - for instance, Microsoft Word 6.0 for Windows supports hypertext links between Word documents allowing for the distribution of hypertexts on diskette, as does Adobe Acrobat Reader, which allows writers to create [electronic documents](#) that include the possibility of full formatting and hypertextuality.

One of the leading proponents of native hypertext is [Mick Doherty](#), who argues strongly for the creation and dissemination of native hypertext and who is the editor of a journal named [Kairos](#) which specializes in the publication of hypertext as a [serious scholarly activity](#) in the face of the bias towards print publication in the academy.


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[How to Navigate This Essay Without Getting Lost](#)

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## Example 4.7: Screenshot of Dorwick's Sub-node 2



### Rethinking The Academy:

#### Serious Scholarly Activity

As Mick [Doherty](#) writes in his editor's note to the first volume of [Kairos](#):

This journal is (or, more accurately at this point, aims to be) a resource for discovering and discussing the issues that face teachers of writing in hypertextual environments. . . . Any hypertext which claims to end with a finished product - like "issue 1.1" - is obviously compromising some of the possibilities afforded by interactive electronic media.

But . . . we find demands at various levels. There are demands from the traditional academy and its grizzled tenure-promotion process. What counts? Has it been peer-reviewed? Where was "it" (the final text) "published" (where it can be viewed)? Archiving hypertexts and maintaining "version control" is a bow to the fact that scholars in hypertextual studies still need something to "show" on their vitae.


There are demands from our own peers and the many sociopolitical and personal stances we bring to the pedagogical table. Collaboration does not necessarily demand compromise, but perhaps compromise can, at times, foster collaboration. An interactive non-blind peer review like we are trying to "invent" is our nod to this demand.

Finally, and most exciting, there are demands born of the creative instincts of the many, many people involved in "collaborating" on "publishing" this journal. Authors - though some have rejected that label - of hypertexts have startlingly (and refreshingly) disparate ideas about what should matter to teachers of writing. Our conversation, our dialogue, our collaboration will result, three times a year, in a "product" - a nod to the demands of tradition.

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[How to Navigate This Essay Without Getting Lost](#)

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Example 4.6 is a screenshot of a sub-node—a contextualizing node connected to a main node via a link—that provides a definition of the term “native hypertext” based on the term’s use and reference within current literature. Example 4.7 is a screenshot of a secondary sub-node—a sub-node of a sub-node—that quotes former *Kairos* editor and technorhetorician Mick Doherty and offers contextualizing information regarding the use of the phrase “serious scholarly activity.” Both of these examples demonstrate the hierarchical pattern associated with contextualizing the arguments in relevant literature. The reviews of literature, themselves, become contextualizing material—information that writers offer in links to secondary nodes for readers who choose to pursue it—and are not part of the main content nodes of the text. At first glance, this arrangement seems similar to the hierarchical presentation of information in a typical print-based paragraph: the main argument statement is offered first, the proof or line of reasoning for the statement is offered second, and the detailed support for the proof is offered last. They are different, however, in that readers must actively pursue these sub-nodes by activating links if they are interested in the deeper level of information—and then they must return to the original text to complete their reading.<sup>32</sup> These “reviews” function conventionally in that they provide a framework for understanding the context of the claim within the wider scholarly conversation; however, the form of presentation based on a multi-linear structural design changes the way in which readers arrive at an understanding of the significance of the contribution. It is useful to consider whether the value associated with a multi-linear

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<sup>32</sup> Such a contextualizing arrangement pattern offers nodes that are similar to footnotes in that they can provide either more information or pertinent digressions. Traditional print texts often include these kinds of discursive footnotes. The difference between traditional footnotes and these contextualizing links is that material in the links is often connected, or linked, to relevant content in other nodes, thereby maintaining the associative joining of ideas throughout the text.

design, namely that readers can assume more control over the order in which they receive information, mitigates the loss of a coherent review of literature.<sup>33</sup> On the one hand, accessing contextualizing nodes that function as reviews of literature at various key points in the main argument rather than in the traditional placement at the beginning of an argument may have a more persuasive impact on readers. On the other hand, readers may become disoriented by not immediately recognizing the exigence of the argument or the gap the research fills. Certainly these issues should be explored when considering the effects of form-based changes on the reception of scholarly content.

### ***Appropriate Methods***

Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff acknowledge the importance of employing an “appropriate method” in order to assess scholarly value in any type of academic work: “At the most basic level, appropriate methodology gives a project integrity and engenders confidence in its findings, products, or results. To gain standing among scholars, a project must use methods recognized in the academic community” (28). In this section, the assessment statement addresses whether the methods of inquiry employed in these webtexts are similar to those employed in traditional (print-based) scholarship. Readers of print-based texts rely on conventional frameworks regarding the process or method by which the research questions within the texts are addressed. The more common the method of inquiry used, the greater the potential for readers to understand, replicate, and adhere to the claims of the text based on knowledge of particular frameworks associated with the methods. As table 4.1 shows, the methods

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<sup>33</sup> The effects of a multi-linear design structure are discussed in further detail in the sub-section “Structural design.”



of inquiry used in all thirteen webtexts are common within the subfield of Computers and Writing, and are methods often employed by authors who publish in such journals as *Computers and Composition*. The most popular methods include theoretical, comparative, and interpretive analyses. Ethnography and personal narrative also appear as methods in this sample set of webtexts. My close reading of the analyzed webtexts reveals that the methods often are implied rather than explicitly stated, which is not uncommon in the type of research usually conducted in Rhetoric and Composition. These methods follow logical argument structures and fall into a framework that is familiar to readers. For example, although details regarding the methods are not explicitly stated, in several of the webtexts the introductory or overview nodes often describe the type of study being conducted; from this information, readers are able to assume the approach used to respond to the particular inquiry. Dorwick, for instance, employs a comparative analysis, described in his introductory node:

In “Rethinking the Academy,” I’d like to examine the problems and possibilities inherent in the present situation of the academy as it exists in a web of social, political, technological, and legal forces that are mostly beyond its own control with a special emphasis and attention to scholarship and teaching, and contrast that with the problems and possibilities that are increasingly evident as growing numbers of teachers and students begin to experiment with ways of learning and the creation of knowledge in cyberspace.

Additionally, method is suggested in other obvious ways. For example, Salvo’s “Deafened to Their Demands: An Ethnographic Study of Accommodation,” establishes expectations that readers will, indeed, be viewing an ethnographic study.

The ease with which I found that all thirteen of the texts could be positively correlated with research methods that are commonly accepted in the field suggests,

however, that my initial interpretation of the question was not sufficiently broad. Indeed, upon further consideration, I realize that more important than whether the research method is one common to that of traditional print-based scholarship is whether the selected method appropriately responds to the research questions, thus enabling a methodologically defensible study overall. I can demonstrate this enhanced question, which requires a new analysis of the thirteen webtexts, through a closer analysis of Dorwick's research method. In his webtext, Dorwick asserts that the existence of networked environments forces teachers and scholars to rethink the ways in which they teach and conduct research. Recall in the introductory text (quoted earlier) that Dorwick engages in this "rethinking" by conducting a comparative analysis of advantages and disadvantages in both traditional and non-traditional (technology-focused) environments for teaching and sharing knowledge. The organization of his content, evident from the indexical webview, shows that he first considers the advantages and disadvantages of the traditional environment, and then discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the webbed environment. His treatment appears to be non-biased in that he concedes to the existence of disadvantages in both environments and provides equal support in the form of documentation. His comparison eventually leads him to address the potential of a "cybercademy" in which advantages of both environments can be leveraged. Certainly if Dorwick had fallen into the common trap, noted by Computers and Writing scholars Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe, of a "technocentric" attitude in which "uncritical enthusiasm" toward technology abounds, one might question the validity of his work ("The Rhetoric of Technology" 56). However, he appears to

maintain a level, well-supported and documented comparison. Consequently, readers are more apt to assess his work as credible and therefore be more receptive to his recommendations. This is just one example of the kind of deeper analysis that can—and should—be conducted on these webtexts to verify their legitimacy as scholarship based on incorporation of an appropriate method.

Other questions arise when one considers the importance of research method to scholarship overall. For example, one might assess whether other scholars could replicate the study. For a webtext, it seems equally important to consider whether the text's design—its form—is methodologically appropriate to the research question; such a question of form and content is discussed to some degree in the sub-section, “Form/content fit.” The issue of method is not as simple as it first might seem, yet it is crucial to understanding a web-based text as scholarship.

### **Arrangement**

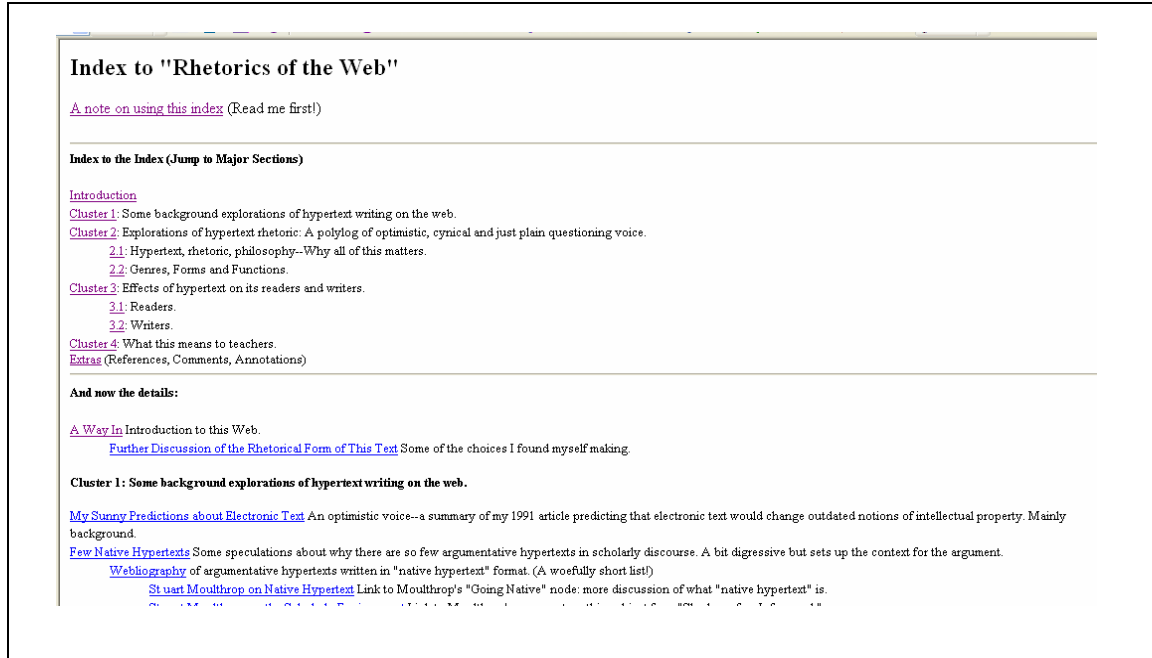
The rhetorical concept of arrangement, as I discussed in chapter 3, is most effectively viewed in this analysis in two ways: the division of content, and the organization of these divisions. This segment of the analysis focuses on how content is divided in a majority of the thirteen webtexts less conventionally than readers would expect to see in traditional print-based texts. However, as table 4.2 shows, I found that slightly more than half of the webtexts—seven of thirteen—do comply with traditional conventions and divide content into recognizable segments of a scholarly argument (introduction, narration, partition, concession, refutation, and conclusion) or research article (introduction/summary of the problem, literature review, methodology, findings, and conclusion).

**Table 4.2: Findings from the Analysis: Arrangement**

Arrangement			
	(1) Content of the webtext is divided into traditional and easily recognizable parts of a scholarly argument (introduction, narration, partition, concession, refutation, and conclusion) or common segments of a scholarly research article (introduction/summary of the problem, literature review, methodology, findings, and conclusion).	7	Dor Bre Sal And Zoe Sor WID
	(2) With the exception of an introductory or overview node, content of the webtext is not divided into traditional parts of a scholarly argument or scholarly research article.	6	Cha Joh Tho Whi Wal Wys
	(3) Other	0	

In these seven webtexts, I found that the division of content is often immediately recognizable through the main node titles presented in a webview (menu, matrix, site map). For example, Doug Brent’s “Rhetorics of the Web” includes four major divisions (or “clusters,” as Brent labels them) of content: Cluster 1—“Some background explorations of hypertext writing on the Web”; Cluster 2—“Explorations of hypertext rhetoric”; Cluster 3—“Effects of hypertext on readers and writers”; and Cluster 4—“What this means to teachers.” These clusters are arranged in numerical order and sandwiched between a conventional introductory node and a node of “extras”—references, comments, and annotations—that would be considered necessary to a conventional text. Example 4.8 offers a screenshot of the main node index.

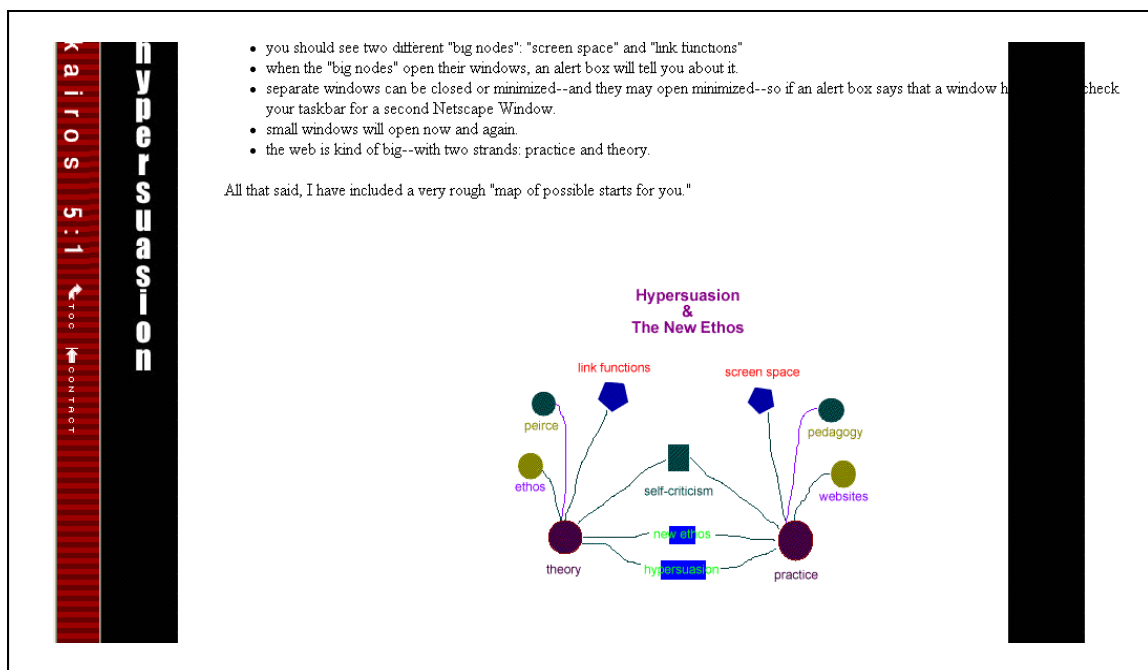
## Example 4.8: Screenshot of Brent's Main Node Index



These section titles provide evidence of a conventional division of content including in the first cluster, exigence and context for hypertext writing; in the second cluster, a review of the literature associated with hypertext rhetoric; in the third cluster, the main argument regarding the effects of hypertext on reading and writing; and in the fourth cluster, the implications of this work. The main links function similarly to the use of main content headings in print-based texts and establish readers' expectations regarding the projected scope of the content. The additional six webtexts also include webviews with main nodes that either explicitly or implicitly offer content in conventional divisions. Nonetheless, it is important to note that, while the content may be divided conventionally, it usually can be accessed unconventionally in that readers can choose to read the segments in any order allowed by the multi-linear structure of the text. Such multi-linearity will be discussed further in the upcoming sub-section labeled "structural design."

The six remaining webtexts do not follow recognizable patterns of content division and instead appear to divide content topographically. In other words, content is divided into multiple hierarchically equivalent nodes with multiple pathways or links among those nodes, thereby encouraging various associations among content nodes rather than a static numerical or linear sequence of content. Jeff White's webtext entitled "Hypersuasion and the New Ethos" demonstrates a topographical division of content. The site map shown in example 4.9 presents the discussion topics within the text.

### Example 4.9: Screenshot of White's Site Map

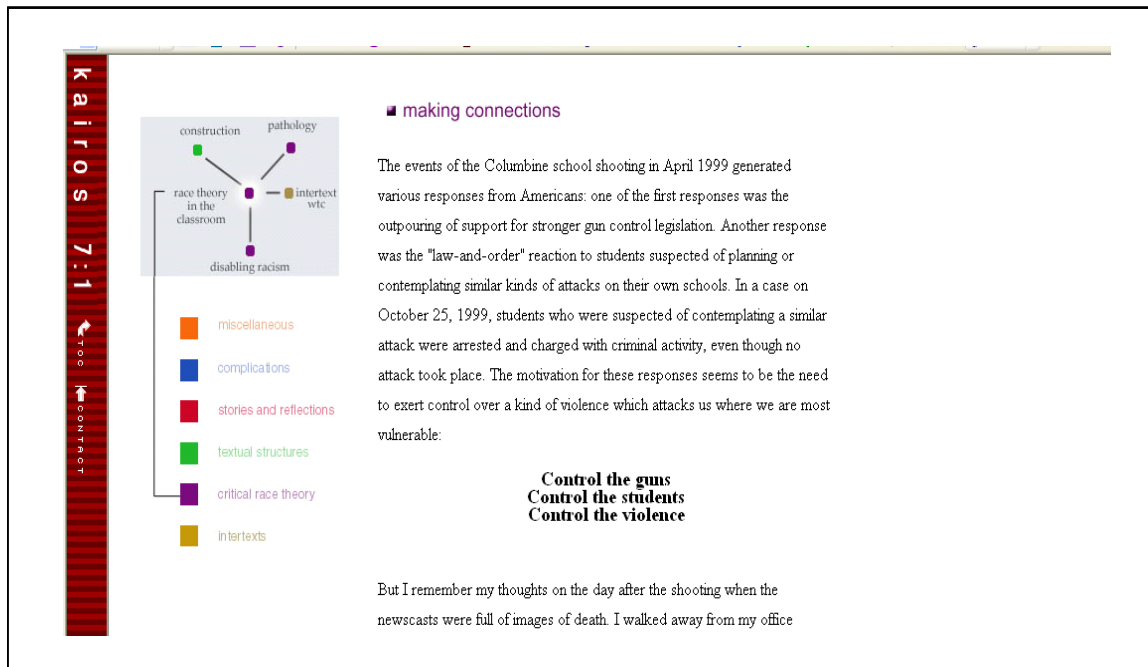


This navigation device—the only webview offered in this exploratory text—shows the connections among topics, but it does not indicate what kinds of conventional information will be provided under each main topic. Consequently, readers cannot rely on a known framework for anticipating the structure of the argument and instead

are left to explore the nodes of interest based on following the associations indicated in the site map.

The webview in Walker’s “Textural Textuality,” shown in example 4.10, offers a similar topographical division of content.

#### Example 4.10: Screenshot of Walker’s Webview



The site map on the left of the screenshot provides a view of the topics discussed in the text. While some of these topics may allude to traditional categories of content division (e.g., readers may assume the topic “critical race theory” relays information regarding the theoretical lens through which the author argues her perspective—a conventional category of content division), they are not divided into immediately recognizable divisions of traditional content. Again, rather than anticipating and following a conventional pattern, readers are challenged to build their own path through the nodes; in this way, readers experience layers of information from which meaning can be derived both in the actual content of each node as well as in the

connections among nodes. This way of experiencing the text requires readers to push beyond normal reading patterns and find meaning in the gaps created by the juxtaposition of certain nodes. In other words, readers can find meaning in what is said as well as what is not said (Charney, Bolter *Writing Space*).

An incidental finding that struck me as interesting was that a majority of the thirteen webtexts—even those that do not follow a traditional division of content—include a prominent introductory node that helps readers discern the context, exigence, and projection of the main argument. The content nodes that function as introductions are sometimes explicitly labeled or they may simply be the first node of the text containing conventional introductory material. In addition to this material, introductory nodes of webtexts usually include navigation instructions and a webview (or a direct link to navigation instructions) as well as a rationale for the form of the text, if one is offered—two common components of web-based texts, as the analysis shows, that are not necessary in print-based texts.

In contrast, several webtexts do not include an explicitly labeled or implicitly functioning conclusion node. Discrete conclusions that provide a summary of the argument and suggestions for future research appear to be, as Brent notes, a print-based construction: “Ultimate messages are for print, which by its physical nature must have a last page and therefore a last thought to print on it.” Instead, I found that the webtexts often provide concluding or summary statements as end-emphasis sentences in several main nodes of the text; in this way, the reader is not required to read every node of the text to arrive at a sense of closure. Arguably, scholars often read the introductions and conclusions of scholarly articles to understand the gist of



the text. Readers of webtexts may come across several summary statements and therefore may be required to synthesize the main points of the argument more so than in a print-based text. The reiteration through layers of summary statements within several nodes of the webtexts, however, is significant for helping readers retain ideas as they build their own coherent path through the text. Again, the lack of a concluding node may confuse or aggravate readers who expect to find a concise summary. Moreover, the sense of closure is significant in that readers often think they must visit every node of the text in order to evaluate fairly the content (Siering). A conclusion traditionally signals that readers have seen every point that the text makes. This online component may challenge readers' expectations.

### **Documentation**

An appeal to authority through the incorporation of direct (quoting) and indirect (paraphrasing) citation and documentation (both in-text and in a final references list) is one of the most commonly used strategies for supporting argumentative claims and a recognizable indicator of scholarly writing. As table 4.3 shows, I found that all thirteen webtexts incorporate other authors' words and ideas, and they all include reference nodes—distinctly formatted listings of references used in the texts.

**Table 4.3: Findings from the Analysis: Documentation**

<b>Documentation</b>			
<b>a) Citation style</b>	(1) A majority of citations within the webtext (incorporation of others' words and ideas directly and/or indirectly through quotation and/or paraphrase) follow a conventional style (e.g., embedded within sentences or indented depending on length).	5	Bre Wal Sal Zoe WID
	(2) A majority of citations within the webtext do not follow a conventional style.	7	Cha Dor Joh Whi Wys And Sor
	(3) Other	1	Tho
<b>b) In-text documentation style</b>	(1) A majority of in-text documentation within the webtext follows a conventional style for presentation (e.g., adherence to a style dictated by a professional association—APA or MLA).	7	Joh Wal Sal Wys Zoe Sor WID
	(2) A majority of in-text documentation within the webtext follows a conventional style for presentation but may include hyperlinks to reference nodes or external online sources.	5	Cha Dor Bre Tho And
	(3) A majority of in-text documentation within the webtext does not follow a conventional style for presentation.	1	Whi
	(4) Other	0	
<b>c) Placement of reference node</b>	(1) The reference node is located at the “end” of the text through a visually-suggestive placement as a final main link choice on a matrix, menu or other hierarchical overview device.	7	Cha Joh Bre Sal And Sor WID
	(2) The reference node is accessible through a link from a final or conclusion node.	2	Tho Zoe
	(3) The reference node is accessible through embedded navigational links from the main text.	5	Cha Dor Bre Whi Wal
	(4) Single entry references are accessible through embedded navigational links from the main text.	0	
	(5) Other	1	Wys
<b>d) Style: references</b>	(1) The webtext includes a references node that follows a professional association style (e.g., APA or MLA) consistently.	3	Joh Whi Sal
	(2) The webtext includes a references node that follows a professional association style consistently but that also includes some links to full online sources.	9	Cha Dor Bre Wal Wys And Zoe Sor WID
	(3) The webtext includes a references node that does not follow a professional association style consistently.	1	Tho
	(4) Other	0	

### *Citation Style*

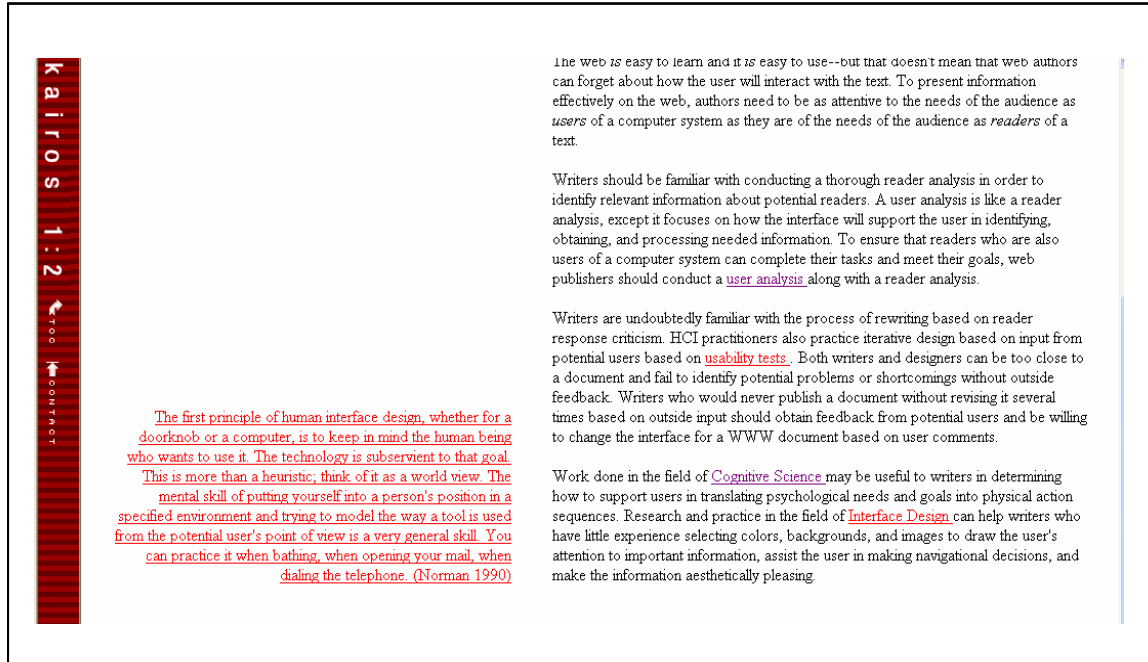
Even though all the webtexts adhere to the convention of incorporating quotations to signal the inclusion of other authors' statements, I found that a slight majority of the webtexts unconventionally incorporate citations in the form of quotations. Specifically, seven of thirteen rely on non-traditional strategies for embedding quotations or separating other scholars' words from those of the author. One strategy, as I previously discussed in the "adequate preparation" sub-section regarding unconventional incorporation of literature reviews, involves the presentation of quotations in discrete sub-nodes; the quotations are offered as contextualizing information that requires readers' active pursuance and departure from a main content node. Moreover, the quotations comprise the entirety of the node, providing a distinct separation from the author's voice in the primary text nodes. The ability to place contextualizing quotations in distinct sub-nodes is a unique allowance of the online medium and arguably functions similarly to the print-based convention of indenting blocked quotations as a way to distinguish ownership of words and ideas. Other strategies of quotation incorporation involve the use of typographic design elements (e.g., non-conventional and contrasting font types and colors or unique placement of text boxes) to emphasize the distinction between the author's words and external quotations. Example 4.11, a screenshot from Thompson's "Speaking of the MOOn," demonstrates the use of typographic design elements for the purpose of highlighting ownership of words and ideas.

### Example 4.11: Screenshot of Thompson’s Introductory Node



The text box in the upper-to-middle left of the screen stands apart from the rest of the text in this opening node, much like an epigraph; it has a unique placement to the side of the text rather than at the top as would be a conventional placement of an epigraph in a print-based text. The pull-out text box with a dark background and neon green font color attracts attention to the quotation and underscores the author’s desire for readers to frame their reading of the text in this node with this particular quotation, providing a kind of emphasis. Karen Chaus incorporates quotations in a similar manner in her webtext, “Reader as User,” as shown in example 4.12.

## Example 4.12: Screenshot of Chauss's Incorporation of Quotations



The majority of quotations in Chauss's webtext are separated from the main text at the bottom left of each node, as this screenshot shows. Rather than embedding quotations within paragraphs, Chauss arranges quotations to function much like epigraphs. Traditional scholarly articles may include an epigraph at the beginning of the text or a pull-quote in the middle of a page; however, limitations associated with paper size and printing costs usually predetermine a standard use of space as well as "white space" or margins.<sup>34</sup> The ability to manipulate screen space in this manner is a unique characteristic of web-based texts, and it allows authors to draw attention to significant quotations while not breaking the flow of their own text. Further discussion of the value of rhetorically manipulating typographic elements and screen space is discussed in the "Visual design" section.

<sup>34</sup> Additionally, authors of web-based texts are motivated to learn how to manipulate elements for various layouts in this environment, whereas authors of print-based texts need not experiment with typographical design elements that are traditionally within the jurisdiction of printers and publishers.

### ***Style: In-text Citations and References***

I found that both in-text citations and reference page citations in the thirteen webtexts follow conventional formats. In-text citations usually appear in parentheses at the end of a quoted or paraphrased sentence, similar to their presentation in print-based texts. Reference page citations are usually consistently formatted according to either MLA or APA<sup>35</sup> style and provide the traditional information required of these style groups. Readers of webtexts are able to find source information in the same manner as they would in print-based texts.<sup>36</sup> However, deviations in conventional presentation are facilitated by the hyperlink allowance of the online medium. Of the thirteen webtexts, five include in-text citations with links from authors' names to either a references node or a full online source. Additionally, nine of the thirteen webtexts include reference page citations with links to full online sources. The added value of this deviation from convention is that readers are able to access full online sources through links and they easily can consult these sources for additional context to the argument, something that cannot be accomplished in a print-based text.

### ***Placement of Reference Nodes***

Moreover, I found that the placement of reference nodes on a majority of the webtexts is conventional in that nine of the thirteen reference nodes appear at the

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<sup>35</sup> As of August, 2007, *Kairos's* preferred style was APA.

<sup>36</sup> I found that only one of the thirteen webtexts deviates from a conventional professional association style of formatting; in Thompson's webtext, the conventional information is included (e.g., author's full name, title and date of publication, etc.), however the formatting style is unconventional. Readers may be disoriented slightly from this non-traditional presentation, which appears to be an exception to the norm. Additionally, Thompson's webtext breaks from other conventions as well in terms of tone, visual design, and content. It is not surprising, then, for readers to find a slightly alternative presentation of references in the spirit of the rhetorical situation of the text. It is possible that Thompson's choices may be influenced by the rhetorical situation of the text, namely, creating the experience of a MOO environment. However, given that the pattern of colors used in the reference node appears random, it can be speculated that she is experimenting with color, which Kalmbach suggests is a defining characteristic of the first phase of *Kairos* publications.

“end” of the webtext (e.g., a final link choice along a visually-guided left-to-right or top-to-bottom path, or as a link within a visually-suggested final node of the text).<sup>37</sup> Readers expect to find references at the end of the text, and therefore this placement does not disappoint. In three cases, the reference nodes are accessible only through embedded navigational links from the main text, thereby offering immediate access to not only the reference node itself, but usually to the exact reference being discussed in the text (thereby saving scanning time for the reader). In three of the webtexts, the reference node is available as a link from every node of the text, which offers easy and immediate access to the references at any time. This access point is particularly useful for readers who decide not to continue following a guided path or visually-guided webview to the “end” of the webtext where the reference node commonly is situated. Multiple and immediate access to reference nodes is a unique function afforded by the multi-linear nature of the online medium and, arguably, it adds value for readers.

One exception to the common placement and accessibility to reference nodes occurs in Wysocki’s “A Bookling Monument.” Wysocki offers access to the reference node solely from the cover page of the webtext. Not only does this placement disrupt expectations, but it appears to prevent easy access to the references—readers must activate the cover node in order to link to the reference node, which means that they must remember at the moment they want to access references that this node will lead them there. The exploratory structure of this text perhaps challenged the author to place reference node access in one stable location

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<sup>37</sup> Concerning the placement of the reference node, this particular statement required me to select all that apply. Some webtexts may include access to the reference node both at the end of the text as well as through embedded links, which is the case with Chauss and Brent.

that she assumed all readers would visit—namely, the cover page of the webtext, which automatically opens from the title of her piece located on the *Kairos* home page.

**Tone**

Entering the scholarly conversation and being taken seriously as a source of knowledge in the field traditionally requires adapting a formal tone that simultaneously is authoritative and open to the voices of others. The use of a formal tone, including field-specific language that other scholars recognize, helps to establish the authors’ ethos and prove their ability to “talk the talk”—to use a shared language that signifies membership in a particular discourse group. As table 4.4 shows, I found that a majority of the thirteen webtexts incorporate a conventionally formal tone characterized by the use of standard grammar and punctuation, field-specific jargon, and generally complex sentence structures.

**Table 4.4: Findings from the Analysis: Tone**

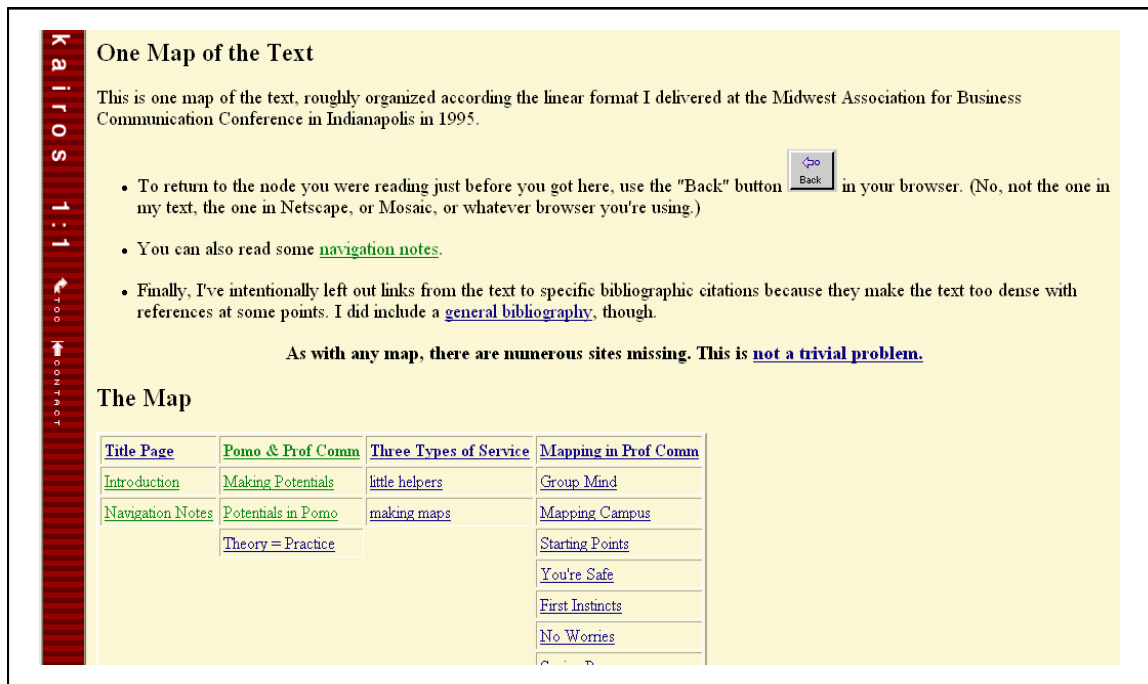
Tone					
	(1) The tone of the webtext is formal (use of field-specific terminology, formal grammar, and other conventions of formal writing).	6	Cha Zoe	Sal Sor	Wys WID
	(2) The tone of the webtext is formal but may include some nodes or segments of nodes (e.g., links that connect to digressions from the main argument, navigational instructions, or other non-content-focused info) containing less formal writing.	4	Dor Bre	Joh Whi	
	(3) Other	3	Tho	Wal	And

Specifically, six of the thirteen webtexts adapt a conventionally formal tone throughout all nodes. These texts satisfy readers’ expectations pertaining to style and voice of scholarly texts, which enables readers to buy in to the argument more willingly—or at least to give it serious attention. However, four of the remaining



seven webtexts include some minor informal segments depicted through the use of unconventional grammar and punctuation, and conversational prose. For example, the node offering navigation instructions in Johnson-Eilola's "Stories and Maps," includes an informal style of writing usually not present in traditional scholarship, as shown in example 4.13.

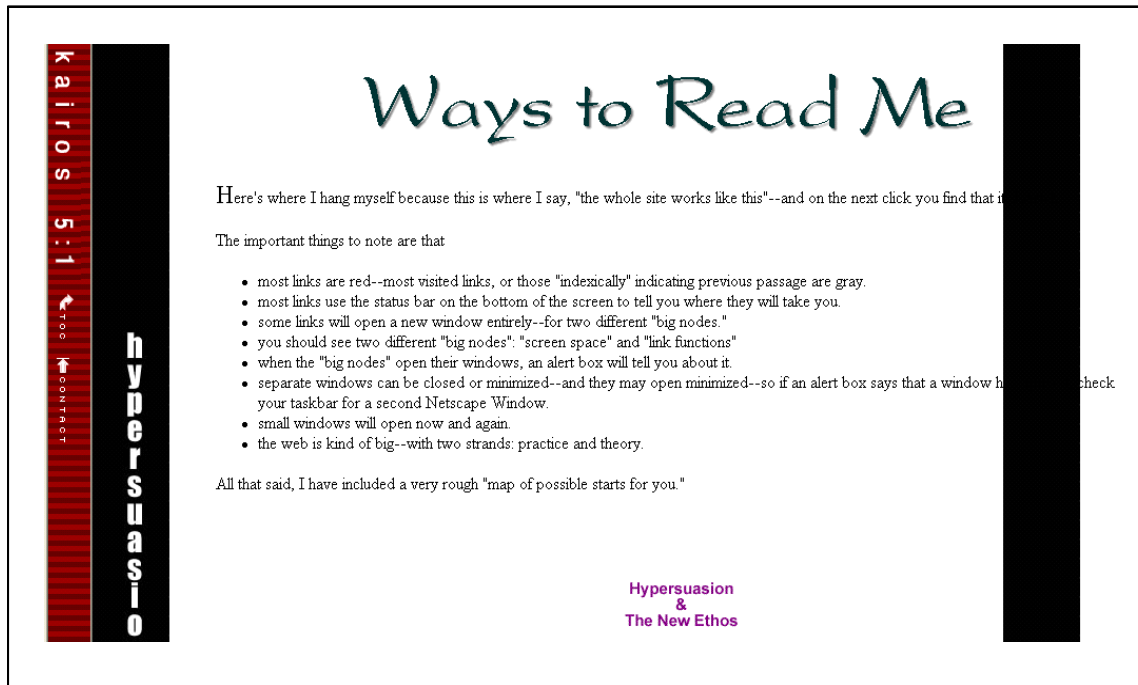
**Example 4.13: Screenshot of Johnson-Eilola's Navigation Instructions**



The first indicator of informal style comes across in the use of the direct address to the reader (e.g., "To return to the node you were reading..."). The parenthetical phrase that begins, "No, not the one in my text..." interacts with the audience in an informal manner that attempts humor. The use of the contraction "I've" in the third bulleted point does not conform to conventional scholarly style. While this is not a main content node of the text, it does represent a particularly informal manner of guiding the reader through the navigation design of the webtext. Similarly, White's "Hypersuasion and the New Ethos" includes some informal writing in its navigation

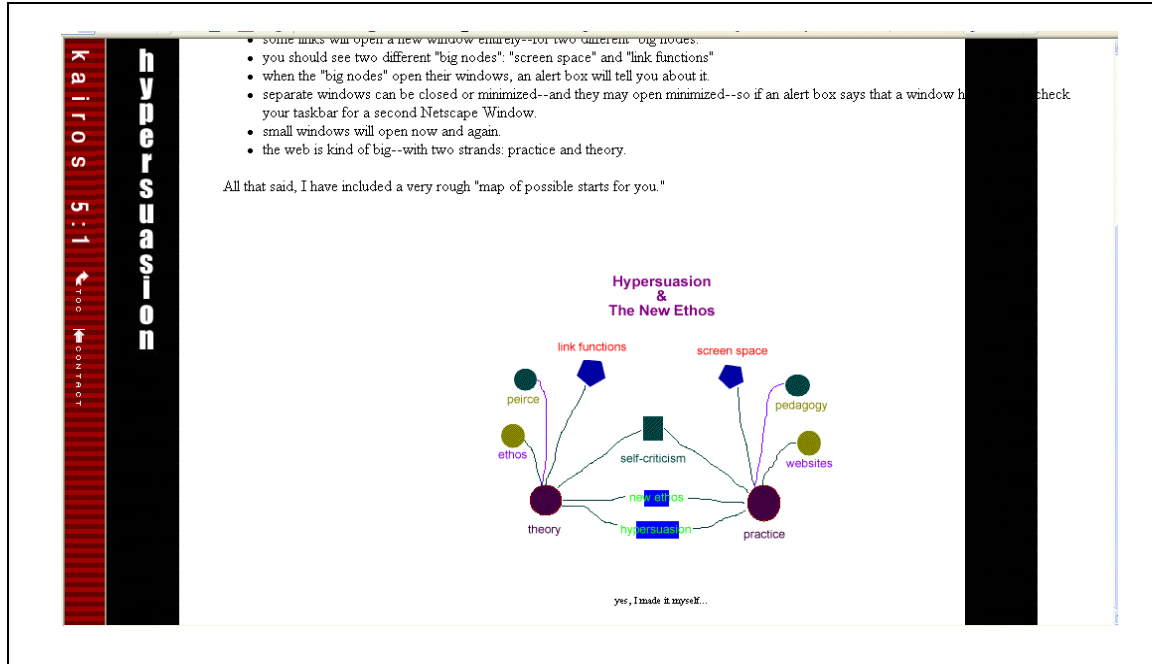
instructions node. Examples 4.14 and 4.15 offer screenshots of the upper and lower segments of this node.

#### Example 4.14: Screenshot of White's Navigation Instructions 1<sup>38</sup>



<sup>38</sup> The left, black vertical bar running through the text on this screenshot appears to be a framing design flaw of the webtext; the screenshot is represented exactly as it appears in the 5.1 issue of *Kairos*. There are a variety of texts in *Kairos* that would have the same kinds of errors. Certainly, technological contexts affect sustainability of designs. For example, when this webtext was published, screens/monitors generally were 13 or 15-inches, and not the typical 17, 19, or even 23-inches of 2007.

## Example 4.15: Screenshot of White's Navigation Instructions 2

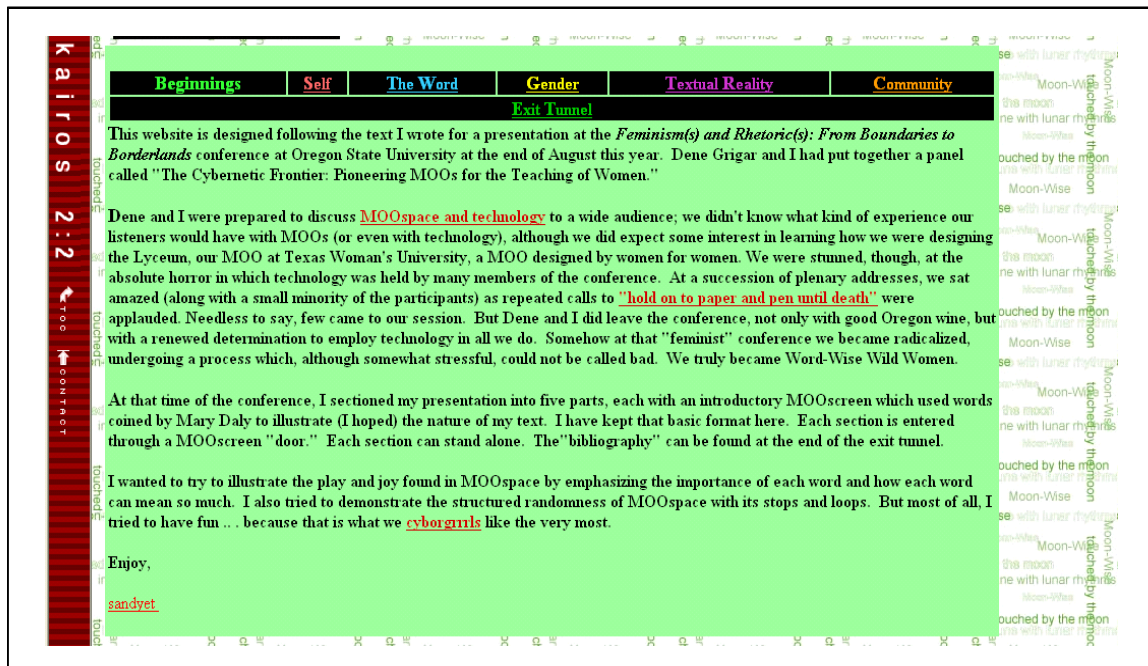


The upper segment of the screenshot in example 4.14 demonstrates the informal style used by the author in this webtext. The node titled “Ways to Read Me” comes across as slightly pedantic in nature. The opening phrase, “Here’s where I hang myself...” depicts an ironic tone not usually associated with formal scholarship. The bulleted points are not written in a parallel style—a common grammatical convention of formal scholarship. Phrases such as “kind of big” in the final bulleted point show a lack of formal phrasing and vocabulary. Additionally, as shown in the screenshot in example 4.15, the author’s self-deprecating comment (“yes, I made it myself”) included under the site map is again more personal in nature than is traditionally found in formal scholarship. A pattern of informality appears most often in non-content-based or “meta-descriptive” segments such as nodes that include navigation instructions. These segments do not generally exist in print-based texts unless the author is purposely flaunting a convention associated with the form of the text and

exceeds readers' familiar frameworks. Based on the frequent changes in tone formality within these particular segments and the contexts in which they occur, it seems reasonable to assume that authors may not yet be comfortable and/or confident in describing and executing their experimentation with form.

The tone of Thompson's "Speaking of the MOOn" and Walker's "Textural Textuality" was particularly challenging to assess. Both webtexts diverge from other webtexts in this subset based on their inclusion of personal reflection segments scattered throughout several main nodes of the texts. These segments are often informal in that they include information not typically broached in traditional scholarly prose. Example 4.16 offers a screenshot of one of the segments from Thompson's webtext.

#### Example 4.16: Screenshot of Thompson's Incorporation of Informal Tone



In this example, Thompson refers to "good Oregon wine," a conversational topic in a conversational, even chatty, way that is reminiscent of the MOO talk in which she

had engaged with Dene Grigar. Additionally, in the node titled, “Textual Reality,” Thompson references real-life personal events to support her point that although MOO space is imagined, the conversations that take place in the space are very real.

As an example of this reality, she writes:

Another example. My husband and I courted each other online. We met at a conference in Utah, I returned to Dallas, he to Albany, New York, and we began meeting in MOOspace. Using text we created our relationship. We wrote our love. When we did get a chance to see each other, at other conferences or at painfully infrequent visits, our online experiences informed our relationship. Online communication in MOOspace was definitely “real” to us.

While perhaps poignant and appropriate as a spontaneous teaching moment in a classroom setting, this example does not conform to the formality usually expected in scholarly argumentation and so it might cause readers to pause. In this respect, Thompson’s text appears to be an anomaly among the other webtexts in this subset. It blends literary quotations and personal reflection with scholarly notions of feminist theory; the juxtaposition of these various styles is at once jolting to readers used to traditional scholarly prose and at the same time novel and interesting. Nonetheless, such a personal style and its subsequent tone are not unusual in a certain subset of Rhetoric and Composition writing, which occasionally can be found in such journals as *College English* and *College Composition and Communication*. Thus, there is precedent for using them in webtexts. Similarly, Walker’s webtext may disrupt readers’ expectations, particularly if they begin with the following node shown in example 4.17.

### Example 4.17: Screenshot of Walker's Introductory Node

The screenshot displays a vertical red bar on the left with the text "KAIROS 7:1" and "TOO CONTACT" written vertically. To the right of the bar is a legend with six colored squares and their corresponding labels: orange for "miscellaneous", blue for "complications", red for "stories and reflections", green for "textual structures", purple for "critical race theory", and yellow for "intertexts". A diagram shows a red square labeled "eavesdropping" connected by a line to another red square labeled "re-act". Below the legend, a text block is titled "eavesdropping" and contains a dialogue between two African American students. The dialogue includes several expletives and phrases like "[unintelligible]". At the bottom right of the text block, there is a small red square labeled "re-acting".

Several expletives appear in the dialogue quoted in this node—one of three main entry nodes to the text (“And I was right there...[unintelligible]. And she still didn’t stop! I waved my arms...[unintelligible]. And I was like, Fuck You.”). This particular example dialogue that Walker chooses to include in her text immediately establishes an underlying tone of informality. The Walker text is a self-titled “personal exploration,” and, as such, readers might expect to see more personal stories and reflections as part of the content. Readers may assign a rhetorical purpose to the use of these introductory attention-gaining phrases; however, their use is still surprising and nontraditional.

I found it particularly challenging to assess tone in Anderson’s “Prosumer Approaches” because of the author’s incorporation of multi-media elements to present content. I developed the assessment tool to address the current majority of textually-based webtexts; questions such as how to assess tone in non-textual

elements such as video and audio are beyond its current purview, but Anderson's text stands as a reminder that they should be incorporated in future iterations.

### **Analysis of Web-based Characteristics**

In this segment of the analysis I explore the characteristics of web-based texts presented in the second category of the assessment tool and focus on (1) the extent to which webtexts incorporate the unique allowances of the medium, (2) what value the allowances add, and (3) how the use of these allowances potentially fail to meet, meet, or exceed traditional goals of scholarship. I address four focus areas (unique allowances) that hypertext scholars have identified as main characteristics of web-based writing: structural design, formal/content fit, contextualization, and multi-media incorporation.

### **Structural Design**

One of the most significant allowances of the online medium that distinguishes web-based from print-based texts is the ability to manipulate the structural design of the text through a multi-linear arrangement of content. Rather than being presented in one linear document, content in a web-based text is divided into discrete chunks or "nodes." These nodes can be connected in various ways, resulting in both associative and/or logical paths. The patterns of connections among nodes determines the degrees of multi-linearity found in the webtexts, from guided, print-like structures (a sequential path through the text) to fully multi-linear structures (multiple paths through the text). As table 4.5 shows, I found that a majority of the thirteen webtexts take advantage of the unique opportunity to present content in a multi-linear structure.

**Table 4.5: Findings from the Analysis: Structural Design**

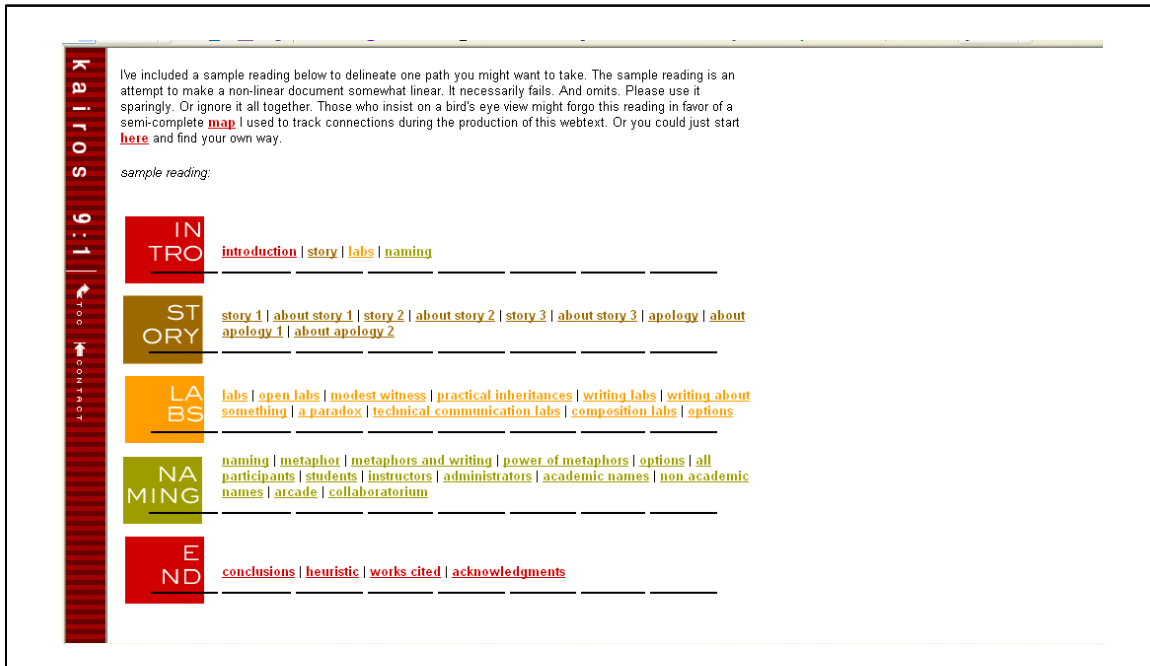
<b>Structural design</b>			
<b>a) Structural options</b>	(1) The webtext includes one prominent structural design/navigation option.	<b>0</b>	
	(2) The webtext incorporates multiple structural design/navigation options.	<b>13</b>	Cha Dor Joh Bre Tho Whi Wal Sal Wys And Zoe Sor WID
	(3) Other	<b>0</b>	
<b>b) Type of structural design</b>			
<b>b) Type of structural design</b>	(1) The structural design of the webtext is linear with few to no navigational options (print-based).	<b>0</b>	
	(2) The structural design of the webtext is guided (print-like).	<b>6</b>	Joh Tho Wal Sal Zoe Sor
	(3) The structural design of the webtext is minimally multi-linear based on a visually suggested sequence (minimally multi-linear/web-based)	<b>11</b>	Cha Dor Joh Bre Tho Wal Sal Wys Zoe Sor WID
	(4) The structural design of the webtext is multi-linear with multiple non-guided navigational options (fully multi-linear/web-based)	<b>9</b>	Cha Dor Joh Bre Whi Wal Wys Zoe WID
	(5) Other	<b>1</b>	And

***Structural Options***

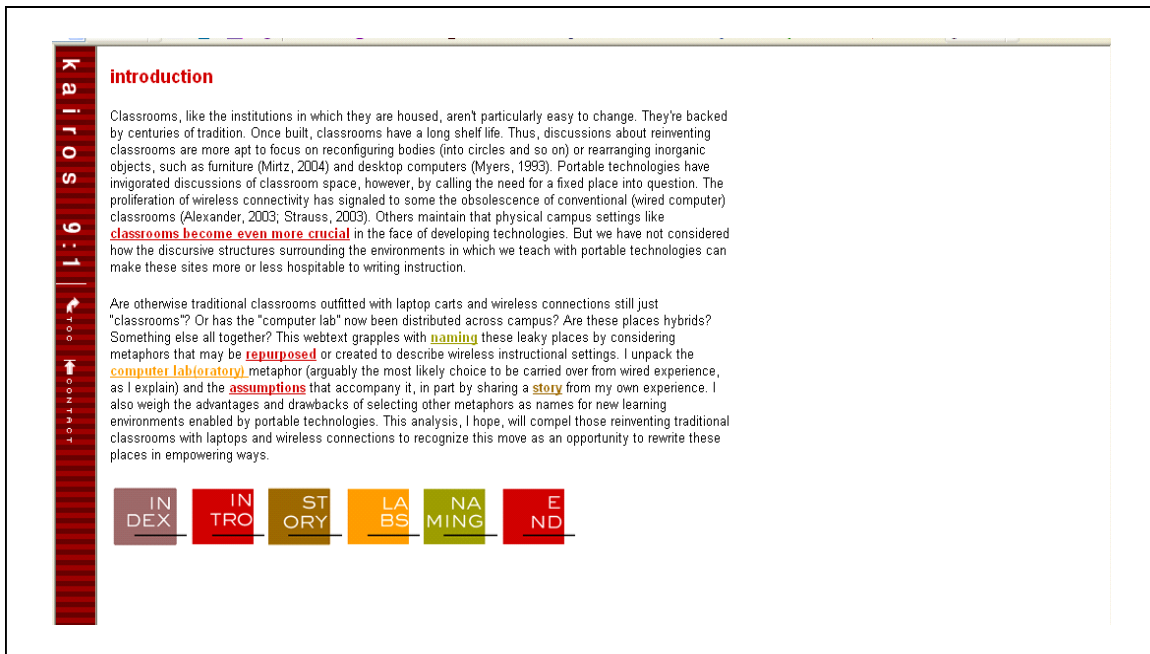
My analysis shows that all thirteen webtexts incorporate combinations of structural designs that offer multiple ways of navigating the text. The most common combination of structural designs—present in eight of the thirteen webtexts—is a minimally multi-linear and fully-multi-linear design combination. In other words, the webtexts include both a visually suggested sequence through a menu or matrix webview as well as multiple embedded internal navigation links in several nodes that allow readers to explore link options in an order of their own choosing. Examples 4.18 and 4.19 consecutively show screenshots of both the guided and fully multi-linear structures combined in Meredith Zoetewey’s “Disrupting the Computer Lab(oratory).”

**Example 4.18: Screenshot of Zoetewey’s Structural Design 1**





Example 4.19: Screenshot of Zoetewey's Structural Design 2



Example 4.18 shows a matrix webview, which displays all of the nodes within the webtext as well as the connections among nodes. Readers can opt to return repeatedly to this guided menu in order to activate the next node in this pre-arranged

order. Example 4.19 shows a continuance of the guided structure through a condensed matrix of main nodes at the bottom of the screen. However, the embedded links in the node text, represented by coordinating colors with the main link topics, are choices the reader can make to follow a non-guided or multi-linear path apart from the order suggested in the matrix. These two structures work together, offering the reader several options for approaching the text.

A majority of these webtexts are similarly designed in that the primary structure offers readers a guided path—whether visually suggested or pre-determined—and then allows readers to explore multi-linear paths among the sub-nodes. This design helps tether readers who are especially hesitant about traversing large connections of nodes by giving them a sense of where they might begin and how they might approach the next main segment of the text. Hypertext scholars suggest two advantages to multi-linear designs. First, additional meaning can emerge from the gaps created by the juxtaposition of certain nodes. In other words, readers may “read into” the particular associations among nodes that authors either purposely or inadvertently constructed in their designs. Moreover, while the author may use a visually-guided design to lead readers toward a prominent arrangement of ideas, a multi-linear design allows readers to have more control over the ways in which they receive information in the text (Bolter *Writing Space*; Landow *Hypertext*; Charney).

One exception to this design is Wysocki’s “A Bookling Monument,” in which, as examples 4.20<sup>39</sup> and 4.21 show, the structural design is reversed.

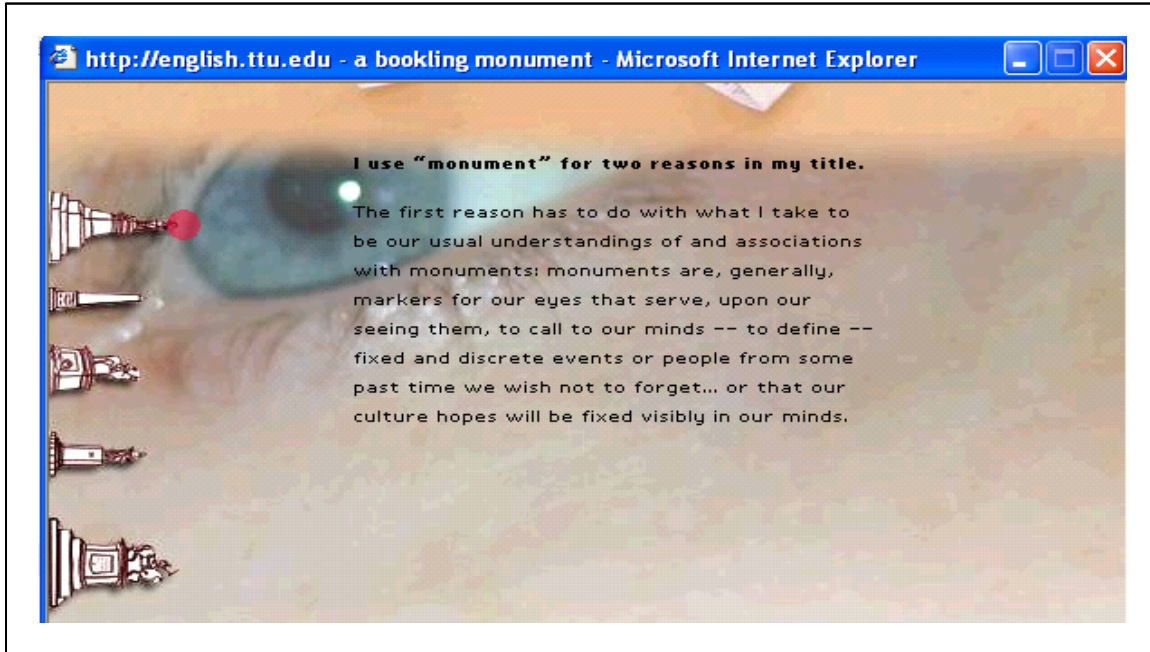
#### **Example 4.20: Screenshot of Wysocki’s Structural Design 1**

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<sup>39</sup> Also used as example 4.5.



### Example 4.21: Screenshot of Wysocki's Structural Design 2



While Wysocki's webtext contains a combination of multi-linear and guided structural designs, it is different from other webtexts in that its primary design is exploratory—readers are not offered a webview to help them negotiate the text, as the screenshot in example 4.20 shows. Readers may randomly activate any of the iconographic links (pieces of paper, body parts) without guidance as to where to begin. The webtext's secondary design is visually guided. As example 4.21 shows, within each of the main nodes, the reader may follow an iconographic webview—in this particular node, it is a menu of monument icons that function as links to the sub-nodes, in a visually suggested order. Again, the value of this design approach is that it allows readers to maintain a greater degree of control over their reception of the text. As Wysocki notes in the rationale for the design of the text, she purposefully attempts to provide readers with an exploratory structure that echoes her own process of discovery in writing the text.

### *Type of Structural Design*

While six of the thirteen webtexts include a print-like, guided design structure in combination with the fully or minimally multi-linear designs, I found that none of the webtexts are solely print-like or print-based in their structural designs. This finding is important in that it suggests a minimum requirement for web-based scholarship to differ from, or move beyond, print-based structural designs. In fact, the *Kairos* home page explicitly establishes this minimum requirement: “In *Kairos* we publish texts authored specifically for publication on the World Wide Web.” In order to be published, the text should incorporate medium-enabled allowances like a multi-linear structure or else there would be no reason to publish the text online. The finding demonstrates that authors are attempting to meet this minimum requirement, at least in their structural designs.

Interestingly, I found no apparent correlation regarding the date of publication and the use of a particular navigational design structure; webtexts that incorporate print-like structures are published both in the early and later years of the ten-year period of study. A reasonable speculation as to the inclusion of a guided structural design is that authors of web-based writing do not want to alienate readers who may not be comfortable with a new reading experience. This accommodation is particularly apparent in cases where authors include a link to a “printable” or “downloadable” version of a multi-linear text (see, for example, the cover pages of Brent’s and Sorapure’s webtexts). Certainly, authors also may be conforming to tenure, promotion, and review portfolio standards that require paper copies of all scholarly publications.

### **Form/Content Fit**

Unlike printed texts, which often present content in a linear, static form, texts in the online medium have an increased opportunity to assume various forms based on the authors' choices regarding structural design (e.g., multi-linearity, link/node design, and navigation options) and interface design (e.g., layout, typography, and other visual elements).<sup>40</sup> A rhetorical manipulation of the text form occurs when authors construct a form that enacts or underlies the content of the text. In other words, authors make conscious choices regarding the placement of nodes and links, the paths of access granted to readers to navigate the text, and the use of unique typographic or multi-media elements toward the purpose of reinforcing, exemplifying, or—literally—enacting the argument of the text. For example, if the content of the text involves an argument for the use of Weblogs in the composition classroom, the author could design the form of the text to imitate a Weblog interface so that readers can use the form that the text is discussing. A successful formal enactment of content can enhance the potential for readers' adherence to the argument of the text. As table 4.6 shows, I found that a majority of webtexts are designed with special attention to how the structure of the text can enhance, demonstrate, exemplify, or ultimately enact the content of the text.

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<sup>40</sup> Certainly, many print texts incorporate illustrations, charts, bulleted points, and other visual presentations of information; however, the ease with which graphical elements can be incorporated as well as the ability to manipulate the “white space” distinguishes online texts. Undoubtedly, there is a malleable, ephemeral quality to the online writing space. Authors may be more prone to manipulating typographic elements in this environment.

**Table 4.6: Findings from the Analysis: Form/Content Fit**

<b>Form/content relationship</b>					
<b>a) Form/ content fit</b>	(1) The form of the webtext enacts the content.	<b>8</b>	Joh Whi And	Bre Wal WID	Tho Wys
	(2) The form of the webtext presents the content.	<b>3</b>	Dor	Sal	Zoe
	(3) Other	<b>2</b>	Cha	Sor	
<b>b) Rationale for the formal design</b>	(1) The webtext includes an explicit statement regarding the formal design of the text.	<b>5</b>	Bre Wal	Tho WID	Whi
	(2) The webtext does not include an explicit statement regarding the formal design of the text.	<b>7</b>	Cha Sal Sor	Dor And	Joh Zoe
	(3) Other	<b>1</b>	Wys		

***Form/Content Fit***

Eight of the thirteen webtexts appear to be designed with a form that enacts the content of the text. For example, Thompson’s webtext replicates a MOO environment through the emphasis on word use and special typographic treatment of quotations; the reflective segments that comment on the main ideas within each node; and the introductory MOO screens that establish the environment for each main node. The screenshot in example 4.22 illustrates the use of introductory MOO screens.

#### Example 4.22: Screenshot of Thompson’s Introductory MOO Screen



This screenshot captures the entry MOO screen for one of the five main nodes, titled, “Self.” The descriptive prose is poetic in style; the author uses pathos to draw the reader into the world of the MOO:

You have entered a magickal [sic] world of light and fantasy where what is possible is bound only by your imagination. Encased in a bright and bedazzling light which warms and comforts you on your magickal [sic] journey, you float through your electronic connection until you land on a mountain in the midst of an endless mountain range. You can only see what is immediately around you. You can not look beyond the next mountaintop. You have entered a world of unknown-ness which threatens the patriarchal, elementary world...

This introductory screen, which fades automatically after a 10-second interval into the main node, is one of five descriptive MOO spaces—each of which leads readers into the main idea of the subsequent connected main node. Thompson’s rhetorical re-creation of a MOO-like environment—through these introductory screens, the word play and descriptive language, and the dark, coordinated backgrounds and font

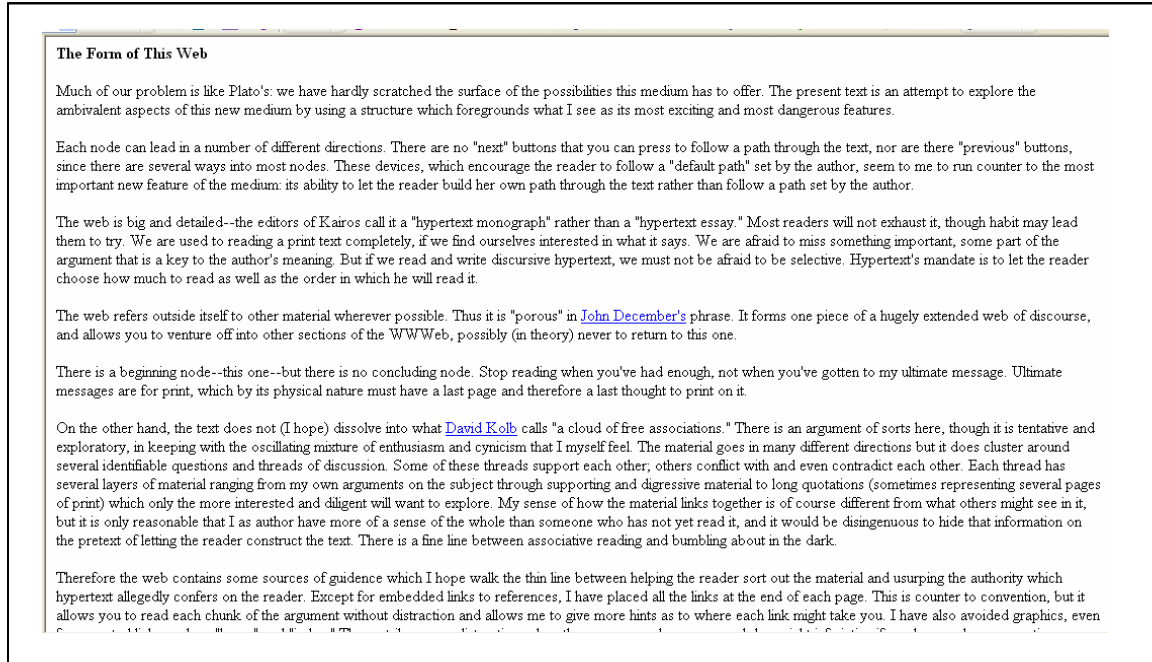


colors—all help to draw readers into the text and ground the very message she attempts to convey of the communicative power of the MOO. Similarly, Wysocki’s webtext (see previous screenshots in examples 4.20 and 4.21) is an exploration of the relationship between text and the body. Wysocki uses several images of the body—for example, a torso (unforgettable as the scene on the opening node—see example 4.21), eyes, fingers, ears—as navigational icons and framing devices for her argument regarding the connections between memory and the conceptual ways of “seeing” bodies and texts. This webtext—arguably the first new media text published in *Kairos*—requires more advanced assessment criteria because it makes meaning in non-textual ways. It does not require an experienced reader of new media texts, however, to recognize the unique, form-based enactment of the text’s content. Wysocki’s exploratory argument echoes the text’s exploratory structure.

### ***Rationale for the Formal Design***

Of the eight webtexts in which the form enacts the content, I found that five incorporate a rationale or explanation for the formal design of the text. Example 4.23 provides a screenshot of Brent’s “Rhetorics of the Web.” This node contains his explanation for the various decisions he made in constructing this webtext so that it practices in form what it explores in content.

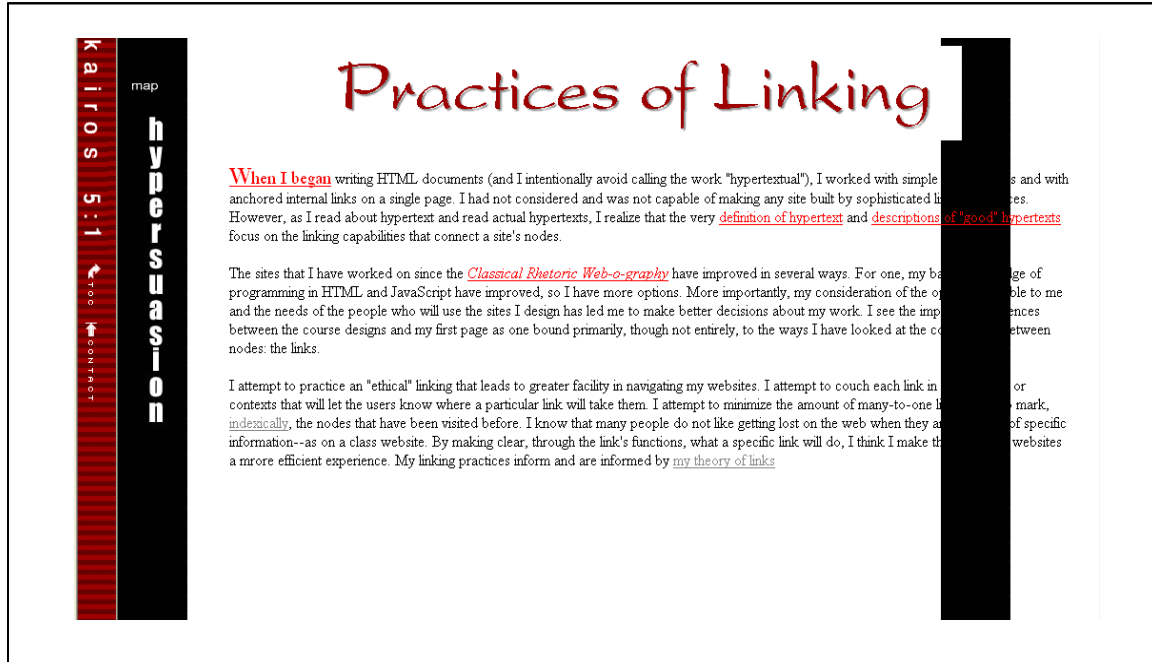
## Example 4.23: Screenshot of Brent's Design Rationale



The rationale is offered in the first main node of the text, and it follows a general overview of the argument. The second sentence in the sub-section "The Form of the Web" presents the author's intentions: "The present text is an attempt to explore the ambivalent aspects of the new medium by using a structure which foregrounds what I see as the most exciting and most dangerous features." This section of the node continues to describe the inclusion and design of links, link text annotations, node digressions, and other aspects that contribute to his conscious formal enactment—his purposeful "foregrounding" or modeling of these link-node relationships throughout the entire text.

Similarly, White includes an explanation for the design of his webtext within one of the first nodes that readers find in his exploratory structure, shown in example 4.24.

## Example 4.24: Screenshot of White's Design Rationale



Here, White explains that his theory of links informs his actual linking practice in this and other webtexts that he has constructed. In other words, readers experience his theory in action as they navigate the text. The final paragraph in this node establishes his reasoning:

I attempt to practice an "ethical" linking that leads to greater facility in navigating my websites. I attempt to couch each link in descriptions or contexts that will let the users know where a particular link will take them. I attempt to minimize the amount of many-to-one linking and to mark, indexically, the nodes that have been visited before. I know that many people do not like getting lost on the web when they are in search of specific information—as on a class website. By making clear, through the link's functions, what a specific link will do, I think I make the use of my websites a more [sic] efficient experience. My linking practices inform and are informed by my theory of links.

The presence of an explanation, at minimum, helps to establish reader expectations and may engender a more receptive attitude toward understanding how both form and content contribute to the meaning of the text. I found two of the five

webtexts more difficult to assess mainly because they did not provide an explicit rationale for their designs, and I could not detect an obvious formal enactment of the content. While the remaining three webtexts incorporated most of the unique allowances of the medium, they did not appear to show any correlation between the form and content of the text.

A rationale for the formal design of the text is especially significant in making a case for the legitimacy of the text; it illuminates layers of meaning that may not immediately be clear to unfamiliar or less experienced readers of these new forms of scholarship. The rationale holds particular significance for tenure, promotion, and review participants and editorial decision makers; it is an explicit method for the formal design of the text. Because there are various ways to structure a formal enactment of content, and because the rationale is not yet in the common framework of understanding, it benefits both readers and writers if the rationale is stated explicitly as a component of the web-based text.<sup>41</sup>

### **Link Strategy: Contextualization**

Another unique allowance of the online medium is the ability to offer multiple segments of contextualizing material easily and non-invasively through links to external content (e.g., information within other online texts or sites) and internal content (e.g., digressions, examples, quotations, and references within the text). Print-based texts often incorporate digressions, additional quotations, and references in footnotes, endnotes, or appendices. However, issues associated with space

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<sup>41</sup> In fact, I could have discussed the rationale for the formal design in the third section of this chapter because it is an emerging convention of web-based writing (see the section on form/content in chapter 3). However, the rationale and the actuality of formal enactment are closely related and made more sense when I discussed them together as I did in this section.

constraints and printing costs limit authors from incorporating fuller segments of contextualizing material. Web-based texts, on the other hand, expand beyond the limitations of print-based space and can provide readers with multiple layers of contextualizing information at the click of a link—from full online source material to expanded illustrations, definitions, and examples for supporting the argument’s main points. The canons of rhetorical invention guide authors to select carefully among the most persuasive common topics for developing an argument (see Crowley). With this unique allowance of the online medium, authors still must be judicious in their selections; however, they also may incorporate layers of contextualizing information to accommodate multiple knowledge and interest levels of their audience. Readers are not required to follow every digression; the contextualizing allowance simply provides options and enhances the potential for authors to incorporate something that may secure the readers’ adherence to the argument. I found that all thirteen of the webtexts take advantage of the contextualizing capabilities of the medium, as presented in table 4.7.

**Table 4.7: Findings from the Analysis: Link Strategy - Contextualization**

Link strategy			
a) Type of link contextualization	(1) The webtext includes one or more links to external content (including links to online references from the references node).	13	Cha Bre Wal And WID Dor Tho Sal Zoe Whi Wys Sor
	(2) The webtext includes one or more links from content nodes to the references node.	7	Cha Bre WID Dor Whi Wal Joh
	(3) The webtext includes one or more navigational links from an overview or main menu to individual nodes.	10	Cha Bre Wal Sor Dor Tho Sal Zoe Joh Whi
	(4) The webtext includes one or more embedded navigational links between nodes.	10	Cha Bre Sal WID Dor Whi Wys Joh Wal Zoe
	(5) Other	0	

“Link strategy” is the only focus area of the assessment tool that required a division of sub-statements for presentation in this chapter. I discuss one of the four statements regarding link strategy in this section of the chapter because it deals specifically with contextualization. The remaining link strategy statements involve emerging conventions of web-based writing, and therefore I treated them separately in the “Link Strategy” subsection of the third main segment of this chapter.

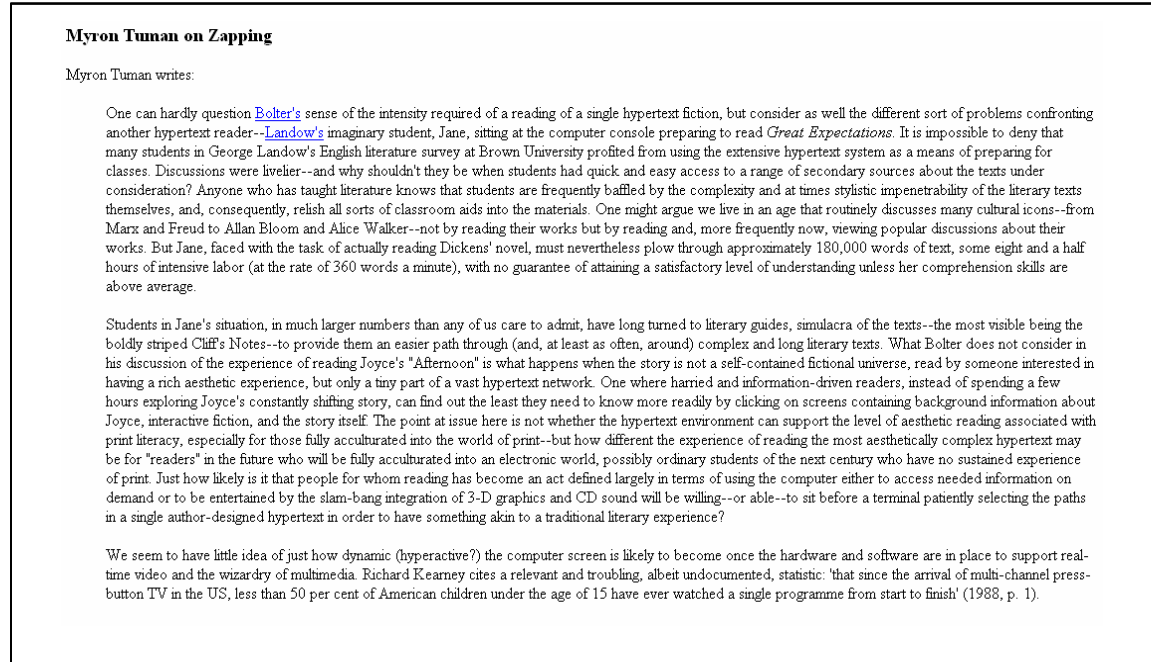
I identified four types of links within *Kairos* webtexts that offer contextualizing information: (1) links to external content (including links to full online sources); (2) navigational links from content nodes to the reference node; (3) navigational links from a webview or overview node to individual content nodes; and (4) embedded navigational links among internal content nodes. All thirteen webtexts include links to external content, thereby broadening the scope of the texts beyond what is possible in print-based texts. The majority of external content in these

webtexts is either (1) information that is usually composed by other authors and is external to the main argument of the text; or (2) information written by the author, but for a different project (similar to an author citing herself). In some of the webtexts, the external content is simply a link to a full online source from the reference node. In other webtexts, external content includes links to specific examples, definitions, illustrations, and quotations in accessible online sources such as web sites, discussion lists, and articles, to name a few.

The second and third types of links that I assessed in this focus area provide access to contextualizing information through their function of facilitating navigation among nodes. The links that connect content nodes with reference nodes are valuable because they allow readers to access reference information easily and directly. The links that exist between webviews and main content nodes also allow readers to move directly to a particular node of interest. Both types of links demonstrate the potential of the medium for navigating seamlessly among various segments of the webtext.

The fourth type of link offers connections among internal nodes—nodes written by the author specifically as part of the webtext. A common structure of a webtext includes several primary nodes of content and several secondary or sub-nodes of content hierarchically linked from the main nodes. The sub-nodes typically offer additional context to ideas within the main nodes such as digressions, definitions, quotations, examples, and illustrations. Most often, authors of webtexts take advantage of the contextualizing feature by citing lengthy quotations or examples within discrete sub-nodes of the webtext. For example, Brent incorporates several segments of another author's text, as shown in example 4.25.

## Example 4.25: Screenshot of Brent's Incorporation of Contextualization



In this screenshot, Brent cites rhetorician Myron Tuman at length; it is an example of the kind of contextualizing information that can be offered in web-based texts but that would seem unwieldy and highly unconventional—perhaps even copyright infringement—if presented in a similar manner in a print-based text.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Walker employs the same contextualization strategy, as shown in example 4.26.

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<sup>42</sup> The inclusion of lengthy segments of another author's text constitutes a lack of fair use, at least in traditional scholarship (Gibaldi). Although currently it is difficult to determine whether the same rules apply to online texts, particularly if the lengthy segments are included within an internal node of the webtext as opposed to an external link to a full online source, it is important to consider the consequences of this inclusion. Questions to ask include: Does this level of inclusion enhance or harm the author's ethos? Does this level of inclusion lead readers to question the author's ability to synthesize external sources? Do readers appreciate the direct accessibility to the primary source material or might they perceive it as an additional burden to have to create their own connections between the material and the main argument of the text? These and other questions require further consideration in the scholarly assessment of online texts.



## Example 4.26: Screenshot of Walker's Incorporation of Contextualization

■ written in fire

This text is a response paper for the course *The Rhetoric of Race in Writing Studies*. <sup>classroom</sup> It was contributed by Amanda Shepherd, a graduate student at the Center for Writing Studies, at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana.

Amanda Shepherd  
Writing in the Margins and Opening a Can of Worms  
A Reflection

Every situation affords opportunity for observation and analysis, which is especially the case in a large Midwestern research oriented university. A class with required reading entitled, Representing the "Other," "Race: The Absent Presence in Composition Research," "Reconsidering the Place of Lived Experience in Composition," and "Arts of the Contact Zone," is especially ripe for analysis. My participation in this class has given me a microcosm to experience life on the margins. "If I could write this in fire, I would write this in fire." I wish those were my words. But they are the words of the Jamaican writer Michelle Cliff. L.P. Aegerter speaks of her

In this particular node, Walker re-presents a sample paper from a graduate student in order to illustrate a point regarding the use of personal narrative in exploring race relations—the topic of Walker’s webtext. Landow argues that the unique ability to reproduce original source material in this manner constitutes an “honest” approach to presenting “Others” voices: “The object here is to let the quoted, appropriated author speak for himself, or, rather, to permit his text to speak for itself without being summarized, translated, distorted by an intermediary voice” (“Hypertext 2.0” 170). This more accessible and open approach to baring one’s primary sources may enhance the author’s ethos by engendering a greater sense of trust by readers.

Another interesting contextualizing characteristic that can enhance the author’s ethos is the inclusion of direct links to author’s email addresses in prominent locations within the webtexts. It is often the case that print-based journals will

provide sanctioned accessibility to authors through the journal editors, and more and more frequently, they may provide the author's email address and other contact information in print. In the analysis, I found that authors (rather than the editors) go a step further and make themselves directly accessible through the linking and networking capabilities of the online medium. In several cases, authors actually request and/or encourage interaction and feedback, and link their email addresses adjacent to that request. Such accessibility encourages interaction that directly addresses a goal of scholarly publication—namely, to open dialogues among scholars for sharing and discussing research. It offers the potential for community through direct, almost immediate communication and, at times, collaboration, which is decidedly different from the static nature of text-based publications. Such communication can be enacted through email (see, for example, Brent, Dorwick, Johnson-Eilola, Thompson, and Zoetewey), as comments to blogs, and in wikis, where readers can co-author with the original authors (see, for example, Garza and Hern). While it remains to be seen just how much readers do take advantage of these affordances of the online medium, such invited communications have the potential to change the ways that authors and readers perceive scholarship overall and as interaction particularly.

From these findings, it is clear that webtext authors find value in the contextualizing allowance of the medium. The added value of this allowance is that authors can enhance readers' understanding of their main points by offering multiple examples, definitions, and digressions, thereby accommodating various knowledge and interest levels of their readers. Additionally, readers are given immediate and

direct access to primary source material, which is an allowance that is limited within print medium. Authors of print texts can include appendices, for example; however, conventions of fair use in presenting a large quantity of primary source information as well as paper costs (and the aesthetic nature of an unwieldy volume of paper) impedes the ability to incorporate primary source material.

### **Multi-media incorporation**

The ability to incorporate multi-media elements such as animation, video, and audio to enhance or present the content of the text is another unique allowance of the online medium. While this particular allowance may not be used to its full potential in this data set, trends in more recent publication years may show otherwise. Table 4.8 provides a numerical picture of the use of multi-media elements.

**Table 4.8: Findings from the Analysis: Multi-Media Incorporation**

<b>Multi-media incorporation</b>					
<b>a) Webtext composition</b>	(1) The webtext is comprised mainly of text.	<b>3</b>	Dor	Bre	Sal
	(2) The webtext is comprised of text and graphical elements (images, tables, graphs, icons, etc.).	<b>3</b>	Cha	Joh	Zo
	(3) The webtext is comprised of text and/or graphical elements with multi-media elements such as video, audio, and animation.	<b>6</b>	Tho And	Wal Sor	Wys WID
	(4) Other	<b>1</b>	Whi		
<b>b) Semiotic nature</b>	(1) The primary way through which the webtext makes meaning is textual with or without some graphics that enhance the meaning.	<b>7</b>	Cha Bre Zoe	Dor Whi	Joh Sal
	(2) The primary way through which the webtext makes meaning is textual with multi-media (audio, video, animation) that enhance the meaning.	<b>4</b>	Tho WID	Wal	Sor
	(3) The primary way through which the webtext makes meaning is a nearly equal combination of text and multi-media (audio, video, animation).	<b>2</b>	Wys	And	
	(4) Other	<b>0</b>			

I found that a majority of the webtexts— ten of the thirteen—incorporate non-textual elements including basic icons, pictures, tables, and graphics, as well as the more

advanced media that cannot be replicated in print-based texts, such as video stream, flash imagery, slideshows, animated icons, and background audio. Specifically, six of the ten webtexts incorporate one or more of the advanced media elements. However, only two of these six webtexts appear to use these multi-media elements to make—rather than convey--meaning. In “Prosumer Approaches,” Anderson uses video to present a lecture that makes up the main content of the webtext. And in “A Bookling Monument,” Wysocki’s imagery and use of body parts as navigation tools drives the argument of the text, as seen in examples 4.20 and 4.21. A majority (eleven of thirteen) of the texts makes meaning primarily through text or through text combined with minimal multi-media elements that enhance but do not present the meaning of the text; in other words, readers are familiar with the ways in which these texts construct their meaning. Trends indicate that webtexts published in the latter half of the ten-year period under study are those that incorporate multi-media elements to enhance or present meaning. Although I limited this study to analyzing thirteen texts longitudinally, a scan of various other *Kairos* texts published within the last three years of the ten-year time period shows a considerably greater incorporation of multi-media for both enhancing and presenting content. My findings concur with Kalmbach’s findings in “Reading the Archives” in which, of his similar ten-year sampling, the most recent three-year period shows a trend toward publishing new media texts.

### **Analysis of Emerging Web-based Conventions**

The unique allowances of the online medium (as discussed in the previous section) necessitate new ways to govern successful writing in this environment. In

the final section of my analysis, I address the emerging conventions presented in the second category of the assessment tool and focus on (1) the extent to which webtexts follow these emerging conventions, (2) what value is added through adherence to these conventions, and (3) how these conventions expand or change the understanding of traditional scholarship. This segment addresses four focus areas that have been identified by various rhetorics of online writing as common form-based conventions for guiding writing that incorporates the medium's unique allowances, including strategies of navigation design, link usage, node formation, and visual design.

### **Navigation Design**

Webtexts that incorporate multi-linear designs often present unfamiliar reading experiences based on their form-based transformations. Readers of print-based texts expect to follow the argument of a text from start to finish, relying on elements such as transitional topic sentences and headings as linear guides through the main points of the argument. Readers of web-based texts cannot rely on this same framework. In order to accommodate this new reading experience, several rhetorics of web writing suggest that authors incorporate three key aspects of a solid navigation design to help readers understand how to move through the text and find particular points of interest among the potential link-node options: (1) a contextual overview or introduction to the text, (2) a textual or graphical webview that allows readers to see the extent of the web, and (3) clear navigation instructions. I found that a majority of the thirteen webtexts follow these emerging conventions, as shown in table 4.9.

**Table 4.9: Findings from the Analysis: Navigation Design**

Navigation design			
a) Contextual overview	(1) The webtext includes an overview or starting node that contextualizes the main argument.	11	Cha Dor Joh Bre Tho Whi Sal And Zoe Sor WID
	(2) The webtext does not include an overview or starting node.	1	Wys
	(3) Other	1	Wal
b) Textual or graphical webview	(1) The webtext includes textual or graphical webviews that provide direct link access to main nodes and show a fair extent of the Web.	10	Dor Joh Bre Tho Whi Wal Sal Zoe Sor WID
	(2) The webtext does not include textual or graphical webviews.	3	Cha Wys And
	(3) Other	0	
c) Navigation directions	(1) The webtext includes directions for navigating the text.	9	Dor Joh Bre Tho Whi Wal And Zoe WID
	(2) The webtext does not include directions for navigating the text.	4	Cha Sal Wys Sor
	(3) Other	0	

***Contextual Overview***

Of the thirteen webtexts in this study, eleven incorporate an overview or introductory node that contextualizes the main argument and provides readers with a starting point for the text, much like a traditional introduction in a print-based text. However, in addition to the print-based characteristics of an introduction, these overviews typically include directions for navigating the text as well as a rationale for the text’s structural design (components that are necessary in a print-based text). The remaining two webtexts, which are exploratory (fully multi-linear with or without a guided option) in their design structure, do not have conventional starting points. The main opening node in Walker’s webtext, for example, includes navigation instructions but does not provide a sense of the overall context or argument. Readers

are required to advance deeper into the “web” in order to locate the author’s intent. Wysocki’s webtext also requires readers to dive right into the text and find their way among multiple iconographic link choices. Again, readers arrive at an understanding of the author’s intent only by exploration. Similarly, in the “Clear goals” subsection of this chapter, I found that the same deviation from convention occurs in these two webtexts. Some overlap exists among the assessment statements, particularly regarding focus areas where the emerging online convention—in this case, the incorporation of an overview node—echoes a characteristic of traditional print writing, namely, the inclusion of clear goals within an introduction. Adherence to these conventions in webtexts, as in print-based texts, is dependent upon the text’s rhetorical situation. Both Walker’s and Wysocki’s webtexts are self-labeled “explorations” with exploratory structural designs; they purposely attempt to capture in form what they offer in content.

### ***Textual or Graphical Webview***

A majority of the webtexts—ten of the thirteen—also include a webview that shows the extent of the webtext and provides direct link access to main nodes. In the online medium, a webview enables readers to get a sense of the scope of the text, something that is accomplished in a print-based text by a glance at the page number span or table of contents, or a quick scan of the text for various headings and segments. For example, Brent’s webtext includes an abbreviated and expanded index of link options on the opening page of the text (see example 4.8); similarly Zoetewey’s webtext includes both an abbreviated and expanded matrix that shows connections among all of the nodes within the text (see examples 4.17 and 4.18); and

the WIDE webtext includes a menu of main node headings. All of the webviews provide direct link access to the main nodes of the texts.

I found that three of the thirteen webtexts do not include functional webviews. Anderson's webtext attempts to follow overview/webview conventions even as it uses video rather than text to present the main content. Readers can estimate the extent of the web by gauging the movement of the playbar; however, this device does not provide information regarding the particular segments or nodes of the text. Chaus's webtext offers a very limited matrix including three links: "introduction," "conclusion," and "references." This webview does not show the extent of the webtext and therefore does not help readers get a sense of the scope of the text. Wysocki's webtext encourages open exploration and does not provide readers with conventional cues (titles, representative icons) to the content of the text. As with navigation, it appears that readers must enter the text somewhat blindly, experience several nodes, and only then may they gain a sense of the content, the connections among content, and the signification of each body part in relation to navigating the text.

Again, both Wysocki's and Chaus's texts are designed with exploratory structures, and the authors purposely engage this emerging convention based on the rhetorical purpose of providing readers with a true hypertextual experience. Because Chaus does not state this purpose explicitly in a rationale for her design, I found it difficult to understand the significance of her form and her decision to bypass the convention. It also may be the case that at the time of publication—Chaus's text appears in the very first issue in 1997—this convention was not yet solidified.



Similarly, the significance of the design of Wysocki's text emerges throughout the reading experience, and readers eventually come across the rationale for her design. However, based on the adherence to this convention by a majority of webtexts, this experimental approach appears to counter a necessary element of scholarly writing achieved by the author's clear communication of content, context and scope of the argument.

### *Navigation Directions*

Several webtexts also appear to follow the emerging web-based convention of incorporating directions for navigating the text. Nine of the thirteen webtexts provide information including possible starting points for the text, typographic designs for internal/external node differentiation, where to find the references, and generally how to move through the text to points of interest. One of the earlier-published texts provides additional detailed information regarding navigation within particular web-browsers, which at this point in the history of web-based writing might seem unnecessary as readers become more and more accustomed to basic web interfaces. Based on my findings, it appears that the majority of authors did not choose to accommodate readers to this extent, given the growing use and familiarity with navigating online texts. The four webtexts that do not provide navigation instructions also offer guided structures; perhaps authors decided these texts did not require instructions given that a familiar, linear reading option is available. Again, Wysocki appears to make a conscious choice to provide readers with an exploratory reading experience; no guidance is offered for beginning the text or navigating among particular nodes. Within several nodes, however, Wysocki offers iconographic

stepping stones that readers can follow linearly from left to right or top to bottom, and therefore instructions were most likely thought unnecessary for the familiar framework. Interestingly, I noticed that three of the four webtexts that do not include instructions were published later in the ten-year period. Again, one might speculate that a high level of reader accommodation is not required as readers increasingly become more familiar with navigating these types of web-based texts.

### **Link Strategy**

The hyperlink is a key navigational device within multi-linear web-based texts. It provides the means by which readers navigate among multiple nodes. According to several rhetorics of online writing, reviewed in chapters 2 and 3, a successful link strategy relies on three main emerging conventions: a clear rhetoric of link text, solid link stability, and an annotated reference list of external links. My findings indicate that these conventions are not as readily followed. As table 4.10 shows, slightly more than half of the webtexts use a clear rhetoric of link text, while fewer than half of the webtexts incorporate stable links and annotated reference lists. Recall that I divided the link strategy question in the assessment tool between the section regarding contextualization as an allowance of the medium and this section regarding conventions of web-based writing. I discuss sub-sections b, c, and d in this section because they are directly relevant to the notion of emerging web-based conventions.

**Table 4.10: Findings from the Analysis: Node Strategy**

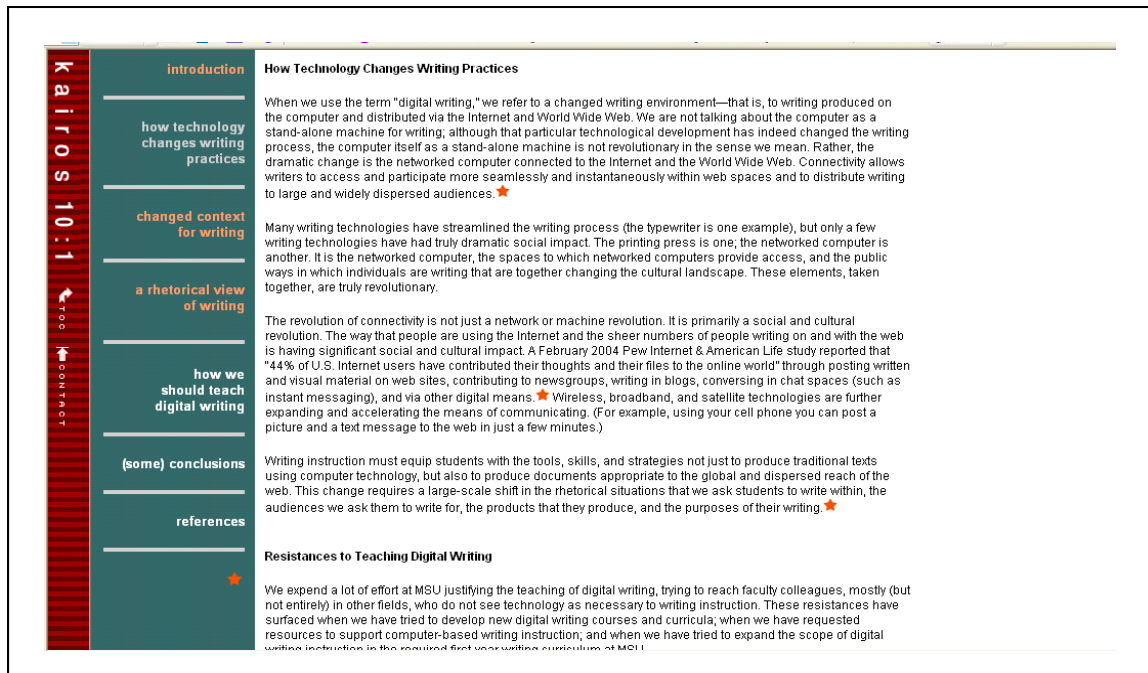
<b>Link strategy</b>			
<b>b) Rhetoric of arrivals and departures</b>	(1) A majority of link text follows a rhetoric of arrivals and departures.	7	Cha Tho Zoe Dor Whi Bre Wal
	(2) The webtext includes some blind links that may affect reader navigation.	2	Joh WID
	(3) Other	4	Sal Sor Wys And
<b>c) Link stability</b>	(1) The webtext does not appear to have any broken or dead links.	4	Whi WID Wys Zoe
	(2) The webtext includes some broken or dead links.	9	Cha Bre Sal Dor Tho And Joh Wal Sor
	(3) Other	0	
<b>d) Link reference</b>	(1) The webtext includes an external links page.	2	Tho Wal
	(2) The webtext does not include an external links page.	11	Cha Bre Sor Dor Whi And WID Joh Sal Zoe
	(3) Other	0	

***Rhetoric of Arrivals and Departures***

Seven of the thirteen webtexts appear to provide a clear rhetoric of arrival and departure for link text. In review, link text that demonstrates a clear rhetoric of departure sets expectations regarding the information that will appear on the other end of the link. Link text that demonstrates a clear rhetoric of arrival satisfies those expectations by providing the anticipated information. The adherence to this convention is particularly useful for helping readers navigate these seven texts. Of the remaining five webtexts, I found that four do not follow this convention; however, this does not necessarily mean these webtexts fail to provide clear reader navigation. Salvo’s and Sorapure’s webtexts, for example, include a guided structural design in which readers have an option to follow the planned path set by the author. Link text may be helpful for preparing readers to anticipate the next topic in these particular

webtexts, but it is not vital for overall navigation in these structures. Similarly, Anderson’s webtext uses a timeline structure in which the video presentation establishes the reading path (the coordinated text nodes appear in tandem with the video). Wysocki’s webtext is an exception; it is fully exploratory and relies on non-textual cues—icons and graphics—rather than link text to create a unique navigation strategy based on memory and the body (the very focus of the argument presented in this text). WIDE’s and Johnson-Eilola’s webtexts include some blind links that may affect reader navigation. For example, WIDE’s webtext incorporates star icons rather than link text, as shown in the screenshot in example 4.27.

**Example 4.27: Screenshot of WIDE Initiative’s Icon Links**



The authors explain the inclusion of these icons in the preface node to this webtext, within the segment subtitled “How to Use This Webtext”:

The information in pop-ups, denoted by ★, is put there because it can, to some degree, stand alone as something you'll want to keep handy. It could be a list of links, a definition, a diagram, or a document you

might want to use. (You can access an index of all of the popups via the star in the main navigation, to the left.) Some are interactive bits, like [the quiz](#) and the [God Term Game](#). We hope all are documents, media, and ideas you might use to kick off a graduate teaching practicum or a staff meeting. They show us, as a field, as serious but not humorless. And we hope they launch productive conversations.

They preface the use of star icons, embedded in the paragraphs within several nodes, as shown in the node in example 4.27, as teaching aids and examples relevant to the particular sections of the text where they appear as links; however, readers are not given specific information—a “clear” link rhetoric as the convention recommends—regarding what to expect in the destination nodes. Should readers choose to follow these links, they do so armed only with the expectations set by the authors in the preface node.

### ***Link Stability and Link Reference***

As I discussed in the previous segment regarding the unique allowances of the medium, contextualization made possible by the link function of web-based texts provides additional layers of information that can potentially increase readers’ adherence to the argument of the text. Unfortunately, a negative byproduct of this allowance is a problem all too often encountered in the continually evolving online environment, namely, the obsolescence of links. I found that nine of the thirteen webtexts include unstable or “dead” links—links that lead to non-existent, outdated, or non-functioning external sites. The majority of these nine webtexts were published in the early half of the ten-year time period; therefore, these numbers are not surprising, given the changing nature of the web and the disappearance or cancellation of particular online sites over the years. As a measure of alleviating the inconvenience and disruption of expectations that is caused by the unstable links, the

*Kairos* editorial staff, in addition to several of the rhetorics, recommends that authors incorporate an annotated list of external links. Only two of the thirteen webtexts actually follow this recommendation. By including a brief annotation of external links within the webtext (*Kairos*'s recommendation), authors can enhance their ethos and better accommodate readers with this additional and potentially necessary information. Why a majority of webtext authors have not executed this strategy is unclear. One guess is that they may see it as a time-consuming activity that either is redundant or is not as significantly informative as providing access to the actual linked contextualizing information; it may be difficult to imagine the day that a link may not work when at publication that link is fully active.

### **Node Strategy**

A multi-linear web-based text relies on discrete segments of content—or “chunked nodes” to facilitate multiple paths and associations among the information presented in the text. Emerging conventions governing the construction of nodes consider the extent to which the content is divided into discrete chunks of information and whether that information is self-contained and contextualized so that readers may approach it from multiple angles without interrupting a coherent understanding of the argument. As shown in table 4.11, I found that a majority of the webtexts follow these emerging conventions associated with a successful node strategy.

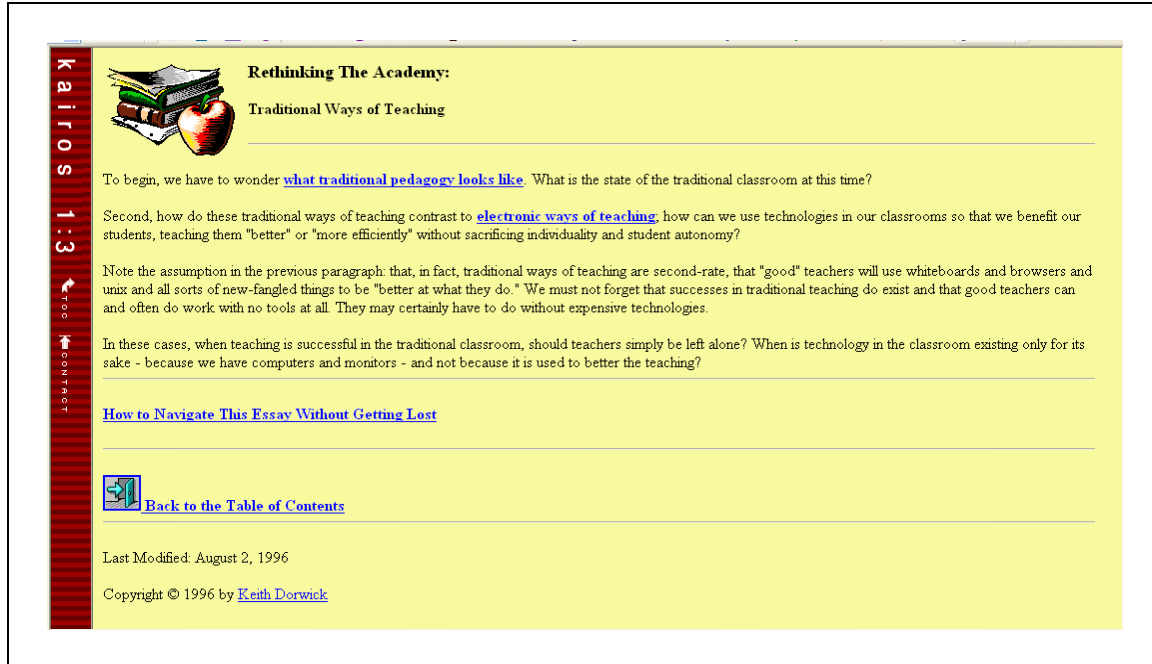
**Table 4.11: Findings from the Analysis: Link Strategy**

<b>Node strategy</b>			
<b>a) Chunked content</b>	(1) The text within the webtext is divided into discrete chunks of information within individual nodes.	<b>11</b>	Cha Dor Joh Bre Tho Whi Wal Sal Wys Zoe Sor
	(2) The text within the webtext is divided into larger sections of information in which readers are required to scroll through a majority of the nodes.	<b>1</b>	WID
	(3) Other	<b>1</b>	And
<b>b) Self-contained content</b>	(1) Content within a majority of the nodes is self-contained and contextualized; nodes can be read individually and in almost any order, however some sub-nodes—particularly embedded links that form guided digression chains—may rely on information from an immediately preceding node.	<b>8</b>	Cha Dor Bre Tho Whi Wal Wys WID
	(2) Content within a majority of both main and sub-nodes relies on necessary information and transitions from previous nodes.	<b>3</b>	Joh Sal Sor
	(3) Other	<b>2</b>	And Zoe

***Chunked Content***

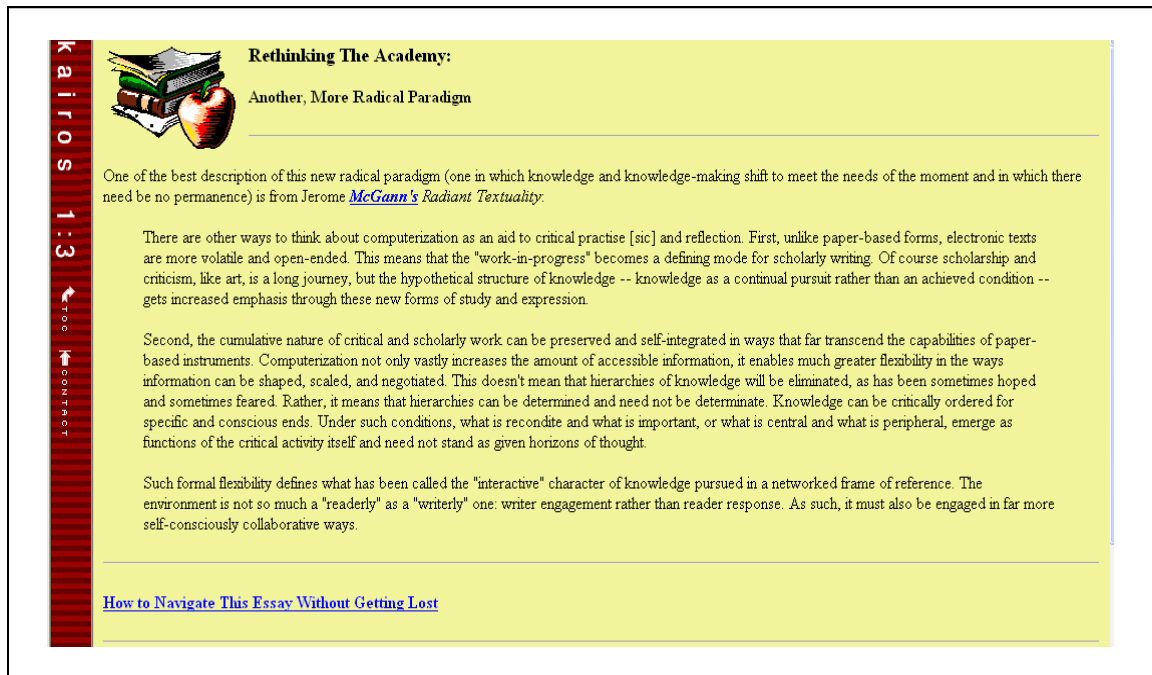
Of the thirteen webtexts, eleven contain a majority of nodes that are chunked into discrete units of information. Nodes in these webtexts are typically short—averaging one screen length at most—and cover a single topic or point in support of the argument. Additionally, I found that the majority of nodes in these webtexts usually are labeled with clear, descriptive titles so that readers anticipate what will be discussed in the node. For example, Dorwick’s webtext contains several nodes that appear similar in length to the ones re-presented below in examples 4.28 and 4.29.

## Example 4.28: Screenshot of Dorwick's Node Strategy 1



The screenshot shows a web page titled "Rethinking The Academy: Traditional Ways of Teaching". On the left, there is a vertical red bar with the text "kairos 1:3" and a small icon of a book and an apple. The main content area is yellow and contains several paragraphs of text. The first paragraph asks "To begin, we have to wonder [what traditional pedagogy looks like](#). What is the state of the traditional classroom at this time?". The second paragraph asks "Second, how do these traditional ways of teaching contrast to [electronic ways of teaching](#); how can we use technologies in our classrooms so that we benefit our students, teaching them "better" or "more efficiently" without sacrificing individuality and student autonomy?". The third paragraph notes the assumption in the previous paragraph: "that, in fact, traditional ways of teaching are second-rate, that "good" teachers will use whiteboards and browsers and unix and all sorts of new-fangled things to be "better at what they do." We must not forget that successes in traditional teaching do exist and that good teachers can and often do work with no tools at all. They may certainly have to do without expensive technologies." The fourth paragraph asks "In these cases, when teaching is successful in the traditional classroom, should teachers simply be left alone? When is technology in the classroom existing only for its sake - because we have computers and monitors - and not because it is used to better the teaching?". Below the text are two horizontal lines. The first line contains the link "[How to Navigate This Essay Without Getting Lost](#)". The second line contains a small icon of a book and an apple followed by the link "[Back to the Table of Contents](#)". At the bottom, it says "Last Modified: August 2, 1996" and "Copyright © 1996 by [Keith Dorwick](#)".

## Example 4.29: Screenshot of Dorwick's Node Strategy 2



The screenshot shows a web page titled "Rethinking The Academy: Another, More Radical Paradigm". On the left, there is a vertical red bar with the text "kairos 1:3" and a small icon of a book and an apple. The main content area is yellow and contains several paragraphs of text. The first paragraph says "One of the best descriptions of this new radical paradigm (one in which knowledge and knowledge-making shift to meet the needs of the moment and in which there need be no permanence) is from Jerome [McGann's Radiant Textuality](#):". The second paragraph says "There are other ways to think about computerization as an aid to critical practise [sic] and reflection. First, unlike paper-based forms, electronic texts are more volatile and open-ended. This means that the "work-in-progress" becomes a defining mode for scholarly writing. Of course scholarship and criticism, like art, is a long journey, but the hypothetical structure of knowledge -- knowledge as a continual pursuit rather than an achieved condition -- gets increased emphasis through these new forms of study and expression." The third paragraph says "Second, the cumulative nature of critical and scholarly work can be preserved and self-integrated in ways that far transcend the capabilities of paper-based instruments. Computerization not only vastly increases the amount of accessible information, it enables much greater flexibility in the ways information can be shaped, scaled, and negotiated. This doesn't mean that hierarchies of knowledge will be eliminated, as has been sometimes hoped and sometimes feared. Rather, it means that hierarchies can be determined and need not be determinate. Knowledge can be critically ordered for specific and conscious ends. Under such conditions, what is recondite and what is important, or what is central and what is peripheral, emerge as functions of the critical activity itself and need not stand as given horizons of thought." The fourth paragraph says "Such formal flexibility defines what has been called the "interactive" character of knowledge pursued in a networked frame of reference. The environment is not so much a "readerly" as a "writerly" one: writer engagement rather than reader response. As such, it must also be engaged in far more self-consciously collaborative ways." Below the text are two horizontal lines. The first line contains the link "[How to Navigate This Essay Without Getting Lost](#)".

Both of these screenshots show the extent of several nodes that comprise Dorwick's webtext. The node in example 4.28 is clearly titled and presents content related

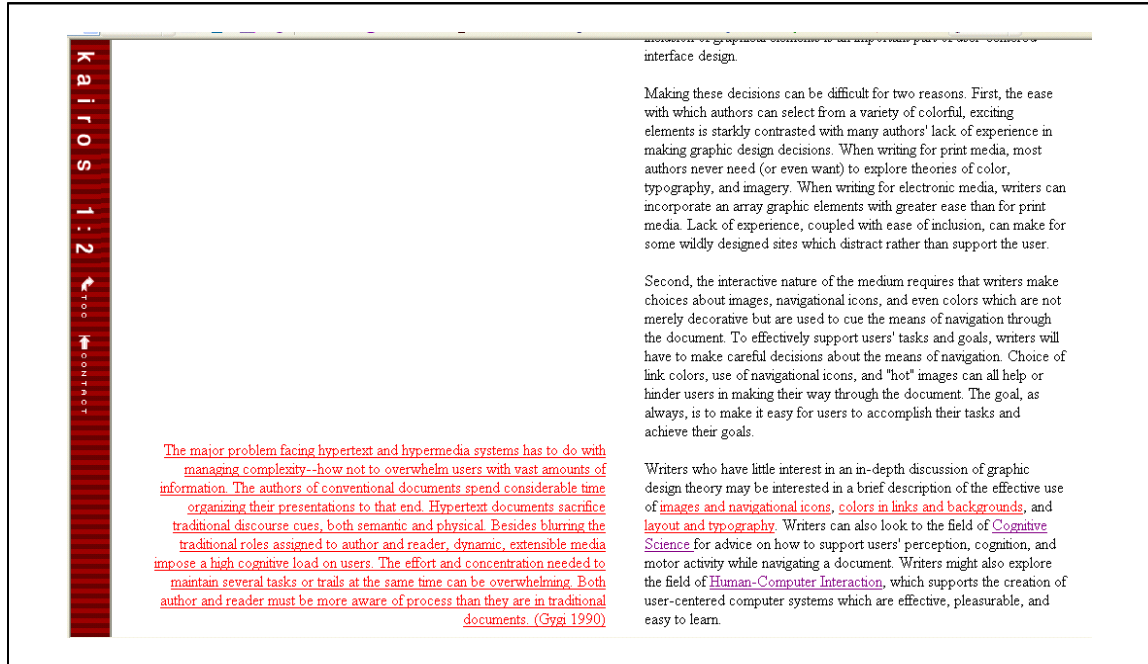


directly to the topic suggested by the title. The node in example 4.29 also is clearly titled and offers a contextualizing quotation to illustrate the notion of a “More Radical Paradigm.” The value of having the nodes each focus on one main idea is that they can be associatively and repeatedly linked to other main nodes in order to provide relevant contextualizing information where necessary. This method of node construction allows authors to link several times to the same key contextualizing nodes in various areas of the webtext so that readers will be assured of visiting the nodes at least once along their navigation path.

### ***Self-contained Content***

Additionally, I found that eight of the thirteen webtexts include a majority of nodes in which the content is self-contained and contextualized within the overall argument. Nodes in these texts can be read in multiple orders without disrupting a reader’s coherent reception of the argument. Almost all of the nodes that comprise Chauss’s webtext, for example, incorporate contextualizing information most often in the introductory or concluding sentences of the nodes. Example 4.30 provides a screenshot illustration.

### Example 4.30: Screenshot of Chauss's Node Strategy



The final paragraph of this node is significant in that it contextualizes the particular topic—the application of interface design to Web writing—within the overall scope of the argument, and it directs readers to visit two other key nodes discussed in the webtext—the fields of Cognitive Science and Human-Computer Interaction. In fact, all of Chauss's main nodes use this strategy to cross reference other main topics of the text and give readers a sense of the scope and fit of each main argumentative point.

Of the remaining five webtexts, three include several nodes that rely on necessary information from previous nodes. Johnson-Eilola's, Salvo's, and Sorapure's webtexts, in particular, incorporate guided structural designs in which readers may follow the "next" link throughout the entire text. Some authors rely on these established paths and conventional transitions to provide readers with the necessary context. In these webtexts, readers often will see linguistic cues that reflect

the linear-reliant nature of the text. Salvo, for example, begins nodes with phrases such as “Similarly...”; “A few years earlier...”; and “This is not a question of blame...”. All of these connective and transitional words and phrases imply knowledge of previous information. Not surprisingly, information presented in a linear path will naturally rely on conventional print-based notions of coherence.

As an interesting and significant exception, I found that Anderson’s webtext does not appear to follow this web-based convention associated with node construction, and in fact, it appears to challenge the wording of the assessment statement in this particular focus area. The use of video to present much of the content in this webtext establishes an automatic timeline for the chronological receipt of information; the textual nodes in the webtext are contingent upon the information presented in the video and therefore the convention does not appear to be viable (or necessary) given the main medium of presentation.

### **Visual Design**

The non-traditional visual design of a web-based text is one of the most immediately visible differences in appearance between print and online texts. The ability to manipulate typographic elements, color, and spatial organization introduces an aesthetic nature to web-based texts. In the same way that manipulation of form shifts readers’ focus from looking “through” a text to looking “at” it, the visual design of a text in the online medium can attract attention and contribute rhetorically to the text’s main argument. Moreover, the visual design can significantly affect the navigation and readability of a text. Several rhetorics of online writing suggest ways in which authors can manipulate typographic style and color in order to provide

readers with additional cues for navigating the text as well as an easier and memorable screen-reading experience. As shown in table 4.12, I found that a majority of the thirteen webtexts incorporate visual design elements in several key ways.

**Table 4.12: Findings from the Analysis: Visual Design**

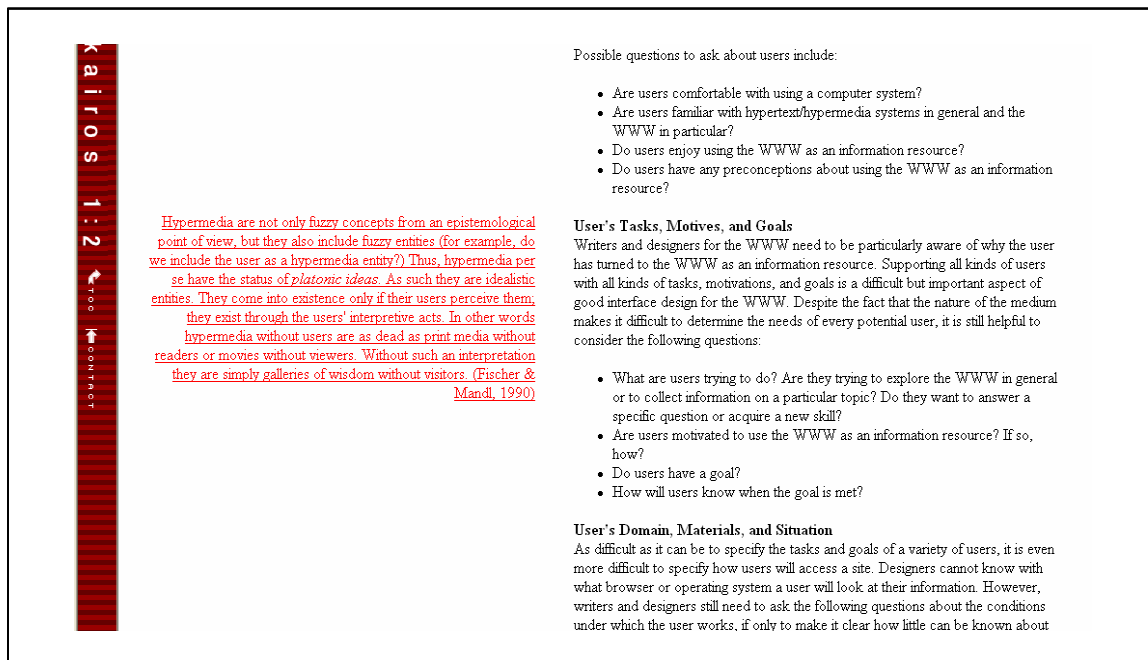
<b>Visual design</b>			
<b>a) Typographic style</b>	(1) The webtext incorporates typographic screen-reading strategies through a majority of nodes (e.g., bulleted points, pull-outs, bold/highlighted text, or other graphic presentations of text).	<b>9</b>	Cha Joh Bre Tho Whi Wal Wys And WID
	(2) The webtext does not incorporate typographic screen-reading strategies; it mainly follows traditional typographic conventions.	<b>4</b>	Dor Sal Zoe Sor
	(3) Other	<b>0</b>	
<b>b) Background and font color</b>	(1) The webtext is designed with a dark font (e.g., black text) on a light background (e.g., white background).	<b>8</b>	Cha Joh Bre Whi Wal Sal Zoe WID
	(2) The webtext is designed with non-conventional font and background colors that may or may not be consistent throughout each node.	<b>5</b>	Dor Tho Wys And Sor
	(3) Other	<b>0</b>	
<b>c) Link feedback</b>	(1) The link color shows feedback by changing consistently with link activation.	<b>8</b>	Cha Dor Joh Bre Tho Whi Wal Sal
	(2) The link color does not show feedback.	<b>2</b>	Zoe Sor
	(3) Other	<b>3</b>	Wys And WID

### *Typographic Style*

Some conventions of web-based texts are so common that they do not require special assessment. For example, short chunks of paragraphs appear to be the norm in webtexts as opposed to the longer paragraphs representative of traditional print-based scholarship. Such paragraph chunks facilitate ease of screen reading. Along this line, I found that all of the webtexts follow a consistent formatting style—left blocked, single spaced sentences with double spaces in between paragraphs—that is most likely a style feature established by *Kairos* editors. The design of these

paragraph chunks with additional white space between the paragraphs helps readers read more easily from the screen and demonstrates *Kairos's* and the authors' inclination toward accommodating readers in this environment. Other typographic styles appear to be less commonly used, but can be assessed for their function and value. Nine of the thirteen webtexts incorporate additional typographic screen reading strategies such as bulleted points, pull-outs, highlighted text, and rhetorical font changes. The strategies are not incorporated in every node of the webtexts; rather, authors rely on them to call attention to key points in the texts. For example, Chauss incorporates bulleted points to help readers scan a list of questions, as shown in example 4.31.

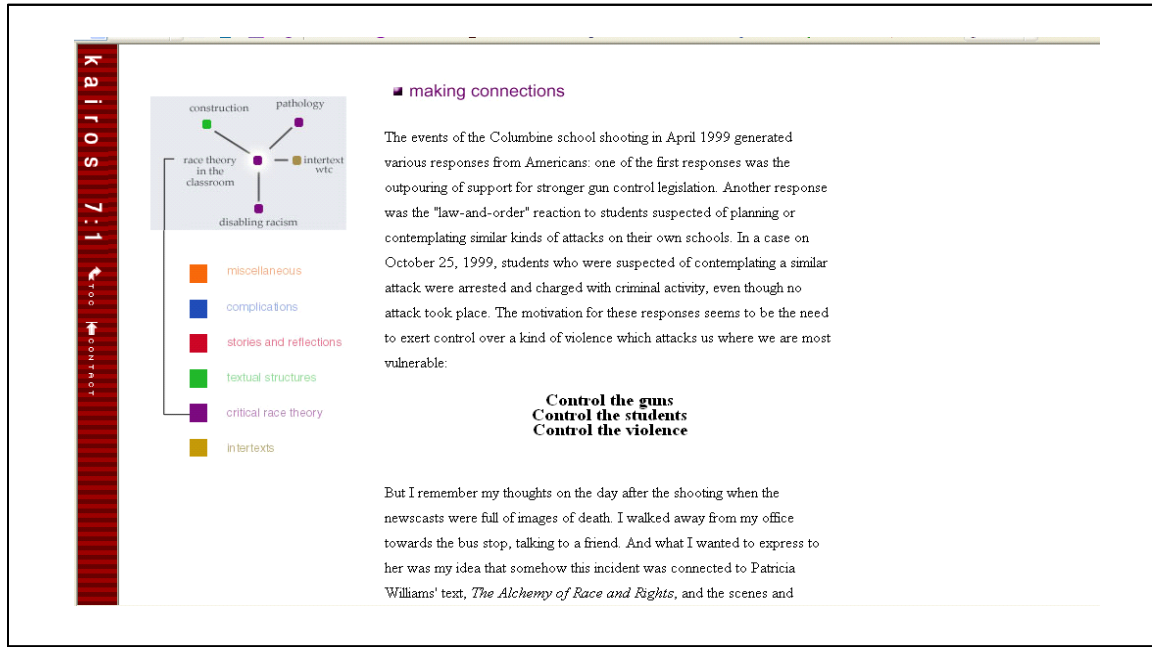
### Example 4.31: Screenshot of Chauss's Visual Design



In this node, Chauss separates a list of questions from the main prose by using bullet points. Readers can scan the questions more easily than if they were buried in traditional paragraph format. Walker also incorporates some font and spacing

manipulations to highlight key segments of her text, as represented by the screenshot in example 4.32.

### Example 4.32: Screenshot of Walker’s Visual Design

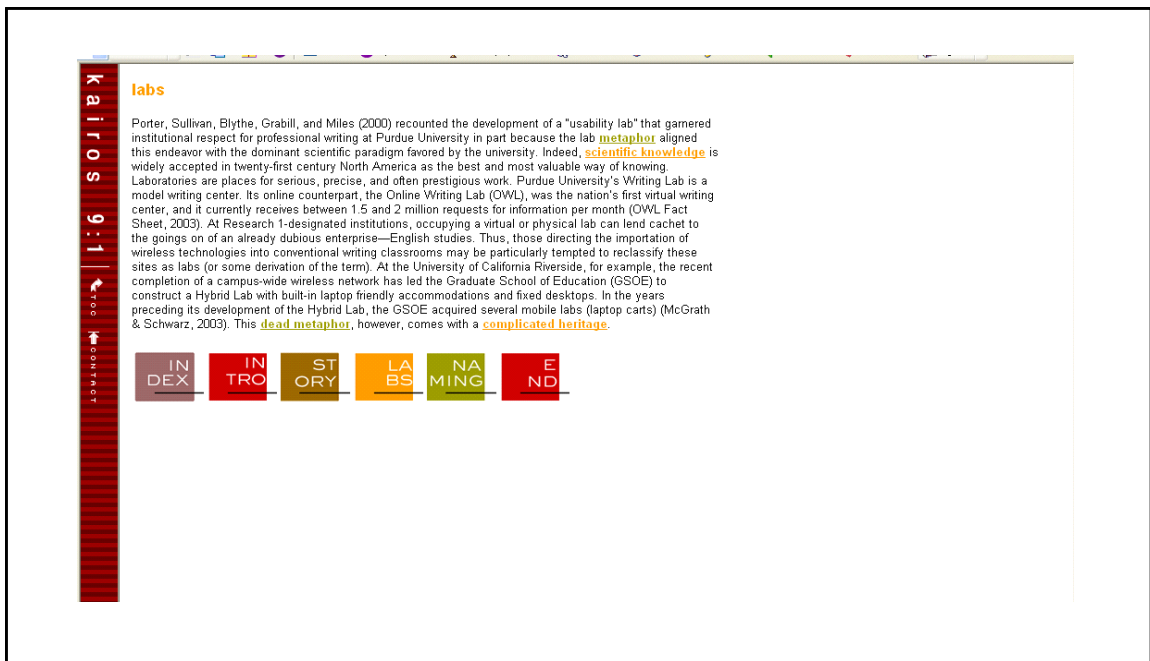


Walker uses the distinct font style and spacing to differentiate these phrases—“Control the guns; Control the students; Control the violence”—from the rest of the text in this node in a way that forces these phrases to resonate with the reader. As I mentioned in the documentation section, many of the authors also employ distinctive font styles and colors to indicate other authors’ quotations. The added value associated with the ability to manipulate visual elements in this environment is twofold. First, authors can accommodate readers by providing them with easier screen-reading experiences through the manipulation of color, layout, and typography as described above. Second, authors are able to manipulate color, layout, and typographic elements rhetorically in that it can enhance the message of the text.

## **Background and Font Color**

Additionally, I found that almost half of the webtexts incorporate font and background color changes within some nodes. In almost all of these cases, color is used rhetorically as a navigational aid. For example, Zoetewey uses a color scheme to help readers keep track of the main strands of the argument and the way in which the content is arranged and connected. Example 4.33 shows a screenshot of a node that illustrates the color pattern.

### **Example 4.33: Screenshot of Zoetewey’s Visual Design**



In this node, each main strand of nodes—index, introduction, story, labs, naming, end—is designed with a distinct color. The “labs” node is represented by the color yellow; the title of the node, the link within the navigation matrix at the bottom of the screen, and the embedded links that are sub-nodes to this main node are also yellow. However, the link to “dead metaphor” (seen in the last sentence of the node) is green, which indicates that readers who choose to follow this link will move to the

“naming” strand of the argument. In this strategy, readers can conceptualize the overall organization and intended association of ideas within the text. Similarly, Thompson uses color to signify unique segments of her argument and to assist with navigation. Chauss describes the rhetorical power associated with the ability to manipulate color and other visual design elements in the online medium:

Designing the user interface for a WWW document involves making decisions about colors, images, backgrounds, and navigational icons, as well as making limited decisions about typography and layout. These elements can draw the user’s attention, assist the user in identifying paths through the document, and improve the aesthetics and visual interest of the site. These elements can also distract and overwhelm the user, increasing cognitive load and drawing attention away from the information provided by the text. Making wise decisions about the inclusion of graphical elements is an important part of user-centered interface design.

Rather than incorporating color in “merely decorative” ways, Chauss suggests that readers think carefully about the choices they make toward accommodating readers and therefore enhancing the potential for adherence to the argument. Again, I found that several webtexts demonstrate a conscious and responsible use of color in this manner.

### ***Link Feedback***

One particular convention of color usage recommended by several rhetorics of online writing is for link color to change to a new, consistent color once the link is activated. This strategy allows readers to keep track of the links already visited as well as the links left to be explored. Eight of the thirteen webtexts adhere to this convention. Those webtexts that do not follow this convention most often are designed with iconographic navigational devices rather than link text, which do not



indicate activation through color changes (see, for example, Sorapure, WIDE, and Wysocki).

Arguably, these changes in typographic style, color, and spacing cannot be as easily and inexpensively incorporated in print-based journals. Moreover, the screen is a much more visual medium than the text. Readers are accustomed to seeing online discourse with these kinds of colors and design. Sites that do not take advantage of the ability to manipulate typographic elements might even be considered antiquated and have less credibility. Based on my findings, clearly, a majority of these webtexts rely on the rhetorical value of interface design elements in this environment.

### **Summary of Findings**

The picture of online scholarship that emerges from my analysis shows a transitional body of discourse that both is tethered to key print-based conventions and that pushes beyond tradition through experimentation with the unique form-based allowances of the online medium. My findings indicate that adherence to certain conventions—incorporation of clear goals, documentation, and formal tone—remains consistent regardless of the medium. However, a majority of the analyzed webtexts extend traditional scholarly conventions most significantly through changes in formal structure; specifically, their formal designs influence the very ways in which the function of traditional conventions are met and often necessitate adherence to new conventions. By taking advantage of the unique value-added allowances of the medium—multi-linearity, formal enactment of content, contextualization, and inclusion of multi-media—the webtexts arguably enhance the rhetorical power of their arguments and expand the traditional standards of scholarship. The significance

of this gradual transformation and expansion of the definition of “scholarly work” for the subfield of Computers and Writing is discussed in the final chapter.

## Chapter 5:

### Implications and Future Research

#### Summary of the Argument

Susan Baxter, an online studies scholar, effectively summarizes one of the main issues motivating the analysis conducted in this study:<sup>43</sup>

New media scholars seem to be caught in a catch-22. Scholars who want to create new media—digital scholarship that uses the various modes afforded by new technology in rhetorically significant ways—run the risk of their work not being taken as serious scholarship because it differs from the traditional arguments other scholars are trained to read and interpret. However, when new media scholars stick to publishing simply scholarship about new media, with its print-based, linear, easily recognizable argument structure intact, it amounts to a tacit nod that somehow new media is inferior to print. (3)

Baxter's statement, written in 2007, demonstrates the challenge Computers and Writing scholars continue to face with respect to creating and publishing web-based online texts and submitting this nontraditional work as evidence of scholarly achievement for tenure, promotion, and review purposes.<sup>44</sup> The challenge, presented in chapter 1, is clear: How can work that does not resemble traditional scholarship be valued as such? More to the point, how far can texts diverge from traditionally accepted conventions and still be valued as scholarship? Tenure, promotion, and review committee participants and online journal decision makers are similarly challenged to justify why and how these new kinds of "texts" do or do not merit the

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<sup>43</sup> Baxter uses the term "new media scholarship" in this quote in the same way that this dissertation refers to "web-based scholarship," namely, discourse that uses the allowances of the medium in "rhetorically significant ways." However, the term "new media scholarship" used later in this chapter refers to texts that make meaning in non-textual ways.

<sup>44</sup> Baxter confirms Ball's assertion that a majority of the published online scholarship is "scholarship about new media texts" rather than "new media scholarship" in part due to scholars' concerns about the potential lack of acceptance of these more experimental texts ("Show, Not Tell" 404).

label “scholarship” as well as the requisite credit for scholarly publication required for advancement in the field. Online texts that take advantage of the unique allowances of the medium (e.g., multi-linear structural designs, formal enactment of content, contextualization, and incorporation of multi-media) are indeed new forms of rhetorical presentation that require new assessment approaches. This dissertation addresses the very need to define the characteristics of “online scholarship” in relation to traditional print scholarship—namely, how online texts fail to meet, meet, and/or extend the traditional conventions that signify scholarly work. To respond to this need, this study uses a tailored assessment tool that accounts for the differences between the print and online environments.

In chapter 2, I review several factors involved in the debate over the scholarly value of online work. The MLA and CCCC, two governing associations in the field of English Studies, point to the need for new assessment frameworks to account for work being constructed and presented in the online medium, particularly as scholars move toward online alternatives to traditional print publishing. However, their recommendations do not directly address how the significant differences between print and online writing affect the reception of such work as “scholarly.” Additional research has considered the peer review process as an indicator of scholarly value regardless of the medium of publication. However, it has not suggested on what grounds peer reviewers determine the value of these new kinds of texts; these “standards” are implicit in the publishing decisions of editors and reviewers. Moreover, recent research focuses on assessment strategies for new media texts that clearly move beyond the relatively familiar form of the scholarly journal publication.

While this work is valuable, it bypasses the necessary first step of understanding the important changes from print-based to web-based writing; further, it bypasses the next step of determining an initial set of standards prior to assessing the substantial differences that occur in media-based work that makes meaning in non-textual and, therefore, much less recognizable ways.

In chapter 3, I identify the method I employed for developing an assessment tool that accounts for both the traditional and the hypertextual qualities found in webtexts. The assessment tool provides the framework for a rhetorical analysis of a select subset of *Kairos* webtexts, those that are labeled “best” for particular years. In chapter 4, I present the findings from the analysis, which renders a listing of these webtexts’ common characteristics. In addition, I discuss a significant factor in legitimizing the unique forms of the text as scholarly; specifically, I suggest that a rhetorical value is added through the use of the allowances of the medium, and that this added-value distinguishes online texts as legitimate forms of presenting research that extend the genre-based definition and parameters of traditional scholarship. The results of this study contribute to a developing understanding of the scholarly nature of web-based journal publications. Additionally, the findings lead to the creation of a tentative heuristic that tenure, promotion, and review participants, journal decision makers, and scholars in general can use as guidance for constructing and assessing web-based journal publications. In the remainder of this chapter, I address in more detail the synthesis and implications of the findings, the significance of the study, and recommendations for future research.

## **Synthesis of the Findings**

While the webtexts in this study appear to meet traditional scholarly conventions regarding content, they often move beyond traditional scholarly conventions regarding form by incorporating the unique allowances of the medium. Moreover, incorporation of the unique allowances appears to provide an added rhetorical value to the presentation of content in this environment. My findings begin to distinguish this form of online publication as a distinct and transitional genre of scholarly writing in the subfield of Computers and Writing. The following four statements summarize the common characteristics of webtexts from which defining characteristics of online scholarship as a genre both related to and different from traditional print texts can be drawn.

### **Summary Statements of the Findings**

*These webtexts follow traditional scholarly conventions regarding content.*

My findings indicate that the webtexts analyzed for this study meet standards of content established by print-based texts. The majority of the webtexts incorporate clear goals in prominent, opening positions of the text; adequate preparation through contextualizing reviews of literature; appropriate methods based on a comparison to those employed in print-based scholarship; documentation to support main points of the text; and a generally formal, academic tone. The arguments in these texts tend to be logically supported and well-written with clear, field-specific prose. It is never the case, based on my analysis of this limited subset, that these webtexts subordinate significant content to technological bells and whistles—no matter how the webtexts may “look” upon first glance, particularly by readers new to the online environment. By extension, the unique forms that webtexts can assume as well as the more

dependent relationship developed between form and content undoubtedly challenge the ease with which “what” is presented (content) can be assessed separately from “how” it is presented (form). In determining the characteristics that represent the current state of online scholarship, it would seem reasonable to assert, based on the findings, that in order for online texts to be valued as legitimate scholarship, the content must meet traditional standards. In other words, even the most technologically advanced forms of presentation will not be an adequate substitution for sound scholarly content.

*These webtexts diverge from traditional scholarly conventions regarding form.* The most obvious divergence from traditional scholarly conventions occurs through the various forms that webtexts can assume based on the incorporation of unique allowances of the online environment. The ability to manipulate form directly influences the ways in which content is presented and received, and most obviously changes the traditional scholarly “look” of the text. Instead of a single, linear document with key sub-head divisions and consecutive, long paragraphs, content in the analyzed webtexts is often subdivided into short, discrete nodes. These nodes are connected in various ways and made accessible through links that offer multiple paths of movement through the text. Unquestionably, traditional notions of linearity and coherence are disrupted in this environment. However, my analysis indicates that the functioning of traditional conventions is often met in non-conventional ways through the rhetorical use of the allowances of the medium. For example, these webtexts enable the development of coherence by providing strategies of repetition and contextualization within nodes in order to help readers conceptualize the text as a

unified argument. Additionally, the inclusion of visual and textual guides or webviews that show the extent of the web as well as the connections among main ideas provides another way in which readers can follow the argument. (Several other divergences are discussed below regarding emerging web-based conventions.) Arguably, these webtexts meet traditional goals of scholarship, albeit in non-traditional ways. An understanding of this point is necessary for web-based texts to be valued as legitimate scholarly contributions to the field.

*These webtexts incur an added value through the use of the online medium's allowances.* Not only do the webtexts in this study meet several key traditional scholarly goals, but they often exceed those goals through the incorporation of the unique form-based allowances of the medium. My findings indicate that four unique allowances are incorporated in a majority of these webtexts and that their incorporation provides an added value for enhancing the rhetorical effectiveness of the texts' main arguments. First, the ability to design a multi-linear structure enables authors to provide multiple paths and associations among content and concurrently allows readers ultimately to control the reception of information. Moreover, multi-linear designs create an enhanced potential for readers to discover additional meaning that emerges from the juxtaposition of certain nodes. Second, multi-linear structural designs enable authors to create forms that enact—underlie, exemplify, demonstrate—the content of the text, thereby providing an extra layer of meaning and increasing potential adherence to the argument. Third, the division of content in discrete nodes and the connection of these nodes through various links enable enhanced contextualization not possible in print-based texts. Linked content



becomes contextualizing support for key areas of the argument and helps to provide readers with additional information—definitions, illustrations, relevant digressions—that can enhance the persuasive potential of the argument and meet the needs of readers who require or are interested in additional layers of information. Moreover, the contextualizing information can be vast; the webtexts often incorporate links to full online sources, providing readers with primary source material to consult. Finally the ability to incorporate multi-media such as video, audio, or animation adds dimension and can enhance the pathos of an argument.

*These webtexts follow emerging web-based conventions necessitated by the form-based divergences.* My findings indicate that the webtexts I analyzed follow several emerging web-based conventions governing effective writing in the online environment. Adherence to these conventions is particularly helpful in accommodating readers who may be unfamiliar with the unique forms of presentation. The extent to which a unique form of presentation affects a reader's ability to access the main content of the text depends on the effectiveness of the author's navigational strategy. These webtexts incorporate several key elements that contribute to an effective navigation design: navigation instructions, introductory or overview nodes that establish the goals of the text and context for the argument; webviews that indicate the extent of the web and the connections among main content nodes; meaningful link text that provides readers with information regarding the content of potential node selections; contextualizing nodes that connect content to the main argument; and visual cues that provide consistently placed navigation devices and indicate the history of link activation. Additionally, these webtexts appear to

accommodate readers by adhering to several web-based conventions regarding the visual design of the text. In order to ease the screen reading experience, authors divide content into short chunks of text with additional spacing between paragraphs; use a dark font on a light background; and alter elements such as font style, color, and layout in order to emphasize important content. Again, while the incorporation of these elements changes the traditional look of the text, the ultimate goals of traditional scholarly work are achieved.

### **Relating the Findings to Previous Studies**

My findings both disrupt and confirm previous assertions regarding online scholarship. Several scholars have attested to a scarcity of “native webtexts”—texts that are created to take advantage of the affordances of the medium and move beyond print-based frameworks of writing (Ball “Show, Not Tell,” Burbules, Peterson, Katz, Krause). On the contrary, my findings indicate that a majority of the analyzed webtexts incorporate the unique allowances of the medium and do so in rhetorically effective ways. In concession, they do not approach the parameters of native hypertexts—truly exploratory, open-ended structures. Several hypertext theorists have argued that truly native hypertextual forms may not be the most effective venues for scholarly argument (Kolb, Landow *Hypertext*, Brent). The use of guided structures and textually-based arguments, for example, demonstrates that writers exploit the medium cautiously and with attention toward accommodating readers who are still new to this environment. Only two of the analyzed webtexts (Wysocki and Anderson) move beyond textually-based arguments to “new media scholarship”—texts that incorporate multi-media to present content and, therefore, make meaning in

non-textual ways. Ball certainly is correct in her assumption regarding the minimal presence of these more divergent forms of online scholarship (“Show, Not Tell”; see also Burbules). Both of the webtexts were published in the latter half of the ten-year period of study; a glance at the most current issues of *Kairos* indicates that these new media texts are a growing trend. I discuss the need to assess these texts with different criteria in my recommendations for future research.

My findings also confirm key assertions regarding *Kairos* webtexts. Recall that *Kairos* describes their publication goals on the cover page of the journal (cited earlier in this study): “With *Kairos*, we seek to push boundaries in academic publishing at the same time we strive to bridge the gap between print and digital publishing cultures.” Indeed, my findings indicate that the analyzed webtexts “bridge the gap” by drawing from the influences of both print and web media. Certain core features of traditional scholarship (e.g., content, arrangement, documentation, and tone) are retained. Additionally, new features emerge that account for the form-based changes associated with online writing. An anonymous *Kairos* reviewer of Joyce Walker’s most recent webtext titled “Hyper.Activity” provides a representative description of this type of scholarship: “This is a kind of bridge or transitional text in which the author is making strategic and controlled use of the new media affordances while echoing print-based practices just enough to avoid alienating traditional readers.”<sup>45</sup> The adjective “transitional” is particularly fitting for these texts that

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<sup>45</sup> Walker’s “Hyper.Activity” (2005) was not included in the analyzed subset of webtexts. However, this text incorporates a useful strategy of contextualization—namely, a link to an internal node of the text offering direct quotations about her work from reviewers as well as her response (defense and agreement) to the review statements. This inclusion not only provides readers with additional context and clarity regarding the author’s position and perspective, but it also exposes both some of the author’s writing process and the reviewers’ assessment processes.

combine elements of print-based scholarship with elements of web-based scholarship in order to help readers literally transition to from print to this new reading experience. Additionally, this description highlights a significant feature of online scholarship with implications for Computers and Writing scholars who attempt to publish and earn credit for this type of work—namely, the element of “safe experimentation.” Writers of online texts appear to push boundaries enough to gain some of the value of the unique allowances of the medium, but not so much that their texts risk losing recognition as serious scholarship. For example, a majority of the webtexts offer a guided navigation option (in addition to a multi-linear option) in order to accommodate those readers who prefer a more familiar, linear reading experience. The ways in which authors incorporate the unique allowances of the medium are crucial to the successful presentations of arguments in the online environment. The ability to engage with the content of a text depends on the accessibility of the form; if the form moves too far beyond readers’ conceptual frameworks, the content may be inaccessible.

### **Implications of the Study**

My findings from the analysis respond to the study’s research questions and help to achieve its goals, which are to identify common characteristics of online scholarship; determine the extent to which these characteristics fail to meet, meet, and/or exceed traditional scholarly standards; and consequently articulate more explicit assessment criteria for these non-traditional forms of scholarship. These findings have several significant implications for both assessing and constructing

online scholarship, particularly for the purposes of advancement within the subfield of Computers and Writing.

Readers new to these texts understandably question the scholarly value of this type of work. Divergence from traditional notions of form disrupts readers' expectations. Certainly some forms disrupt more than others. The form of Wysocki's "A Bookling Monument," for example, is so unexpected and unfamiliar that it risks losing the audience, as Ball explains: "Figuring out how to navigate this text may pose a large enough obstacle for some readers to keep them from entering it, let alone engaging with it in order to make meaning from its overt design" ("A New Media Reading Strategy" 23). Lack of engagement tends to be equated with lack of value; readers often do not value what they do not understand. In this study, I found that only two of the analyzed webtexts truly extend readers' frameworks based on their use of non-textual elements to make meaning.

The majority of the webtexts I analyzed arguably disrupt readers' expectations, but they do so in ways that are recognizably scholarly. First, readers must suspend their need for conventional elements (e.g., transitions, signposts, headings, and linear text) as they move through the text and instead rely on non-conventional strategies motivated by the changes in form (e.g., node contextualization, webviews, and explicit navigation directions) and create their own coherent reading of the text. Online texts require more active readers, who are responsible for choosing a path through multi-linear texts and deciding which digressions or sub-nodes to follow. Additionally, readers are expected to "read between the lines" and fill in the gaps created by the juxtaposition of content nodes

and visual elements. Online scholarship, in this view, becomes a more active negotiation between reader and writer. Readers, particularly those in positions of judgment, can more easily find the value in these texts once they become conscious of the ways in which their needs and expectations as readers of print-based texts are met and transformed in this environment.

Those readers in positions of judgment—either as tenure, promotion, and review participants and/or journal decision makers—can benefit from being able to justify and articulate why and how a text that deviates from familiar print-based standards is, in fact, scholarly. Clear and explicit assessment criteria for discussing the elements of value within these texts can provide reviewers with the necessary tools to make more standardized judgments regarding the quality of the work.

Writers, too, must revise their approaches to constructing texts in the online medium. They must consider how the incorporation of the unique allowances of the medium and adherence to the emerging web-based conventions can effectively enhance the rhetorical situation of their argument in order to produce a successful example of online scholarship. My findings from the study provide scholars with an initial set of standards for constructing online texts that can be valued as scholarship.

Furthermore, as a way of extending the findings of this study to other webtexts, they lead to the development of a heuristic that tenure, promotion, and review participants can use to assess the scholarly value of online journal publications. In figure 5.1, I present an example heuristic that engages the core questions of this study, thereby representing the common characteristics of successful online scholarship. I envision

that an online text assessed by such a heuristic ideally would demonstrate several if not all of these characteristics.

**Figure 5.1: An Example Heuristic for Assessing the Scholarly Value of Online Texts**

### **An Example Heuristic for Assessing the Scholarly Value of Online Texts**

#### **Content**

*Considers whether the content of the text meets traditional standards of scholarship.*

- Does the text establish clear goals within an introductory, prominent node?
- Does the text incorporate documentation to support the logical appeal of the argument?
- Does the text contextualize the main argument and demonstrate its significance within the field by offering a review of relevant literature?
- Does the author employ a method acceptable in the field?
- Does the text establish a formal tone throughout a majority of content-based nodes?

#### **Web-based allowances**

*Considers whether the text incorporates the allowances of the medium to enhance the rhetorical effect of the argument as well as to justify its construction within the online environment.*

- Does the text divide content into discrete nodes?
- Does the text move beyond print-based forms of presentation and provide a multi-linear navigation option (either visually guided or fully multi-linear) for readers to select their own path based on their interests and needs?
- Does the text provide internal and external linked contextualizing nodes that enhance the content?
- Does the form enact or exemplify the content in some way?
- Does the text incorporate multi-media to enhance or present the content?

#### **Emerging conventions**

*Considers whether the text follows emerging conventions of web-based writing in order to accommodate the new reading experience (e.g., in terms of navigation, coherence, and screen-reading).*

- Does the text provide navigation instructions (particularly if it is extensive) comprised of multiple nodes and designed with a multi-linear structure?
- Does the text include a textual or graphical webview that shows the extent of the web, indicates the connections among nodes, and provides direct link access to main content nodes?
- Does the text incorporate an effective rhetoric of link text?
- Do the text's nodes include contextualizing information that connects to the main argument?
- Does the author provide a rationale for the formal design of the text?
- Does the text incorporate visual elements (e.g., icons, graphics, and images) to assist with navigation and/or to enhance the content?
- Does the text provide feedback for link activation as a way to enhance navigation?



The questions that comprise the example heuristic reflect my major findings from the analysis: the finding regarding content is encompassed in the content segment of the heuristic; the findings regarding formal divergence and added value are encompassed in the web-based allowances segment; and the finding regarding adherence to emerging conventions is encompassed in the emerging conventions segment. The questions in this heuristic offer a starting point for determining the scholarly value of online publications. It needs to be field-tested with numerous texts and refined in order to certify its practical value for readers and writers of online scholarship. At minimum, it contributes to the ongoing dialogue regarding the nature and legitimacy of work produced and presented in and for the online environment.

### **Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research**

The limitations of my study are addressed as implicit recommendations for future research. First and foremost, this study is limited in scope. The subset of webtexts that I selected as the data set for the study—the *Kairos* “Best Webtext” award winners and finalists—is a rich group for analyzing and identifying common characteristics. However, a much larger group of texts published in various reputable online journals would help to widen the scope and perhaps reveal interesting comparable findings that can broaden and validate a set of defining characteristics for scholarly web-based online journal publications. Moreover, in this study, I intentionally exclude collaborative webtexts in which the collaboration involves multiple authors contributing individually composed texts to a unified web—similar to an online edited compilation. These collaborative forms require an extended

assessment strategy that accounts for the ways in which links among the individual texts can enhance the meaning and rhetorical impact of the arguments.

Second, the assessment tool I construct and employ in my analysis offers a starting point, not a definitive set of statements for analyzing all types of online scholarship. As trends in online scholarship move toward new media studies, scholars will need to develop revised assessment strategies; the current assessment tool does not account for texts that make meaning in non-textual ways. I often assessed certain characteristics in the Wysocki and Anderson webtexts, for example as exceptions because they are the only two analyzed webtexts that make meaning in non-textual as well as textual ways. Assessing elements like tone, for example, is difficult for readers who lack an understanding of how tone can be established through images, audio, or video. Recent literature regarding new media studies has begun to address issues of assessment (Ball “A New Media Reading Strategy,” Wysocki, Sorapure, Joyce Walker “Hyper.Activity”). However, more studies like the one I conducted in this dissertation can help scholars identify some common components of new media texts, relate the value of these presentation approaches to familiar scholarly goals, and explain how new media texts extend even more the parameters of scholarship. Again, in this dissertation I identify some commonalities of web-based texts that can be used as a springboard for assessment of new media texts.

Additionally, some of the statements in the assessment tool require a more in-depth analysis of the function and value of certain conventions. For example, my analysis of appropriate methods should consider whether research methods are or

should be chosen according to different criteria when the text is web-based and the relationship of form and content becomes a factor in constructing the text. In other words, questions such as the following should be addressed: Should the consideration of method apply only to the text's research methods or also to the design choices for developing the web-based project? Furthermore, should an analysis of method then apply to the formal design as well as the content? As another example, an analysis of visual design might address how a text's visual elements support the writer's rhetorical purpose. Visual rhetoric scholar Pamela Takayoshi asserts: "The design of a text can be produced in such a way that the rhetoric of its page design supports the text's written arguments, giving writers more control over the effects those texts produce on readers." Discussions of page design lie outside the jurisdiction of traditional processes of composition; however, authors of web-based writing must consider the impact of their design decisions as part of the construction process. Because the creation of these kinds of texts requires specialized and continually updated knowledge of new and evolving web software, not every scholar will be able to produce these kinds of texts. Some questions to consider in light of the trends toward this type of scholarship include: Will this work lead to the creation of new forms of collaboration where teams of designers/writers co-construct the final products? Further, how would this kind of collaborative work be judged for tenure, promotion, and review purposes?

Moreover, my assessment tool does not directly address the issue of "significant scholarly contribution"—a major factor in determining the publication value of traditional scholarship. Certainly, reviewers can assess whether the content

of a webtext contributes to the scholarly conversation by traditional markers such as the author's review of literature and statement of the "gap" that the study purports to fill. However, determining whether a webtext is, indeed, a significant scholarly contribution is complicated by the need to explore what, specifically, constitutes a significant scholarly contribution in web-based form. If experimentation is a notable characteristic of web-based texts, to what extent must the form be experimental for the text to be considered a significant scholarly contribution? If the content of the text is deemed a significant contribution, but the form presents nothing new, can the webtext as a whole be considered a significant contribution to what can be called the genre of online scholarship? These and other questions should be addressed in future studies.

In my analysis, I discussed the changes in form motivated by the unique allowances of the medium have been discussed in some detail in the analysis. However, additional research might address the new argumentation strategies required of texts that incorporate multi-linear structural designs and non-textual modes of presenting content. Various hypertext scholars have asked whether hypertext is an effective medium for argument (Kolb, Brent, Carter, Ingraham, Hawk, Snyder). Brent acknowledges, for example:

The essence of rhetorical argument is control—not intellectual tyranny but the ability to have a predictable effect. Even when the goal is not to foist a point of view on another but simply to create an image of the world as one sees it, the rhetor must be able to ration out the argument she will make in order to present that point of view. Points of view are expressed in chains of arguments in which ideas come first, second, third in order to achieve maximum argumentative weight.

This linear sequence is often disrupted in web-based texts, and so scholars are justified in questioning whether the form-based changes in online texts can truly present a sustainable argument that can potentially secure the adherence of readers. Carter addresses these very concerns in his dissertation, as I reviewed in chapter 3. From his analysis of four authors' hypertext writing processes, he is able to identify several new approaches to argumentation including, for example, "encapsulating the full argument within each reason, so that the entire argument is composed of many sub-(but complete-) arguments" and offering a "suggested argument structure" to readers so that the strongest arguments are in a "preferred path" and the weaker ones are available for interested readers to explore (13). The identification of these and other strategies of argumentation in multi-linear structures will add to the list of common characteristics that define online scholarship.

An additional limitation of the assessment tool and the subsequent example heuristic I presented in figure 5.1 is that both undoubtedly will require revision over time in response to the pace of technological advancement. Walker notes that work in the online writing space is "still in the process of becoming" ("Hyper.Activity"). The current state of online scholarship can be defined to an extent, but it will need measures in place to account for changes in software and writers' continued experimentation with new technology. Indeed, the limitations of computer software, specifically web-writing programs that enable and disable certain authorial choices, also should be addressed in a study of online scholarship. Identifying and verifying core aspects of online scholarship will be crucial to the successful use of such a tool for the purpose of scholarly assessment.

## **Concluding Remarks**

My study reveals that a representative subset of web-based texts published in a Computers and Writing online journal can be valued as legitimate scholarly work according to an extended, but traditionally-grounded view of “scholarship.” My identification and rhetorical analysis of common characteristics shows that these texts adhere to traditional scholarly conventions associated with content, but they often diverge from traditional conventions associated with form. These changes in formal presentation based on incorporating the unique allowances of the online medium do not appear to detract from the effective communication of the content and, instead, often enhance the rhetorical effectiveness of the arguments offered in these texts, thereby distinguishing them as valuable contributions and extending the parameters of “online scholarship” to include emerging web-based conventions. The identification of non-traditional and traditional elements that constitute web-based online journal publications in Computers and Writing helps to establish practical criteria—such as the example heuristic in figure 5.1—for assessing the scholarly value of texts composed and presented in the online medium. Such a heuristic, as it is further tested and refined, may prove useful for tenure, promotion, and review participants and journal decision makers, who require a more standardized means of assessing these new forms of scholarly presentation as evidence of scholarship. My study is a first step for understanding the scholarly nature of the web-based online journal publication in the Computers and Writing subfield. More research into the evolving nature of online texts—particularly the increasingly popular new media texts that incorporate non-textual elements—is necessary to understand both the impact of technological advances and the bolder authorial experimentation with the unique

allowances of the medium in the genre of online scholarship. Such understanding eventually may be extended beyond the Computers and Writing subfield more broadly to English Studies in general.

Recognizing the early history of caution with respect to online publication, I believe, based on evidence from my research and analysis, that a trend is clear: A growing number of Computers and Writing scholars will engage in reading and interpreting others' web-based online publications as well as producing these types of texts themselves. Academic tension regarding print-based and web-based scholarship will dissipate as each of these new media continues to overlap and inform each other. The result of my dissertation—defining the characteristics of web-based scholarship in relation to print scholarship through a focus on web-based journal publications—should contribute to this optimistic academic development.

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