# WRITING BEYOND
# THE UNIVERSITY

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# Writing Beyond the University

Preparing Lifelong Learners for Lifewide Writing

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*Edited by Julia Bleakney, Jessie L. Moore, and Paula Rosinski*

ELON UNIVERSITY | CENTER FOR Engaged Learning

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# INTRODUCTION TO WRITING BEYOND THE UNIVERSITY AND THIS COLLECTION

**Julia Bleakney, Paula Rosinski, and Jessie L. Moore**
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Writing is an integral part of engaged learning within and beyond the university, across the entirety of one's life. Students write for classes, of course, but they also write in academic contexts that focus on transitions to spaces beyond the classroom, such as when they write at internship sites or keep a practicum log. Writing also happens in workplaces and civic spaces. We write in our daily lives, often for non-obligatory purposes, when we reply to social media posts, journal, or engage in personal interests like contributing to fanfiction sites or sharing travel tips on a blog. Writers also routinely move among these "beyond the university" spaces—sometimes daily or even hourly—so discussions of writing beyond the university must attend not only to what happens within these unique spaces for writing but also to how writers navigate among those spaces.

Writing beyond the university matters:

- Because it pervades students' academic and co-curricular experiences, and they are often asked to engage in complex writing activities with little to no instruction;
- Because it's one of the primary ways individuals make sense of new information and convey their understanding to others;
- Because students report a connection between having opportunities to write in lots of different ways in college and their perception of success with workplace writing;
- Because alumni write extensively in the workforce, across many different professions; and

- Because alumni report that being an effective writer in the workplace helps them feel confident and competent.

Faculty and staff want students to be successful critical thinkers and engaged citizens; administrators want students to be well prepared for the workforce and want their institutions to respond to societal and employer concerns about the value of a college education; and students want to find meaningful, well-compensated work. And just as we know that writing beyond the university matters, we also now know there are strategies and pedagogies that support students/alumni to be more effective writers in these spaces and that teach them to transfer what they've learned about writing in academic and co-curricular contexts to writing beyond the university contexts. Since we know there are strategies and pedagogies that help students transfer their writerly knowledge among these spaces, we also should design professional development opportunities to teach faculty and staff these strategies and pedagogies, so they can integrate them into the learning experiences they design for students.

This collection features multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional research that examines this myriad of ways students and alumni write beyond the university (or college) classroom, how college faculty (i.e., academic staff, in some geographic contexts) and staff can prepare students to be lifelong and lifewide writers, and how administrators can support those efforts. In this introduction to the collection, we use three composite case studies of writers to illustrate what writing beyond the university can entail and to explore how two generations of research have studied that writing. We also briefly preview the collection's other chapters.

## Writers Move among These Spaces

Fictional, composite stories about three different writers highlight the variety, the value, and the impact of the different kinds of writing beyond the university that lifelong and lifewide learners may encounter.

Sam is an undergraduate student majoring in public health at a large public university in the United States. They use they/them pronouns. Since they're doing a work placement this term (like an internship), they're enrolled in a course that supports their integration of learning with this work experience. During the school year Sam also works in the campus writing center and keeps a journal to help them reflect on personal and work challenges, successes, and relationships.

Malcolm, our second writer, uses he/his pronouns, and is an early-career IT professional in a temporary position in Spain. He earned his undergraduate degree in the United States at a medium-sized liberal arts institution, where he double-majored in professional writing and history. Malcolm wrote a lot in college in classes for his majors, at an internship, and for independent research with a faculty mentor. He writes a food and travel blog for fun, something he's been doing a lot more lately, especially while living in Spain.

Our third writer is Donna, a mid-career professional who uses she/her pronouns. She's in mid-management in a marketing firm in the United States. Donna earned her undergraduate degree in a country in western Europe, and while in college she did not receive a lot of explicit writing instruction. In her job she supervises early-career professionals and student interns, who are in work placements similar to Sam's work placement/internship. For fun and to feel connected to her community, she helps write a monthly newsletter for her church.

Imagine that our three writers have been asked to write a memo (or are supervising a group of novice writers as they write memos). Memos take different forms, but they're typically short documents used to share information internally within an organization or externally to stakeholders. Given each writer's different individual life and educational experiences, we'll briefly describe how they each respond to this same writing situation.

Sam, the undergraduate student, approached the task of writing a memo for their work placement just like they would write an academic essay because that's what they are familiar with. Sam

started off with an elaborate introduction in an inverted pyramid format, concluding with the main point. Then they wrote six additional dense paragraphs, with each one elaborating on a sub-point. Their supervisor told Sam that the memo was too wordy, included too much analysis, used too many long paragraphs, and failed to put the main point up front. Their supervisor also said the memo didn't even look like a memo—it looked like a school essay. That evening, Sam journaled about this memo-writing experience as they tried to figure out how the previous writing strategies they used in college writing assignments that got them high grades seemed to have failed them miserably at work.

When Malcolm starts writing a memo for work, he's feeling confident because he's had some experience writing this genre in his professional writing classes and in his internship. He knows the general format and purposes of a memo, and he knows enough to understand that context matters and that different companies will have their own unique expectations for memos. And when he did independent research his junior year, Malcolm learned how to work one-to-one with his faculty mentor, making him somewhat more comfortable approaching his supervisor for help. However, he's writing for a company in Spain now, and he doesn't fully understand the workplace culture or writing expectations, and he doesn't fully know how to work collaboratively with his team members or how to ask his supervisor the right questions: should he ask for example memos? Should he ask general questions, or specific questions about whether the memo should be summative and concise, or include background information and detailed statistics? Malcolm finds himself wishing that writing this memo was as easy and as fun as writing his food and travel blog.

When Donna started writing a newsletter for her church, she struggled with hitting the right tone, as she was so used to writing efficient marketing materials. She reflected on what she found challenging about writing the newsletter, which was a new genre for her and addressed a more informal audience than she was used to. As this was self-sponsored, non-obligatory writing for her, she

initially struggled to understand where to go for guidance. She eventually read through previous newsletters and talked to previous writers of the newsletter until she figured out an approach that was appropriate. When Donna started supervising a group of new employees and interns, her struggles with writing this newsletter helped her understand the challenges the newer employees and interns were experiencing when writing memos for the first time. She related to their confusion trying to figure out how to write in a new genre, to a new audience, and in a new context. Donna earned her undergraduate degree in western Europe and didn't receive much direct writing instruction. Thus, being able to draw upon her newsletter writing experiences helped her understand her employees' difficulties with the memo writing task and helped her explain to them how a professional tone was important to take in a work memo.

These three writers' profiles show individual writers at different stages in their writing development, negotiating how to take writing knowledge and strategies from one context and transfer them into another context; and they show writers with different college writing experiences, with different dispositions, and with varying levels of expertise and comfort with writing. What they all have in common, though, is their efforts to transfer (or to help others transfer) writerly expertise from school-based writing to writing beyond the university.

## Reflection 1

Maybe these scenarios seem familiar to you or resonate with your own experiences with writing. What kinds of writing do you do now, in your personal, professional, or civic life? What kinds of texts do you write, why do you write them, to whom do you write them?

**Reflection 2**

How did you learn *to write* the texts you just listed?

- Where did you learn to do this writing? Was it in a class? Can you remember the class? Was it in an internship? On the job? Some combination of these?

- What challenges or successes did you experience?

## First Generation Writing Transfer

The first generation of writing transfer research focused primarily on the writing transfer that occurs within the university. During the Center for Engaged Learning's 2011–2013 research seminar on Critical Transitions: Writing and the Question of Transfer, scholars primarily explored how, and to what extent, writers transfer writing knowledge and practice from one learning context into another. That research seminar led to the publication of the Elon Statement on Writing Transfer (2015). The research seminar participants' work also was featured in collections like *Critical Transitions: Writing and the Question of Transfer* (Anson and Moore 2016) and *Understanding Writing Transfer: Implications for Transformative Student Learning in Higher Education* (Moore and Bass 2017), as well as a special issue of *Composition Forum*, edited by Elizabeth Wardle (2012, Volume 26). In that special issue, Jessie Moore (2012) mapped the questions and methods used by the first generation of writing transfer research, providing a review of the scholarship to that point.

Although focused primarily on writing transfer *within* the university, this first generation of research gives us a great deal of foundational knowledge for studying writing transfer *beyond* the university. For example, Moore (2017, 4–8) shared five principles about writing transfer:

Principle 1: Successful writing transfer requires transforming or repurposing prior knowledge (even if only slightly) for a new context to adequately meet the

expectations of new audiences and fulfill new purposes for writing.

Principle 2: Writing transfer is a complex phenomenon, and understanding that complexity is central to facilitating students' successful consequential transitions, whether among university writing tasks or between academic and workplace or civic contexts.

Principle 3: Students' dispositions (e.g., habits of mind) and identities inform the success of their unique writing transfer experiences.

Principle 4: University programs (first-year writing programs, writing across the curriculum programs, majors, etc.) can "teach for transfer". . .

Principle 5: Recognizing and assessing writing transfer require using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods looking at both critical transition points and longitudinal patterns of learning.

The first generation of writing transfer research demonstrated that writing transfer can occur across multiple contexts: between lower-level and upper-level classes; to/from classes and work-integrated learning, including internships; to/from self-sponsored and academic writing contexts; and in and outside of the classroom. In addition, universities can "teach for transfer" (reaffirming Perkins and Salomon 1988) by introducing tools to analyze expectations for writing and allowing students to practice with those tools across a range of writing situations. Although university curricula are built on the premise of transfer—that students will learn knowledge and skills that they will transfer to subsequent tasks—writers need opportunities to refine their strategies for analyzing and responding to new audiences and purposes for writing. Scaffolded opportunities to practice, paired with timely feedback, help students test their writing strategies and develop habits of mind needed to be successful writers beyond the university.

## Second Generation Writing Beyond the University Research: Fostering Writers' Lifelong Learning and Agency

The 2019–2021 Center for Engaged Learning (CEL) research seminar, "Writing Beyond the University: Fostering Writers' Lifelong Learning and Agency," built on this first generation of research by examining how we know, or if we know, the ways that college writing experiences are preparing students for the wide variety of writing they do after they graduate. Our specific goals were to understand writing experiences and writing knowledge development across and among contexts for lifelong learning; to explore how writers' developing professional identities, subjectivities, and practices are informed by writing experiences within and outside academic contexts; and to understand how to facilitate writers' ongoing self-agency and learning.

This collection features second generation writing beyond the university research from the six multi-institutional teams that participated in the CEL research seminar as well as seven additional groups of scholars doing parallel research. While many of these teams' researchers are from writing-related fields, they also include participants from law schools, student affairs, communications, statistics, health sciences, and education. The range of professional knowledge and insight these chapter authors bring to their research highlights how important it is that faculty from across the curriculum contribute their diverse disciplinary expertise to preparing lifelong learners for writing beyond the university.

The authors in this collection conducted their research at a wide array of sites and in various industries and countries, as well as spoke to a wide range of writers and employers. Sites and contexts for writing include the workplace, internships or work placements, and self-sponsored contexts. Researchers talked to alumni in industries such as marketing, social media, law enforcement, university administration, gig work, software engineering, education, and medicine. These research teams also focused on writing contexts around the globe, studying writers' experiences in Australia, Czech

Republic, Germany, Ireland, Kenya, Madagascar, Oman, Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Vietnam.

We introduce the contributing authors here and then, later in this introduction, explore how this new generation of scholarship approaches inquiry about our three composite writers and their writing beyond the university.

In section one, chapter authors examine learning to write as a lifelong process, and in particular writers' adaptability as they learn to write in new contexts, both professional and self-sponsored:

- Karen Lunsford, Carl Whithaus, and Jonathan Alexander show how alumni orient themselves to collaboration in the workplace, often in serendipitous ways; the authors see this orientation as a form of wayfinding and map their participants' awareness of ongoing writing development. ("Collaboration as Wayfinding in Alumni's Post-Graduate Writing Experiences," chapter 1)

- Jennifer Reid, Matthew Pavesich, Andrea Efthymiou, Heather Lindenman, and Dana Lynn Driscoll study "rogue" writing (such as writing about gardening or writing for prayer groups) that occurs outside of university-sanctioned writing spaces. Lifelong learners engage in a great deal of this self-sponsored writing, but its impact on other kinds of writing is often ignored by teachers and researchers. The authors ask questions about the functions of self-sponsored, non–obligatory writing and rhetorical activity, and also about the relationship between those functions and writers' identities. ("Writing to Learn Beyond the University: Preparing Lifelong Learners for Lifewide Writing," chapter 2)

- We (Julia Bleakney, Paula Rosinski, and Jessie L. Moore) partner with Heather Lindenman, Travis Maynard, and Li Li to explore how institutional efforts like campus–wide writing initiatives, writing majors, and other campus writing experiences (like writing center consulting positions, internships, or undergraduate research) prepare students for writing they'll encounter as alumni. The chapter draws on a national survey

of US college graduates and alumni studies conducted at two US institutions. ("Understanding Alumni Writing Experiences in the United States," chapter 3)

Section two explores the ways colleges and their community and industry partners can support writers' development as lifelong writers. This support includes preparing writers for the types of writing and workplace writing cultures they will encounter after graduation, helping writers access or request the kinds of resources that enhance their workplace writing, and attending to the complexity of writers' writing lives:

- Kathleen Blake Yancey, D. Alexis Hart, Ashley Holmes, Anna V. Knutson, Íde O'Sullivan, and Yogesh Sinha study the non-linear complexities of the writing students do inside and outside of class—their occasions and opportunities for writing, their writing processes, the texts they produce, and the complex, messy, recursive relationships between all of these aspects of writing. ("'There is a Lot of Overlap': Tracing Writing Development Across Spheres of Writing," chapter 4)

- Michael-John DePalma, Lilian W. Mina, Kara Taczak, Michelle J. Eady, Radhika Jaidev, and Ina Alexandra Machura make connections between two previously unconnected fields: the study and teaching of writing transfer and the study and practice of work-integrated learning (WIL). They argue that such connections enhance university-workplace partnerships and improve the teaching and learning of writing beyond the university. ("Writing Across Professions (WAP): Fostering the Transfer of Writing Knowledge and Practices in Work-Integrated Learning," chapter 5)

- Ha Thi Phuong Pham and Dominique Vola Ambinintsoa focus on university contexts in Madagascar and Vietnam, where limited writing support is available, but their discussion of using low-stakes activities to help students develop the capacity to be lifelong writers is applicable to any college curriculum. ("Examining the Effects of Reflective Writing

and Peer Feedback on Student Writing In and Beyond the University," chapter 6)

- Jeffrey Saerys-Foy, Laurie Ann Britt-Smith, Zan Walker-Goncalves, and Lauren M. Sardi use survey data collected from ninety-one employers to highlight points of convergence and divergence between workplace and academic writing contexts; they use these intersections to offer pedagogical strategies and administrative implications for supporting the workplace readiness of students. ("Bridging Academic and Workplace Writing: Insights from Employers," chapter 7)

- Ann M. Blakeslee, Jennifer C. Mallette, Rebecca S. Nowacek, J. Michael Rifenburg, and Liane Robertson study professionals' stories about their writing experiences, the formation of their identities as writers, and the role that mentoring or other resources play in their workplace writing contexts. ("Navigating Workplace Writing as a New Professional: The Roles of Workplace Environment, Writerly Identity, and Mentoring and Support," chapter 8)

- Brian Fitzpatrick and Jessica McCaughey use interview data to closely examine the writing lives and on-the-job struggles of two writers. The authors seek to understand how writing works for these writers, their challenges as they learned to write at work, and the extent to which these writers think their university writing experiences helped them do complex workplace writing. ("'I'll Try to Make Myself Sound Smarter Than I Am': Learning to Negotiate Power in Workplace Writing," chapter 9)

- Neil Baird, Alena Kasparkova, Stephen Macharia, and Amanda Sturgill focus on the reality of workplace writing for alumni and how their university education enables them, or doesn't enable them, to succeed as workplace writers. ("'What One Learns in College Only Makes Sense When Practicing It at Work': How Early-Career Alumni Evaluate Writing Success," chapter 10)

In section three, chapter authors explore writers' ongoing agency and the networked lives of writers. Chapters in this section examine tools and practices that help students and alumni develop writerly agency in their workplace writing contexts, including practices that help students use writing to communicate their professional identities and use social media to build networking relationships:

- Nadya Yakovchuk, Ryan Dippre, Lucie Dvorakova, Alison Farrell, Niamh Fortune, and Melissa Weresh research how students about to enter a work placement make sense of the writing demands they will face. They also explore connections among this sense-making, students' various writing experiences, and the writing instruction students received in college. ("Writing Transitions Between Academic and Professional Settings," chapter 11)

- Ella August and Olivia S. Anderson demonstrate how familiarity with the types of writing that students will encounter in their professional fields can help faculty design writing assignments that give students scaffolded practice with the writing they'll compose as future professionals. August and Anderson also illustrate how assignments with authentic audiences and purposes—what they call the "Real-World Writing Project"—help students practice the types of professional writing they'll do beyond the university. ("A Framework for Designing Effective Writing Assignments in Public Health," chapter 12)

- And finally, Benjamin Lauren and Stacey Pigg argue that social media networking is essential for building writers' self-agency. They also suggest ways to teach networking as a transformative writing practice in the classroom. ("'And Sometimes We Debate': How Networking Transforms What Professional Writers Know," chapter 13)

## Second Generation WBU Research & Sam's, Malcolm's, and Donna's Scenarios

Returning to our writers' profiles, each of the chapter authors would be interested in knowing more about how our three writers navigate new writing challenges. What questions would the chapter authors ask about Sam, the student in the United States who used their prior experience writing academic essays to write a memo for their internship? What questions would they ask about Malcolm, the early-career professional with previous college and internship experience writing memos, but who's struggling to figure out how to write collaboratively with his Spanish workplace colleagues? And what questions would they ask about Donna, the mid-career professional who finds herself empathizing with her employees and interns as they struggle to write memos in a professional tone?

Below, we group inquiry questions that cross the foci and research methods of chapters in this collection to highlight the complexity—and significance—of this second generation research to understanding and preparing students for writing beyond the university.

### Sam

- How would Sam make sense of the writing demands they are likely to face in their internship?
- Will the course they're taking, related to their work placement, help prepare them to write the memo?
- How does this course teach them the value of networking as a critical writing practice?
- What additional real-world writing projects could be integrated into the curriculum to better support students like Sam and to offer additional scaffolded practice with the types of writing students will encounter in their professions?
- Thinking about the functions and purposes of Sam's self-motivated journal writing, how might Sam use this non-obligatory writing to make sense of the other writing they're doing in professional contexts, like the memo? For example, does Sam use any of the same writing strategies when writing their

journal and the memo—such as reflection and brainstorming—and are these strategies successful or problematic?

- If Sam were to explain and map out—using colored markers and paper, with dotted lines, arrows, and circles—the complex relationships between the various kinds of writing they're doing at the same time (in their work placement, in their journaling, and in their writing center consulting), how would they then use this map to describe connections between their writing processes, different contexts, and different purposes for writing?

## Malcolm

- How does Malcolm draw from his prior experiences in college to determine if his memo is successful and to approach collaboration with his work colleagues?
- Which courses and writing-intensive cocurricular and extracurricular experiences have prepared him for the writing he does now?
- What kinds of instruction did he receive in college, especially as a double-major in professional writing and history, and did any of those experiences help him write the memo?
- How does Malcolm orient himself to collaboration through the challenges he's facing in this new work context?
- What mentoring and support has he received from his supervisors that helps him make sense of the expectations for writing this memo, work collaboratively with his team, and ask for support?
- How does Malcolm make sense of the new writing demands he faces in his new context as an early-career professional?

## Donna

- How does Donna encourage her employees and interns to draw upon their previous writing experiences?
- How does Donna draw upon her own prior writing experiences, from both college and the workplace, to support and supervise the people who report to her?

- How is the writing Donna does in her marketing job similar to and different from academic writing?
- What are Donna's employees' on-the-job writing lives and writing struggles, and how do these employees talk about their challenges as they learn to write memos in their current positions at a marketing firm? How much and in what ways do they think their experiences writing while in college helped them write the memo?
- What function and purpose does Donna's non-obligatory writing for church play in her life, what extent does it impact the writing she does in other contexts, and does this writing help her grow as an individual or as a writer?

Exploring questions like the ones posed above, collecting and analyzing data, and drawing conclusions helps the scholars in this collection build on our collective understanding of writing beyond the university, an understanding that moves outside the walls of the university into the cocurricular, professional, and personal lives of writers. It is our hope that such an understanding of this much broader picture of writing transfer and writing beyond the university will assist educators of all kinds—teachers across the disciplines, staff, and administrators—to make more informed decisions about curriculum, the allocation of new resources, and the support for existing resources like faculty development opportunities, general education requirements, cocurricular programming like internships and work-integrated learning, writing centers, and writing across the curriculum or university programs.

## What We Know about WBU: Themes across Chapters

Despite the wide range of writers, writing experiences, and writing contexts that collection authors have studied, and the wide range of questions they've asked, common themes emerged.

We know that writing is messy and complicated. Research featured here reaffirms first generation writing transfer research

findings that transfer is a complex phenomenon and extends that awareness to contexts beyond the university.

We know that the writing a person does in one context impacts the writing they do in other contexts. For example, in our scenarios, Malcolm applied some of what he learned writing a memo in college to writing a memo for his first job, and Donna used what she learned about tone while writing a church newsletter and applied it to her work helping interns write a memo in the workplace. These scenarios forecast research in the collection that surveys and interviews current students (as in chapters 4 and 5) and young professionals (as in chapters 8 and 10) as they move across multiple professional and personal writing situations.

We also know that within the university, many students write in various contexts outside of formal classroom instruction, without that writing being intentionally taught (Brandt 2015; Moore et al. 2016; Pigg et al. 2014). Further, students are sometimes asked to write a lot, but depending on their institutional contexts, they don't always receive intentional, direct writing instruction that attends to teaching for writing transfer.

And we also know that beyond the university:

- There's a connection between students' engaging in a variety of writing practices during college and their perception of success with writing in the workplace.
- Writing is an important part of professionals' lives.
- Writers develop their own strategies for learning how to write in new contexts.
- Understanding what successful workplace writing is and how to produce it helps professionals feel confident and competent.

Given that these cross-chapter findings demonstrate a need for intentional instruction, the chapters' *research* on writing beyond the university also plays a critical role in helping readers imagine or adapt *practices* for supporting the development of writers in curricular and cocurricular spaces across a variety of institution types.

## As You Read

We've already introduced you to the chapters and chapter authors above, but to offer a few additional guideposts for your reading, broadly:

- Each section begins with an introduction that expands on the significance of the section chapters for understanding and supporting writing beyond the university.
- The collection's conclusion invites readers to take action to support writing beyond the university and suggests areas for further study.
- A glossary at the end of the book offers concise definitions of several key terms.

Throughout the book, chapter authors reference supplemental resources—available on the book's website at https://www.Center ForEngagedLearning.org/books/wbu—that provide more information about their studies, prompt discussion and reflection, or offer additional strategies for putting their research–informed implications into practice.

As you read, we encourage you to consider:

- If you teach college writers, in or beyond the classroom, what research insights and practical tips from the collection's chapters could inform the way you design writing projects, support student writers, and give students feedback on writing tasks?
- If you administer curricular programs, *when/where* in individual courses or course sequences are students invited to bring their "beyond the university" experiences into the curriculum? How might the ideas presented here inform curricular revisions attentive not only to what comes next for students but also to their prior and concurrent experiences to facilitate more comprehensive integration?
- If you work with faculty and staff, what kinds of professional development opportunities might you design, or ask writing studies leaders at your institution to design, to share these researchers' conclusions and implications about writing beyond the university? Given the important implications

for alumni success, how might you encourage faculty and staff to participate in such professional development (stipends, recognitions)? If you are in a position to inform revisions to promotion and tenure processes, how might those systems value faculty and staff efforts to support student writing development beyond the university?

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# ADAPTABILITY AND LEARNING TO WRITE AS A LIFELONG PROCESS

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Each of the chapters in this section examines how writers draw on and adapt previous writing experiences and strategies as they learn to write across their lifetimes in different contexts. While each chapter takes its own unique focus, several themes run through each of them, including the variety of personal, professional, and civic writing in which participants engage beyond the university; the ways in which identities are impacted by writing practices; and the realization that experience with academic writing is not the only or even most important factor in becoming a successful writer beyond the university.

> *"In talking with students about collaborative writing, instructors should not simply focus on 'group work,' in which students are assigned roles for finishing a research project. Rather, remind students of the serendipitous ways in which writing with others can develop over time—often with significant emotional investment and relationship building that is fluid." (Chapter 1)*

In chapter 1, "Collaboration as Wayfinding in Alumni's Post-Graduate Writing Experiences," Karen Lunsford, Carl Whithaus, and Jonathan Alexander conducted focus groups with alumni from three US institutions to examine the alumni's writing development through collaborative writing experiences in and across professional, personal, and civic contexts. Highlighting the role of both intentional

and unintentional moments of collaboration, the researchers offer the concept of wayfinding to describe the writers' increasing awareness of their own growth as writers over time. When mapping participants' reflections on their writing development, the researchers note the importance of the wide variety of non-academic genres and practices that impacted their growth, the range of signposts that helped participants come to understand their development, and the complex interactions between writing and identity formation.

> *"SSWTL [self-sponsored writing to learn] techniques extend beyond writing fluency and domain knowledge; our research participants taught us that writing to learn is a lifetime practice people use to formulate and negotiate their personal, professional, and communal identities. Writing, in these cases, is an affordance of everyday life, one that bridges the mundane to the most fundamental levels of what it means to live." (Chapter 2)*

In chapter 2, "Writing to Learn Beyond the University: Preparing Lifelong Learners for Lifewide Writing," Jennifer Reid, Matthew Pavesich, Andrea Efthymiou, Heather Lindenman, and Dana Lynn Driscoll (a 2019–2021 research team) used online surveys and video/phone interviews to capture the extraordinarily diverse kinds of self-sponsored, non-obligatory writing that occurs in non-academic spaces. The US-based researchers argue that while people engage in a great deal and variety of self-sponsored writing (defined as writing done beyond the requirements of work or school), its impacts on other kinds of writing beyond the university have been ignored. In particular, participants reported using what the researchers call "self-sponsored writing to learn" outside of school and work spaces to make meaning, understand experiences, and develop their identities across their lifetimes. While the boundary between self-sponsored and obligatory writing often blurs, the use of self-sponsored writing to learn is a strategy participants turned to repeatedly across different personal, professional, and civic contexts. As part of their efforts to

understand non–obligatory writing, these researchers also developed a taxonomy of its functions and purposes.

> *"Across the university, students have multiple opportunities to practice writing for academic conventions, but assignments that require students to write to a specific recipient, rather than the teacher or a general reader, offer students much-needed practice in adapting writing to specific audiences and purposes. Writing for 'real' audiences, in turn, also increases the likelihood that students will have opportunities to prac-tice writing a range of genres in varied media, including visual genres." (Chapter 3)*

In "Understanding Alumni Writing Experiences in the United States" (chapter 3), the researchers use a US national survey of college graduates and data from three studies at two US universities to develop both a broad picture of the writing alumni engage in and also a more detailed snapshot of their writing beyond the university. The national survey data examines how well alumni believe their college experiences prepared them for writing after graduation. The institutional studies by Julia Bleakney, Heather Lindenman, Travis Maynard, Li Li, Paula Rosinski, and Jessie L. Moore report on details that help us understand the national survey by examining how specific institutional efforts—such as writing initiatives, writing majors, internships, undergraduate research, and cocurricular experiences—helped prepare alumni for the writing they find themselves doing after graduation. This chapter offers insights into the writing lives of alumni beyond the university, including the genres most commonly written; the college writing experiences and high-impact practices they draw upon to write successfully beyond the university; the ways in which college prepared them well and failed to prepare them well for writing after graduation; and self-reported gaps in their writing preparation as well as opportunities for improving curricula for better preparing future alumni.

Taken together, the three chapters in this first section offer valuable evidence that alumni, as lifelong writers, draw upon and adapt college writing experiences and strategies in powerful ways to make meaning, develop their identities as writers, and understand the situations in which they find themselves so they can respond successfully through writing. The chapters offer insight into the curricular features of alumni educational experiences—including high-impact practices, writing majors, internships, and cocurricular experiences—that helped them become adaptable writers, as well as avenues for curricular improvement. Specific writerly practices— such as writing to learn and reflecting on one's collaborative writing experiences—are also identified as particularly important strategies for successful writing beyond the university. Faculty from across the disciplines, staff from across campus programs, and administrators from different kinds of institutions will find the chapters in this section helpful if they seek to understand and perhaps revise educational experiences at their own locations to support the lifelong writing development and writerly adaptability of alumni.

CHAPTER 1

# COLLABORATION AS WAYFINDING IN ALUMNI'S POST-GRADUATE WRITING EXPERIENCES

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In this chapter we draw upon a pilot study of twenty-two University of California alumni from our three different campuses to consider how post-collegiates orient themselves to different forms of collaboration, both intentionally and serendipitously. In particular, following Ken Bruffee's famous assertion that "collaborative learning models how knowledge is generated" (1984, 647), we examine the learning about their own writing development these participants engage in as they work with others in and across professional, personal, and civic contexts after graduation. We have in mind Xiqiao Wang's (2019) attention to the ways in which the failure to meet particular goals creates opportunities for improvisation. Similarly, Clay Spinuzzi's (2015) research examines how contingent, ever-changing forms of teamwork open up more fluid ways for writers to learn from one another. In this account, we likewise foreground the exploratory, unanticipated, and often contingent forms of collaborative writing our participants engage in as they— and those they collaborate with—imagine, define, and create goals for shared writing that are grounded in reflections on their own practice.

Building upon the approaches articulated by Bruffee (1984), Wang (2019), and Spinuzzi (2015), we analyze our participants' discussion of collaboration through the framework of *wayfinding*—the

conceptual way in which we map participants' awareness of ongoing writing development through a range of intentional and accidental encounters, processes, and experiences (Alexander, Lunsford, and Whithaus 2020). Over the course of our research, participants have talked to us about their creative writing, their social media, their community writing, their civic writing, and all of these are as (if not more) significant to the ongoing development of their knowledges about writing than the more school-based literacies that have (typically) been described and considered by transfer writing scholars. So, while we can track the transformation of knowledges across domains, we also want to map complex and unexpected sources of writing knowledges and ability laminated by (1) the choices writers make over the course of their lives, (2) the varied signposts that orient them along their paths, and (3) the shifting identities they take on as writers. Interestingly, participants often use experiences of collaboration as vectors of wayfinding; that is, they offer descriptions of collaboration that consider personal interactions and self-discovery alongside external (e.g., workplace-driven) goals. They also report on forms of collaboration characterized more by serendipity and idiosyncratic practices. In this chapter, we focus on this simultaneous intentional *and* accidental working *across* professional, personal, and communal forms of writing.

## Orienting Our Research on Collaboration

Researchers in writing studies, as well as in education, information studies, and other disciplines, have been studying collaboration for some time. Here, we want to reflect on how such research on workplace collaboration often has been oriented towards identifying the distinct roles and processes needed to compose final products, or deliverables. This impulse has both research and pedagogical implications: in the face of the diverse contexts, media, and communities in which collaborative writing may take place, researchers have sought to identify common practices that might then be taken as models. For example, in the frequently cited "Building a Taxonomy and Nomenclature of Collaborative

Writing to Improve Interdisciplinary Research and Practice," Paul Benjamin Lowry, Aaron Curtis, and Michelle René Lowry point out that "CW [Collaborative Writing] researchers and practitioners do not even agree on a common term for CW" (2004, 72), and then go on identify common terms and strategies through which multi-author writing takes place. Recognizing that partners in collaborative work might occupy different "roles" (such as writer, consultant, editor, team leader, reviewer) (88), Lowry, Curtis, and Lowry also identify common strategies and activities that writers working together engage in. They contend that collaborative writing, unlike single-author writing, is dependent on "multiple authors" and "group dynamics"; they argue, in part, that "(a) Single-author writing involves the minimum activities of planning, drafting, and revising; (b) CW extends on single-author writing by involving multiple parties and the minimum activities of planning, drafting, and revising" (72). The authors' comments on writing *activities* are particularly important, as we have been focused on the communicative activities of our participants. The scholars identify brainstorming, outlining, drafting, reviewing, revising, and copyediting as common collaborative writing activities (82). They do not dictate a sequence of activities, but rather emphasize the shared, recursive nature of these specific activities across collaborators occupying different (and sometimes shifting) roles.

Some of our participants have described writing activities, as well as roles, that can be discussed productively using taxonomies such as Lowry, Curtis, and Lowry's. Five participants have identified themselves as having different experiences with marketing, and they each describe people in different roles (e.g., managers, lawyers, other copywriters) with whom they must collaborate to create, for example, a successful social media campaign. Yet our attention has been drawn even more to participants who speak less to existing taxonomies—which overlap, as noted, with more curricular and school-based knowledges about writing—and speak more to idiosyncratic, unexpected, and even accidental practices that generate different knowledges about writing after graduation. Our alumni's

collaborations seem more akin to the informal kinds of peer-to-peer writing groups that Anne Ruggles Gere (1987) noted and the often temporary workplace writing groups that Clay Spinuzzi (2015) has studied. What Gere identified in institutional contexts and Spinnuzi in the workplace, we have been seeing in post-collegiate writing ecologies, where alumni are finding their way toward different practices and knowledges about writing. We have described the experiences leading to such post-graduation knowledges—both the more well sign-posted and the more serendipitous—as *wayfinding* (Alexander, Lunsford, Whithaus 2020). For us, wayfinding helps account for exploratory writing practices that draw upon previously acquired knowledge about and experience with school-based forms of writing, but also those that orient writers, sometimes unexpectedly, to new writing knowledges and practices that frequently cross communicative contexts.

We analyze here participants' experiences with and descriptions of collaborative writing. Our accounts come from a three-year, IRB-approved pilot study in which twenty-two alumni from our three campuses, recruited through email listservs, participated in focus group interviews. Each interview lasted 30-60 minutes, and only the audio was recorded and transcribed. In this chapter, the quotations from the focus group interviews were lightly edited for clarity. Although we did not systematically collect demographic information in the pilot, we can say that our participants reflected the racial/ethnic/cultural diversity, professions, and geographic distribution of UC alumni. All participants were alumni who had earned a bachelor's degree within the past three to ten years; their names in our reports are pseudonyms.

We focus on three participants whose conversation drew our attention to the fluid experience of collaboration itself. Participants across the focus groups commented on outcome-oriented forms of collaboration within specific workplaces, as goal-oriented models might suggest. However, while reflecting on their ongoing learning about writing, our participants also focused on the contingent and emotionally charged forms of collaboration that cut across their

experiences in different contexts. This fluidity across contexts, and the emotional motivations that accompany emerging roles and goals for a collaboration, are not fully accounted for in, say, pedagogical practices that assign students specific roles in group work. Moreover, even though research has frequently studied emotions and "group dynamics" in deliberate collaborations—whether role-based as in Lowry, Curtis, and Lowry, or extremely fluid as in Spinuzzi—less attention has been paid to whether and how individuals see themselves within collaborations at all, and thus how they orient their collective writing activities and what they learn about writing as a result. Our participants' data call for new ways to describe the often serendipitous nature of collaborative work.

To capture the fluid ways that writers work with one another, we have identified two different axes that emerged from our analysis of the transcripts: the first describes how the collaboration came about (i.e., whether it was intentional or serendipitous collaboration) and the second maps the alum's stance or orientation towards collaboration (i.e., ranging from defining a task as collaborative to insisting the writing task was not a collaboration and relied on individual effort). Both of these ways of describing collaboration seem to operate on a spectrum, rather than as an on-off binary.

## Intentional and Serendipitous Collaboration

Describing the ambiguities between intentional and serendipitous collaboration, Jasmine talked about working as a script writer for reality TV:

> For my job, I will typically have to write VO [voice over] for something. But I also have to write suggested bites for our cast members. Reality TV is real, sort of. But, so you have to think in their voice, and you have to craft the questions in a way where you are still getting the answer that you want, but not in a way where they feel like they are not getting a say.

The task of script writing for a reality TV show is complex, because the questions and sound bites are suggestions. They are acts where the writer, Jasmine, is creating a script, but this script is really a draft that the reality TV personality will improvise from. The art of writing, the art of collaborating in this case, is creating "in their voice." Jasmine emphasizes crafting questions so that the writer is directing the reality TV personality, but also providing them enough space where they "get a say." This balance highlights the way in which her reality TV show script writing runs toward the serendipitous point on the intentional-to-serendipitous spectrum of collaboration. As a writer, Jasmine is intentional—dramatically so—about drawing out a particular response that fits with where the producer would like the show to go. However, her script is both in tension with and in collaboration with the reality TV personalities who need to have their "say" for the writing, for the show, to work.

Jasmine explores this idea of collaboration existing along an intentional-to-serendipitous spectrum: "When you suggest something for [the reality TV personalities] to say, they want to feel like it's in their voice so that they are not feeling like you're putting words in their mouth." She points to a show she worked on about a year ago, noting that "It was about a family with quintuplet daughters. The episode was about the girls' fourth birthday and so the parents are updating us on how each of the girls are doing. But they're just like, 'I don't know, tell me how my daughters are doing.'" After sharing this example with us, Jasmine explained, "So it's about getting them to say what we see and what they see but in words they would use, I guess." For Jasmine, as a writer working on reality TV, this collaborative writing is more fluid than most of the writing described in the research literature. Jasmine as the writer, the TV reality personalities, and the producers are all learning from one another as they work on the episodes. This writing, this voicing, is collaborative, but in a way that exceeds team-based document creation. There is distinct intention in what Jasmine creates as a script writer, but the end product, the dialogue on the reality

TV show, slides away from her intention toward the serendipitous voicings of the reality TV personalities.

Tom, a member of a different focus group, described a more intentional form of collaboration. When asked about "something that you wrote that was meaningful," Tom recalled a "biography of my dad's dad." He noted that it started as an assignment in college: "We had to write a thousand [word] narrative piece about just someone," but it evolved into "a more concrete biographical story," because of conversations with his father and a trove of photographs of his grandfather. In this passage, Tom discusses how he and his dad collaborated:

> So that kind of involved writing a basic first draft from what I remember hearing from my dad and remember seeing in photos, and then interviewing my dad over Skype about, to help fill in the holes and make sure the things I'd written out were correct. I think I might have sent what I had written to him to look over just to make sure everything was accurate so far. And then refining it based on what he said.

Tom, as the primary writer, builds a text through interviews and confirms the accuracy of his piece with his subject. In this creative writing activity, Tom is not emphasizing empirical accuracy, but rather a felt sense of accuracy, a fidelity to his father's emotional recollections. Tom describes this collaborative process:

> And so I kind of took the stories I heard from my dad about him and things that I had seen in old photos about his dad, and tried to turn it into a thousand-word biography that utilized as much kind of creative writing as I could, or kind of lyrical writing almost, as I could.

Tom's writing is a collaboration within his family, a reach across generations to preserve the memory of his grandfather. It was based on an interview with his father, but it was not a single-session interview; rather, Tom describes a recursive process that involves

a conversation, the sharing of photographs, and then follow-up conversations. Tom's work with his father is intentional, but it is also the crafting of a story with another person to reflect the interviewee's emotional memories.

Jasmine's experiences as a script writer for reality TV and Tom's experiences shaping the biography of his grandfather reflect the ways in which collaborative writing and storytelling reach beyond models of team-based document creation. Both alumni rely more on serendipity to find their way toward meaningful writing experiences. Considering their writing processes as collaborations requires us to adjust how we think about collaborative writing—particularly how both intent *and* serendipity, a key dimension of wayfinding, function in the same instance. Jasmine intends to write for the reality TV personality and bring the show towards the point the producers aim for, but she needs to craft space for the serendipitous, the real-time play, of the reality TV format. For Tom, the project begins as an intentional writing activity for a course, but unexpectedly spills over into his life after college. As a writer, he becomes interested in his grandfather's story and, in particular, in his conversations with his father. He returns to the work, to the biography, and develops it to recount, to represent, his father's emotional state and connections with his father. That act is a collaboration that relies on Tom's intent to craft a biography, but also includes elements of serendipity that range from conversational moments to the sharing of photographs. Both cases show us how collaboration can become a rich experience of wayfinding, combining both intention and serendipity.

## (Not) Collaborative Interactions

The fluid, sometimes serendipitous nature of writing with others, as described by our participants, meant that they were not always certain they were engaged in collaborative writing. When asked about which writing was the most meaningful to them, or about what conversations with others they had had about writing, participants raised different scenarios in which they were uncertain about how to describe precisely their interactive writing, leading

them to muse aloud. To what extent does an audience's response to a stand-up comedy routine equal working with those audience members? How should one characterize one's role in authorship upon being surprised to find that an offhand social media post has become the center of collective action? This uncertainty about what counts as collaboration was amplified when participants equated collaboration with school-oriented definitions. When we asked Francine about what conversations she had had about writing with family members, friends, and coworkers, she initially responded, "I don't feel like I've done a lot of writing collaborative projects in my adult life, I feel like that was much more of a high school scene kind of a thing, which I definitely did a lot of." In this response, Francine dismisses the frequent project-oriented, school group work as not having much to do with the forms of collaboration she has done as an adult.

In contrast to her own high school experiences, Francine describes a two-year, multimodal, and multigenerational classroom activity that she organized as a high school teacher:

> I think it was my first year teaching, and I had this obnoxious child who was making an argument that, "Oh, that's not how the real world works. In the real world, I can get away with this." Or whatever. And I was like, "Oh, girl, oh, man." . . . I was going to curate all of my friends, from their adult lives: Could you just write about, what is . . . the craziest transitions, things you learned from high school and then when you hit the adult world, basically. . . . And I put their faces and [artifacts] to generally identify them with their quotes, and I pasted them all around the room. . . . It was like some team building day and I made my kids go around and read them. And then for ones that stood out to them, that they had reactions to, I made them write responses on little sticky notes and stick them over.

Despite the multiple possible forms of collaboration she mentions in her account—from asking friends to provide commentary, to asking students to think about team building, to having students respond back to the photos and posters stuck about the room—Francine initially describes herself as not having "done a lot of writing collaborative projects in my adult life." Perhaps, as a teacher, she does not initially define herself as collaborating with students on a project. In her account, she first identifies the collaboration with the adult friends who provided the quotations she transformed into classroom materials.

But Francine's initial reluctance to identify her work as a collaborative writing project shifts as she reassesses the nature of collaboration, while musing aloud with us and her focus group members. She realizes that, rather than working together to create an artifact as a high-school project group would do, her students and friends work together to generate new possibilities for future identities and actions:

> It was amazing how useful [this classroom activity] was. And I took photos of the post-its that my kids had written to my friends and then sent those to them too. Like these are what the kids said about what you said, they really appreciated it. And I think of that as a very collaborative project, because . . . it was so great for me and affirming to me. It was really helpful for my students, to see people that looked like them, but older . . . and affirm for them that things are going to be okay even if they're going to be terrible. And then it was affirming for my friends who got these kind of comments back from like the next generation of kids. So I feel like it was kind of a weird three-way collaboration between my students and my friends and me. But it was great. I loved doing it. I learned a lot. I think my kids did too.

Responding to our follow-up question about what she has learned, Francine offers the following:

> I think the biggest thing that I learned . . . was that I am not the best person to say some things. . . . It would mean nothing to some of my children, for me to say, some piece of wisdom like, you're going . . . to follow your dreams, take some really flippant comment like that. But when it comes from someone who's like a Chicana badass woman in her photos, like her standing in front of a fighter jet, and she's like in chemistry, for my young women of color in a very niche science academy, her saying it is huge. Like it's a much bigger deal, and means much more to them. And they ask more questions than they would ever have done to me. It was humbling and useful for me to realize that like, hey, maybe part of your job as a teacher isn't to give the wisdom, but to just point them at it.

The aim of this collaboration is not a specific written product, but to represent multiple futures and subject positions to her students, a way of making visible what it means, for example, for a Chicana to be successful in STEM. Working with her friends and colleagues, Francine literally provides signposts (in the form of handmade posters and sticky notes posted around the classroom) to assist students in finding their way towards future potential selves. Moreover, again in keeping with wayfinding, her students amplify those potential pathways by writing back to the adults. The learning in this case is a "three-way" street, among adults and students, with Francine in particular learning more about different forms of writing, of the powers of authorship, and a new understanding of what it is to be a teacher.

## Implications and Conclusion

What are the implications of our research for the classroom and for writing programs, as well as future research? In "Tracing

Connections and Disconnects: Reading, Writing, and Digital Literacies across Contexts," Xiqiao Wang (2019) offers an in-depth study of a multilingual, transnational student's literacy practices in a variety of contexts, both academic and personal. Wang's particular contribution lies in a focus on "disconnection," or the moments when literacies fail to meet particular needs, a failure requiring further reflection, refinement, and even creativity and improvisation. Wang ultimately argues that "it is with increased exposure to texts, explicit instruction, and collaborative discovery that students learn to recognize texts as accomplishing rhetorical action, fulfilling purpose, and embodying modes of disciplinary inquiry across contexts" (581). Our research into post-collegiate collaborative writing experiences reinforces Wang's understanding of the importance of encountering disconnection while being open to serendipitous possibilities. Focusing more classroom attention on collaboration itself as a form of serendipity—not just as a from-the-get-go goal-oriented and role-assigning practice—might attune writers to the many different ways collaboration takes shape in the "real world."

In talking with students about collaborative writing, instructors should not simply focus on "group work," in which students are assigned roles for finishing a research project. Rather, remind students of the serendipitous ways in which writing with others can develop over time—often with significant emotional investment and relationship-building that is fluid. Further, talk with students about the ways in which creative work and multimodal work might *also* inform professional work, although their aims may not be to develop a specific artifact, but to develop opportunities, pathways, new ways of thinking, and experiences. Such classroom practices might be augmented by curricular shifts at the programmatic level. We concur with Francine that what is needed are resources and models that illustrate a wide range of writing with others, all framed as potential pathways forward.

Beyond the work that a single instructor can do with students in a course, writing program directors might think about how they could establish opportunities for students to participate in

collaborative writing work across curricular and co-curricular experiences, especially when "roles" in collaboration are more fluid and less concrete. Writing programs might create workshops led by faculty who research and write collaboratively. Having faculty who work in interdisciplinary contexts develop workshops could leverage students' engagement with complex, multidisciplinary problems—especially if faculty also highlight how they draw upon their own extracurricular experiences to develop solutions. Program directors and other university administrators can likewise support writers' development for writing beyond the university, furthering what we used to call "lifelong learning" about writing, particularly when writers need to learn to look for unexpected opportunities to write and to write with one another. To facilitate such learning, as well as to aid self-reflection about ongoing writing development, program directors could encourage graduating students to form their own writing groups and to seek out each other as writing partners, either for professional, personal, or civic projects. Inviting students to work across the artificial boundaries of discipline or major on projects that are of mutual interest can initially model how such groups might work. Finally, creating spaces for graduating students to form connections with alumni (and perhaps return to campus to talk about their own experiences) can demonstrate for students how writers continue to work with others to find their way toward powerful writing across multiple contexts.

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CHAPTER 2

# WRITING TO LEARN BEYOND THE UNIVERSITY

## Preparing Lifelong Learners for Lifewide Writing

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Writing helps to "formulate what I want to do [and] who I am." In this short but powerful statement, a study participant offered us an example of writing as a method for discovering new ways of acting and being. He was one of a number of people we found who write in support of their evolving identities. The field of writing studies features rich scholarship on how students write, how they write to learn new knowledge, and how writing informs their identities. However, we have much yet to learn—and to share throughout higher education—about how writing similarly functions for people beyond our classrooms and campuses.

Self-sponsored writing (SSW) has been defined as writing that people take up beyond the requirements of work or school; it is writing that people pursue on their own time for their own purposes (Yancey 2004). Research has shown how SSW and obligatory writing can interanimate one another, indicating the untapped potential of SSW as a learning tool (Gere 1994; Lindenman and Rosinski 2020; Prior and Shipka 2003; Roozen 2009; Sternglass 1989; Yancey

2004). Indeed, the line between what is self-sponsored and what is required is blurry, as we found among our participants, including those featured in this chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight how adults write in order to learn outside of work and school contexts—or to manipulate their boundaries—practicing a strategy we call "self-sponsored writing to learn" (SSWTL). We also offer implications for faculty and administrators invested in teaching writing.

The literature, based primarily on classroom contexts, establishes two central foci of writing to learn (WTL). The first focus centers on using writing as a tool to learn content area knowledge (Bangert-Drowns, Hurley, and Wilkinson 2004; Fry and Villagomez 2012). The second focus of WTL hones in on developing writing proficiency (Beaufort 2007; Melzer 2009; Soliday 2011; Thaiss and Zawacki 2006), and neither of these foci are mutually exclusive. What we discovered, however, were people pursuing WTL strategies long after their days as students. Far from the carefully deployed lesson plans of higher education, the individuals in our study write of their own volition in order to challenge themselves with new knowledge, express their inner lives, and lean into their identities. The examples we share suggest emergent intersections of SSW and WTL—SSWTL, as it were. The participants we feature here also demonstrate that the two well-documented aims of WTL might now include a third: self-motivated writing for intra/interpersonal growth. What, these cases led us to ask, do we need to do in higher education to help students to enact throughout their lives the kinds of SSW we found in the participants we highlight here?

## Self-Sponsored Writing Within and Beyond the Classroom

Scholarship on SSW often explores best practices for teaching and implications within classroom contexts. This work ranges from framing SSW in terms of self-chosen topics in classroom assignments (Sternglass 1989) to documenting how SSW within classroom contexts can bolster writing knowledge transfer (Fishman et al.

2005; Gere 1994; Roozen 2009; Yancey 2004). We know that writers often draw on SSW to focus their resources on writing tasks for school (Prior and Shipka 2003; Shepherd 2018) and have likewise learned that "extracurricular journaling" can contribute to writing within classroom contexts (Roozen 2009). SSW's emergence as an area of study has also positioned it as a WTL technique for students with varying linguistic backgrounds (Yi and Angay-Crowder 2018).

Outside of classrooms, literacy scholars have worked to understand the writing that people do in the world. For example, Beverly Moss (2003) examines writing practices of African American preachers to highlight how entire discourse communities inform rhetorical activity, and Deborah Brandt's (2001) research connects Americans' writing practices to labor and the evolving economy of the twentieth century. Further, Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) seminal work represents a landmark study of writing development of two racially homogenous communities—one white and one Black—tracing these communities' writing practices at home and school. Extending this research on the literacy practices within professional and personal spheres, our work serves as a lens for looking at how voluntary writing practices operate within self-sponsored contexts in the twenty-first century, specifically considering how SSWTL might serve as a bridge connecting writing in the classroom to writing beyond the university.

While composition scholarship helps us understand the value of WTL practices within classrooms, and literacy studies has examined specific communities' writing practices beyond the school sphere, there is little exploration of how WTL strategies in particular operate beyond classroom contexts. We therefore ask: if WTL is, indeed, an effective way of helping people develop their writing and thinking, how does it unfold in self-sponsored contexts? Our work follows Manian and Hsu's (2019) scholarship, which highlights medical students' scholarly blog posts as a WTL tool. We likewise extend Shepherd's (2018) work, which explores the connections first-year college students make between their digital compositions in-school and out-of-school, in that we, too, interrogate the fine

line between obligatory and SSWTL. We explore how individuals take up writing outside of school—and work—as means to learn or deepen knowledge, grow as people and writers, or explore new ways of being.

## The Writers

Our research explores how WTL functions in self-sponsored contexts, offering a slice of what we learned from our larger multi-institutional study, employing online survey (n=713) and video/phone interview (n=27) techniques. Our study explores the functions of SSW and rhetorical activity in writers' professional, personal, and civic lives. The survey was distributed using a snowball sampling technique across our university listservs, personal networks, and social media, aiming for wide distribution. It was open from September to December 2019 and asked respondents if they would be willing to be interviewed.

To the extent possible, we selected interviewees to ensure a range of ages, education levels, geographic locations, genders, and professions. Though we did not ask participants to identify their race on the survey, we were able to use participants' self-disclosure of racial identity to select a more racially diverse range of interview participants. Within the interview sample, there were five undergraduates, five graduate students, and seventeen non-students. Seventy percent identified as female. Over half held degrees beyond high school diplomas, including associate's, bachelor's, master's, and professional degrees. Sixty-two percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18–44, and 38% were 45 or older. Both survey and interview participants were asked to submit samples of SSW that were meaningful to them in some way. All interviewees selected their own pseudonyms.

Highlighting a portion of our larger study, we focus here on three interviews with non-students, all of whom indicated that writing to learn is one key function of their self-sponsored writing. After interviews were professionally transcribed, each interview transcript was coded by two research team members to create a

taxonomy of the functions of SSW, and we identified thirty-eight functions, one of which was "writing to learn." The "writing to learn" code appeared in 48.1% of our interviews. The three interviews we discuss below represent one female- and two male-identifying participants, all college graduates. We chose to focus on these interviews for the frequency of WTL as a code in the data and also for the richness of how these participants used WTL strategies in connection to their SSW, reflecting that SSWTL functioned as a mechanism for learning, self-exploration, and identity development. Specifically, we see our participants using SSWTL to develop knowledge in service of individual and communal identity.

## Self-Sponsored Writing to Learn (SSWTL) Case Snapshots

### "To challenge myself"

A woman between the ages of 35–44, Kristen has worked for seventeen years as a physician's assistant in a dermatologist's office, and she indicated she loved her work. On the survey, Kristen indicated that she wrote daily, though in her interview, she was adamant that she was not a writer. In Kristen's words, her writing was "more of a self-help motivational skill." Kristen described writing in order to learn new knowledge in a wide variety of areas, explicitly mentioning politics, history, and self-help techniques. She calls her SSW "note-taking," including personal lists of important facts, conceptual relationships, and questions to follow up on later. In our survey, Kristen identified her SSW as "summaries of knowledge attained through documentaries or educational sources/research."

Kristen's WTL, despite being self-motivated, connects to her professional goals. In addition to clinical reports she writes for work, she pursues medical knowledge outside her professional field of dermatology, examples of which are notes she took "at a conference just in review for my board exam." Kristen insisted that writing to learn medical knowledge for personal reasons is nothing like the "robotic" writing she does for work, such as clinical notes, referrals, and prescriptions. She noted that she writes to learn how to read

EKGs, for example, a skill that, she says, has mostly eluded her since her professional training and rarely, if ever, arises in her daily work. While at first such writing to learn may not seem to be self-sponsored because of its proximity to obligatory professional writing, the terms in which Kristen described these efforts clearly identify it as such: "I'm challenging myself, which is important to me. It reminds me that I need to take time for me, and that I succeeded in doing so."

Note that writing to learn new medical knowledge, disconnected from the day-to-day in her professional work, is writing that Kristen described in terms of challenging herself, taking time for herself, and envisioning personal success. These motivations for her writing are connected to her professional and personal identities. She elaborated, "I intentionally set out to allocate time to educate myself and challenge myself and figure out where my faults were and try to improve on them." Additionally, Kristen described her SSW as "calming, like many feel about coloring or listening to music" and "a self-help [or] motivational skill." Kristen engaged in WTL that, at first, appears to be more professional than self-sponsored, but upon closer examination reveals a more complex set of relations between the professional and the personal, writing to learn beyond the classroom, and personal issues of identity.

### "I'm still learning and studying this"

A retired high school English teacher between the ages of 55–64, Dean identifies as a Druid, a nature-based minority religion, and describes himself as a daily writer. He spoke of writing in sophisticated ways perhaps because of his MFA and teaching experience. He considered his writing an integral part of his identity as a member of a minority religion: "My poetry and fiction answer the deepest call I experience to be creative and to express my inner life." His poetry was a means of connecting with and honoring his ancestors, paying homage to how "we got here and the people that came before us," which are important aspects of his spirituality.

Dean also described his SSW in intersecting layers of learning, including lifelong learning of the craft of writing. He wrote as part

of an Old English Facebook Group, a space he described primarily as one of learning, and noted that he had been writing poetry since high school, basing his creative work off both coursework and his own self-tutored approach. He described his creative writing in terms that underscore an ongoing relationship and explicitly invoked terms we associate with WTL: "I need to put some discipline . . . in my writing and see what happens," he said; "I'm still learning and studying this." When he was teaching, he would often use pieces of his own writing in the classroom as examples for students while simultaneously workshopping them with students, an act that blurs the line between professional and SSW. While a primary purpose of Dean's SSW is to learn to become a better writer, Dean understands this effort as inextricable from his sense of himself and his connection to other people.

### "To really learn about Black culture"

An 18–24-year-old male with a bachelor's degree, Jerome identifies as African American and works for an education non-profit committed to racial justice. In his interview, Jerome reported writing a wide variety of texts, some of which are unambiguously self-sponsored and others of which blur the lines between the self-sponsored and the obligatory. Jerome's interview is important to our argument because his SSW, including the learning functions that we focus on here, does not only involve individual identity similar to those described by Dean and Kristen, but also collective identity.

Jerome's SSWTL emerged through a discussion about a book he wrote in a college course that guides students through the writing and publishing process in partnership with a publishing company. Although Jerome's book could certainly be characterized as writing he did for school—thus, obligatory—he framed it as writing that he ultimately did for himself. Reflecting on his book, Jerome commented, "I realized how much I thought I knew who I was before versus after the book came out. It was night and day." More specifically, Jerome's book functioned to establish his identity as a person of color, detailing that his "Blackness was questioned" earlier in his life because he "didn't get certain references." He explained:

"I didn't have a Black mom playing Erykah Badu or Jill Scott. . . . Like, that wasn't part of my lived experience." Jerome explicitly described writing his book to "really learn about Black culture [and] Black history." He added, "I was just coming to terms with my own sense of consciousness around race and also that time period in my life also fueled me to write the book." In terms quite different from Kristen and Dean, Jerome wrote about Blackness to learn about and further understand his own racial identity.

More important than a discrete distinction between Jerome's obligatory and self-sponsored writing is, in our view, his grasping of the opportunity afforded by his college course to write for personal aims. Jerome, by choosing this class for what it could do for him, transformed the obligatory nature of the assignment into a functionally self-sponsored act of writing. And what was that function? Learning about his own racial identity in order to grow more fully into the Black man he wants to be.

## Discussion: Blurring Self-Sponsored and Obligatory Writing

In each participant's case, we observed blurry relationships between self-sponsored and obligatory writing, on the one hand, and between learning (almost anything) and identity development, on the other. Our findings encourage us not to think about self-sponsored and obligatory writing as opposites, or even on a spectrum; rather we see these operating in dynamic relationships with each other. For Kristen, SSWTL is a mechanism for learning new information that develops her personal and professional identity through a growing knowledge base. For Dean, SSWTL functions to develop his writing craft, which is tied to his personal, interpersonal, and spiritual identities, toward personal growth through the craft of writing itself. For Jerome, SSWTL connects him with others and performs the action of personal growth via learning more about his intersectional racial, socio-cultural identity. And for each, SSWTL functions, sometimes in tandem with obligatory contexts, in all of these ways in varying degrees: to learn new knowledge, to become

a better writer, to relate to oneself and others. SSWTL techniques extend beyond writing fluency and domain knowledge; our research participants taught us that writing to learn is a lifetime practice people use to formulate and negotiate their personal, professional, and communal identities. Writing, in these cases, is an affordance of everyday life, one that bridges the mundane to the most fundamental levels of what it means to live.

SSWTL seems to be an important way to make meaning in life after university, for as Prior and Shipka (2003) note "literate activity is about nothing less than ways of being in the world" (181). We believe our findings indicate a new direction for research in SSW, including continued exploration of how individuals combine SSW with WTL techniques throughout their adult lives, and how these efforts interact not only with their obligatory writing, as a good deal of research already investigates, but how these efforts energize and provide the very stuff of individual identity.

## Implications

### Leveraging SSW(TL) in the Classroom as a Lifelong Learning Strategy

Many institutions emphasize lifelong learning in their mission statements. Our findings suggest that SSWTL is a mechanism for such learning and extends existing scholarship that establishes SSW's relationship to the classroom. While we resist too fully pulling SSW into classrooms for fear of conflating it with obligatory writing, the blurriness between writing that is self-sponsored and obligatory already exists; as all of our cases show, self-sponsored and obligatory writing already commingle in meaningful ways in people's lives.

Understanding how SSWTL might be useful in life beyond college can make educators even more intentional about the spaces we create in our classrooms for WTL activities. That is, educators can invite students to bring some of their SSW into classrooms in order to introduce and frame accompanying WTL activities as explicitly transferable and broadly applicable. For example, faculty who teach introductory history courses could invite students to

bring in a piece of SSW that documents parts of their personal history to use as a springboard for discussing the role primary texts play in historiography. An example of such texts might be an email to a friend, a card from a family member, or a scrapbook. Asking students to meaningfully engage with SSW within classroom contexts, understanding the social function of SSW genres, may reinforce the value of SSW as connected to learning as well as related to their personal lives. SSW is more than a tool for learning a particular discipline or developing writing skill: it is a method for navigating new environments and phases of one's life. This is not to suggest that we should appropriate students' SSW in classroom spaces. Rather, we suggest that, when students see the connection between their SSW meaning-making practices and other kinds of writing as meaning-making, this helps them recognize the wholeness of their writing lives. Tapping into students' SSW and inviting them to pursue self-sponsored functions in required writing provides a pathway for students to transfer a newly broadened sense of themselves as writers into unfamiliar contexts throughout the rest of their lives.

### Implications for Administrators

Administrative leadership of writing programs, writing centers, and teaching and learning centers can also benefit from understanding the reach of SSWTL strategies illuminated in our research. As our interviews indicate, SSW and workplace writing can be highly interconnected. Writing program administrators and teaching center directors should encourage faculty and tutors they supervise to begin from the premise that students have rich writing lives beyond and prior to the classroom, and encourage students to use SSW to learn and develop as people beyond the purview of writing classrooms.

A writing center administrator, for instance, might work with writing consultants on ways to engage student writers through their SSW in order to open conversations about genre conventions, for example, which can be subsequently brought back around to techniques useful in classroom writing. Administrators who lead

faculty development across institutional spaces have the capacity to introduce the kinds of WTL assignments we discuss above to faculty who teach undergraduate and graduate students with the intent of integrating SSWTL awareness into the curriculum and beyond. Again, our intent is not to appropriate SSW for classroom use, but to strengthen classroom dynamics through acknowledgment of the importance of SSW and writers' tacit knowledge through it. In short, we want educators to recognize the ways classroom learning primes writers for learning that takes place in many contexts to more intentionally build connections between classroom- and out-of-classroom learning.

Taking a wider lens, we hope that teachers, administrators, and researchers will join us and those cited throughout this chapter in exploring our field's growing awareness of the reciprocal and social nature of learning and the role writing plays in it throughout people's lives. Such awareness would, we believe, help faculty and administrators across disciplines and educational spaces more fully understand how writing can be operationalized for life, both in terms of the work writing does for people in obligatory contexts, like work and school, and self-sponsored contexts, like identity development and lifelong learning.

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# UNDERSTANDING ALUMNI WRITING EXPERIENCES IN THE UNITED STATES

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As staff and faculty strive to prepare students for the writing they will compose beyond the university, educators need a better understanding of what that "beyond" looks like. What are alumni writing in their daily professional, personal, and civic lives? How well did their different college experiences prepare them for those writing tasks? Alumni studies are a significant source of information to answer these questions. This chapter presents data from a national survey of college graduates to provide a perspective of what alumni in the United States write beyond the university. We then use data from three institutional studies—two at Elon University in North Carolina and one at Florida State University—to illustrate what these writing experiences look like for alumni from these specific institutions. These snapshots explore how institutional efforts like campus-wide writing initiatives, writing majors, and other campus writing experiences (e.g., writing for on-campus jobs, writing for student organizations, etc.) prepare students for writing they'll encounter as alumni.

Some alumni studies have sought to extend research on the transitions writers make into the workplace (e.g., Anson and Forsberg 1990; Beaufort 1999) by addressing how prepared alumni feel to

make these transitions and how well they feel their college experience prepared them (Baird and Dilger 2017; Maynard, forthcoming). Other studies of alumni writers were motivated by specific institutional concerns and a desire to assess, update, or improve the effectiveness of majors or curricula (Cosgrove 2010; Melzer and Pickrel 2005; Perelman 2009; Weisser and Grobman 2012). These studies used surveys, a method identified early on as valuable for studying workplace writing (Anderson 1985), activity theory (how writing occurs within a system—such as how an individual writer operates within a work context, with colleagues, and with existing documents or artifacts), or direct analysis of workplace writing. However, all draw from an individual institutional context, even though the alumni writers referenced a wide variety of curricular and cocurricular experiences in these studies. Other scholars conducted more focused research into the workplace writing of graduates of technical and professional communication programs, using surveys to conduct nationwide studies of alumni writing (Blythe, Lauer, and Curran 2014) or surveying alumni of multiple schools and managers of technical communication departments while also analyzing the participating schools' curricula (Whiteside 2003).

Another group of researchers have sought to further understand complex workplace writing experiences, observing writers' practices, analyzing their writing, and offering in-depth descriptions of their writing experiences and practices and the beyond-the-university contexts in which they write (Lauer and Brumberger 2019; Alexander, Lunsford, and Whithaus 2020). Across these studies, the authors find writers showing adaptability, drawing on prior knowledge or anticipating the need for new knowledge, and composing or creating content in new ways (Bleakney 2020). Our own studies discussed in this article similarly recognize alumni's varied writing experiences and their need for adaptability and flexibility when transitioning from college into the workplace. We briefly summarize the studies below and share additional details about them on the book's website.

## National Survey of College Graduates (July 2019)

In July 2019, Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning and the Elon Poll conducted a national survey of recent US college graduates (n=1,575, ages 18–34) to explore how they experienced high-impact educational experiences and to learn about how college had prepared them for workplace writing. The study, "High Impact Undergraduate Experiences and How They Matter Now," used an online, opt-in sample to reach the target population (Elon Poll/Center for Engaged Learning 2019). The online resource for this chapter, "Understanding Alumni Writing Experiences: Research Designs," includes more details about the target population and the sampling method for this study. Figure 3.1 provides demographic information about the participants. In this chapter, we focus on their perceptions of writing after college.

Most participants (83%) believed college had prepared them well for the work-related writing they have done since graduating. In addition, nearly 64% indicated that writing effectively was very important to their day-to-day life, with 82% reporting they had developed their writing skills in college. The survey did not ask participants to report their major or their current field of employment, so these results reflect a more holistic look across majors and professions. Recent college alumni compose a variety of genres, or types of writing, with email their most frequently written genre (70% reported writing emails weekly). Other frequently written types of writing include client correspondence (36% write it weekly), reports (32%, weekly), social media (31%, weekly), memos (30%, weekly), instructions (25%, weekly), project management documents (25%, weekly), teaching materials (25%, weekly), and web content (25%, weekly).

Although most graduates felt well prepared for this writing, they still noted challenges. Twenty percent of participants indicated that "writing a type of document I had not encountered before" was the biggest writing challenge they had encountered since graduating, followed by "adapting to my readers' expectations and needs" (biggest challenge for 16%). In responses to an open question

## Age

| 18-24<br>20% (n=315) | 25-34<br>80% (n=1260) |
|---|---|

## Gender

| Male<br>44% (n=693) | Female<br>56% (n=882) |
|---|---|

## Region

**Midwest**
21% (n=331)

**Northeast**
21% (n=331)

**West**
24% (n=378)

**South**
34% (n=535)

## Size of College

**Large**
>15K undergrads
29% (n=458)

**Medium**
4-15K undergrads
47% (n=741)

**Small**
<4K undergrads
24% (n=373)

## Race and Ethnicity

**White (non-Hispanic)**
67% (n=1055)

**Black**
11% (n=173)

**Hispanic or Latinx**
12% (n=189)

**Other**
10% (n=158)
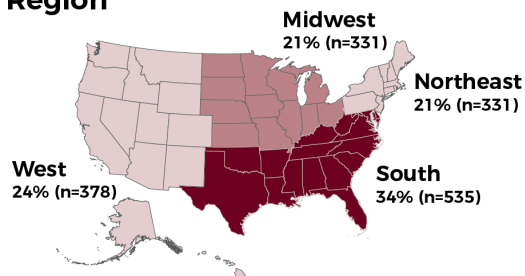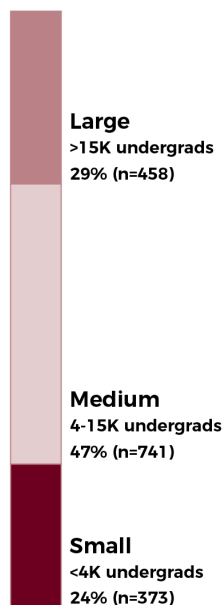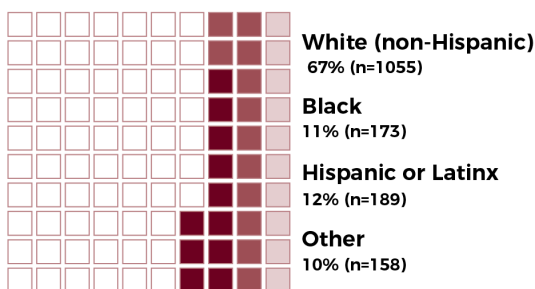
*Vector map of the USA with states from freevectormaps.com*

*Figure 3.1. Demographics for 2019 Center for Engaged Learning/Elon Poll survey*

about how college could have better prepared them for writing in the workplace, participants wished they had encountered more opportunities to practice writing for "authentic" or "real" audiences and purposes beyond typically practiced academic genres. Their responses suggest that—even though graduates felt generally prepared for writing after college—alumni do not feel as well prepared to adapt their writing strategies for unfamiliar writing contexts.

The institutional snapshots that follow illustrate what these writing experiences and challenges look like for alumni from two specific US institutions.

## Institutional Snapshots

Using data from three institutional studies, these snapshots explore how institutional efforts like campus-wide writing initiatives, writing majors, and other campus writing experiences (like writing center consulting positions, internships, or undergraduate research) prepare students for writing they'll encounter as alumni. Although some co-authors collaborated on more than one of these studies, leading to similar question sets as we refined survey instruments based on our prior research, the national survey and each of the institutional surveys were conducted independently.

### Elon Alumni Study Summary (October 2017 & August 2018)

The overarching goal of Elon's Writing Excellence Initiative (WEI), launched in 2013, was "to establish writing as a key characteristic of an Elon education, one that is recognized by students, alumni, graduate programs, and employers as leading to exceptional writers" (Elon University 2013, 69). Our survey-based study investigated one slice of the WEI: how Elon alumni perceive Elon's contribution to their ability to succeed as writers in their lives after graduation. Using the same set of questions, the researchers separately surveyed two cohorts of Elon alumni: those who graduated before the implementation of the university's Writing Excellence Initiative (classes of 2000-2013) and those who graduated after Writing Excellent Initiative implementation at Elon began (classes of 2014-2018). This study gathered data on:

- the genres alumni write in their careers, personal lives, and civic engagement
- how and in what ways Elon prepared alumni effectively for their post-graduation writing responsibilities
- how the university could have better prepared alumni for writing in their careers
- the challenges faced by alumni in their post-graduation writing

The online survey, "Writing After Elon: Assessing the Writing Experiences of Elon Graduates" was distributed by the Office of Alumni Engagement to all Elon graduates from the specified class years in an email invitation signed by the university provost. The 2000–2013 alumni cohort (n=541) was surveyed in October 2017 and the 2014–2018 cohort (n=435) was surveyed in August 2018. Overall, the demographics of the respondents reflect the demographics of the university as a whole.

Among those who graduated before the implementation of the WEI, 85.43% somewhat or strongly agreed that Elon prepared them well for the writing they were required to do for their careers post-graduation. Among those who graduated after the implementation of the WEI, 89.66% report feeling prepared for writing in their careers post-graduation.

### Rhetorical Training Summary (Fall 2019)

Our research sought to understand the kinds of rhetorical training that most help students be successful writers when they graduate and move into their professional lives, recognizing that all students have multiple—ideally cumulative—opportunities for rhetorical training. We define "rhetorical training" as the coordinated curricular and cocurricular experiences that immerse students in writing for different audiences, purposes, and contexts—from writing-intensive courses, to internships, to campus jobs in administrative offices, to consulting in the writing center. We recruited both student (n=88) and alumni (n=45) participants through email- and social media-based convenience sampling, inviting students and alumni affiliated with writing-intensive majors/minors and on-campus jobs, as well as snowball sampling, asking our contacts to forward the survey to others who might have had similar writing-related experiences. Although we oversampled English majors (n=23) in relation to the current distribution of majors on campus, our participants include majors from all three branches of the College of Arts and Sciences and from all three undergraduate professional schools at the university. Additional demographic information about the participants is included in the online resource for this chapter,

"Understanding Alumni Writing Experiences: Research Designs." We discuss findings from the student responses elsewhere (Bleakney et al. 2021), focusing in this chapter on a deeper dive into alumni responses.

The survey asked participants to identify their most often written and most valued types of writing, explain the rhetorical situation in which they composed them, and describe their writing process. Participants were not required to answer all questions, leading to different rates of participation across the questions.

In survey responses, alumni described both writing in a wide variety of genres (with texting and emails the most frequently written and also, for email, the most valued) and their robust writing processes that incorporated multiple drafting and revision steps, peer or supervisor feedback, and collaboration. They talked about how the most important thing they learned was how writing expectations vary by audience and genre, followed by the importance of conciseness and revising and editing their work. Finally, alumni pointed to specific degree programs or their comprehensive undergraduate education, inclusive of cocurricular and extracurricular rhetorical training, as preparing them for workplace writing. When considering email, for example, alumni noted how on-campus employment and internships or co-ops served as important preparation.

**Florida State Study Summary (Fall 2017 and Spring 2018)**
The Florida State University alumni study was focused on graduates of the university's Editing, Writing, and Media (EWM) concentration, taking a discipline-specific approach in order to understand the impact of sustained undergraduate education in writing and rhetoric on alumni lives. The goals of the project were three-fold:
- Determine if and how students' prior education, experiences, and literacies influence their undergraduate experiences within an undergraduate writing major;
- Identify undergraduate academic, cocurricular and/or professional experiences that shape alumni writing lives;
- Determine if and how those undergraduate experiences influence alums' post-graduation writing lives, encompassing their

academic and professional experiences as well as the scope of their current writing activities.

The study's survey was distributed via email to all graduates of the EWM program, using alumni's last known email addresses received with permission from the Florida State University Foundation; we also relied on convenience sampling, recruiting colleagues and program faculty to distribute the survey via targeted emails, LinkedIn messages, and posts on Twitter. The survey garnered 174 complete responses, yielding a 14.7% response rate. The survey covered five broad areas, including:

- Demographics
- Reasons for enrolling
- Professional trajectories following graduation
- Current writing activities, including processes and genres
- Quantitative ratings of the EWM program, keyed to programmatic outcomes

The survey's final question asked whether alumni would be willing to participate in an interview. From that pool of potential subjects, six alumni completed semi-structured interviews asking about their current writing tasks and processes as well as their undergraduate experiences in the program, having them articulate the perceived influence of the EWM program on their experiences in college and current writing lives.  These alumni's writing transfer after graduation is discussed in-depth elsewhere (Maynard, forthcoming), but briefly, the data suggest three overarching findings: alumni's identities as writers and prior writing activities influence their decisions to enroll in a writing major; the coursework and internship requirement of the EWM program contribute to alumni's concurrent and subsequent transfer within and beyond the university; the EWM program shapes alumni's writing lives by helping them develop rhetorical metacognition, allowing them to compose in the range of genres and media necessitated by their professional writing.

## Cross-Cutting Themes

### Trends around Genre

All three institution-specific studies included survey questions about commonly used genres. Similar to Blythe, Lauer, and Curran (2014) and Weisser and Grobman (2012), digital multimodal genres remain prominent, with email, presentations, and web content frequently reported across sites. Table 3.1 highlights these similarities across the studies, as well as some interesting differences, including the relative frequency of field-specific genres, e.g., legal documents and business writing.

Although the differences among the studies reflect the varied survey designs, they still help us better understand the writing lives of alumni. The national survey and the Elon Alumni Study included participants from an array of professions, giving us insight into frequently used genres *across* disciplines (e.g., client correspondence, reports, teaching materials). The Elon Rhetorical Training Study and the Florida State University study focused on alumni who had writing-intensive experiences during college—either as students in dedicated majors or minors or in concurrent employment or student organization contexts. These alumni might have a natural affinity for writing, pursue more personal writing (e.g., journals or diaries), and seek professional careers with more varied writing opportunities. The alumni in the Elon Rhetorical Training Study, for instance, report writing in a variety of web genres—websites, blogs, microblogs, and image messaging (e.g., Instagram photos and captions). The Florida State EWM alumni report using more multimodal genres and more genres associated with publishing or production. The findings of the two studies on alumni's increasing use of digital and multimedia genres are also consistent with Blythe, Lauer, and Curran's study of professional and technical communication alumni in 2014.

Collectively, these wide-ranging studies have implications for teaching and mentoring college writers—whether in the classroom or in cocurricular contexts—to better prepare them for writing beyond the university. For instance, given the prevalence of email and

| | CEL/Elon Poll National Survey of Recent College Graduates | Elon University Alumni Study | Elon University Rhetorical Training (Alumni Participants) | Florida State University Editing, Writing, and Media Alumni |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Similarities (Shared across 2+ studies)** | • Client correspondence<br>• Email<br>• Reports<br>• Social media<br>• Teaching materials<br>• Web content | • Client correspondence<br>• Email<br>• Reports<br>• Presentations<br>• Teaching materials | • Email<br>• Journal / diary<br>• Presentations<br>• Web Content | • Emails<br>• Journal / diary<br>• Presentations<br>• Reports<br>• Social media<br>• Web content (blogs) |
| **Distinctions** | • Instructions<br>• Memos<br>• Project management documents | • Grants/ proposals<br>• Legal documents | • Business writing<br>• Creative nonfiction<br>• Image messaging<br>• Lists<br>• Texting | • Copywriting<br>• Fiction<br>• Graphic design<br>• Layout<br>• Photography |

*Table 3.1. Similarities and Distinctions in Commonly Used Genres across Studies*

presentations in alumni's writing lives, regardless of their professions, college students would benefit from more opportunities not only to practice these genres but also to receive intentional instruction and timely feedback on them. Similarly, scaffolded opportunities to learn more about writing web content and for social media during on-campus employment, while participating in student organizations, or in classroom contexts might better prepare alumni to use these frequently written genres more effectively.

## How Is College Preparing Students to Write Beyond the University?

Despite the varied methodological approaches of these local studies, they each prompted students and alumni to identify some common academic and cocurricular experiences that were formative in their development as writers. In the Elon Rhetorical Training and Florida State studies, respondents indicated that writing-related majors and minors most contributed to their development as writers, including discipline-specific coursework in advanced writing, rhetoric and visual rhetoric, and creative writing workshops. The broader Elon Alumni Study identified both courses and projects that shaped graduates' current writing, including cross-disciplinary senior seminar courses and courses in business communication and media writing. Additionally, regardless of discipline, participants in that study valued two types of projects: sustained, mentored writing experiences requiring multiple drafts and revision—including undergraduate research projects and theses—and client-based projects that had writers address real non-academic audiences. Beyond writing-related majors and minors, and academic courses and projects, participants in all three studies named a range of formative cocurricular experiences, including writing for campus clubs/organizations, internships, and on-campus jobs such as writing center consulting. Table 3.2 presents this range of experiences, highlighting academic programs, courses, projects, and cocurricular work that participants in each study identified.

In their open-ended and interview responses, participants in each study expanded upon these academic and cocurricular experiences,

|  | Elon Alumni Study | Elon Rhetorical Training | Florida State |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Academic Experiences (Programs, Courses, and Projects)** | • Senior seminar<br>• Undergraduate research<br>• Business communication<br>• Media writing course<br>• Multi-step, process-focused writing projects | • Advanced writing courses<br>• Writing-related majors and minors | • Advanced writing courses<br>• Rhetoric courses<br>• Visual rhetoric courses<br>• Creative writing workshops |
| **Cocurricular Experiences (On- and Off-Campus)** | • Client projects<br>• On-campus jobs | • On-campus jobs<br>• Writing center consulting | • Internships<br>• Writing center consulting |

Table 32. Range of Writing Experiences across Studies

providing insight into how their classes and cocurricular activities better prepared them for their writing after graduation. Overall, participants indicated that these experiences helped them to practice different genres and writing styles, to cater their writing to different audiences, and to be more intentional in their writing processes.

We see these various intersecting experiences at play in a response by a participant in the Elon Alumni Study, who describes her long-term research project as a valuable experience that shaped her writing knowledge and prepared her for writing in her career. "The entire project," she writes, "which spanned three years, demanded writing proficiency for a number of genres: grants, literature reviews, proposals, presentations, abstracts, transcripts, and essays/articles." She explains that this project entailed ongoing and long-term support from a professor-mentor, who read and provided feedback on her work continuously: "During the thesis writing process, my faculty mentor willingly read and revised new sections every week, offering detailed feedback that directly addressed my strengths and challenges as a writer." The long-term and highly mentored nature of this project was key, as were the "required semesterly reflections," which kept the student on track and promoted metacognition. "Having a single professor review my work over a three-year period was highly productive, seeing as he knew best what I needed to improve, refashion, or cut based on my writing style and capability," the student wrote, and she appreciated the extent of this involvement: "It was comforting and rewarding to have a professor invest valuable time in cultivating my intellectual development."

Participants in the Florida State study also described their increased attunement to audience and genre. For example, a student who took a writing workshop said the experience "was useful in terms of understanding how you write, and having the teacher and your classmates write you feedback, but then also learning about how other people write, their style, and maybe picking up someone's good habits that you can incorporate into yours." Similarly, another FSU alum says that her coursework

changed the way she writes based on her understanding of audience: "Between advanced writing, rhetoric, and visual rhetoric . . . all my classes . . . influenced how I write; I can't go back to how I wrote before those classes. . . . They've developed my ability to write and kind of read what I'm writing in a different lens other than just my personal lens." And a third participant describes how the program prepared her to be able "to write different ways; so we're writing a press release to the local news—that looks totally different, and it's formatted on paper differently than it would be writing online. There's so many different things that go [into] writing in those different [spaces]; you have to change your writing style because you can't write one way for all of those methods."

Another theme that emerged across the studies is the value of participants' metacognitive reflection on their writing processes, their writing choices, and the power of effective writing. Alumni across the studies recognized how they developed thoughtful writing processes that contributed to their success as writers. For example, an alumnus who participated in the Elon Rhetorical Training Study and who graduated with a professional writing and rhetoric major explained that from their coursework, "I learned that the process is just as important as the product. Retrospectively, I've realized that strong writing is a skill that many professionals don't have. It's an incredible asset that I'm fortunate to have developed." When discussing the importance of their writing processes, alumni across the studies also noted the importance of soliciting feedback from audiences, given that writing is a kind of social action, a means to get things done. As another alumnus from the Rhetorical Training Study who majored in professional writing and rhetoric and creative writing said: "Writing is functional. Even when we write creatively, we aim to answer questions and solve problems. Also— good writing is not an isolationist exercise. Most, if not all, pieces of good writing have many pairs of eyes and hands on them before they are published."

**Gaps in Preparation/Opportunities for Enhancement**

The studies also identified gaps in students' preparation for writing and opportunities for future curriculum enhancement. Despite participants' discussions about their preparation to write for different audiences and purposes and to develop their writing processes, alumni in both the Elon Alumni Study and the Elon Rhetorical Training Study identified three writing challenges they experienced since graduation:

1. How to adapt to readers' expectations and needs.
2. How to write a new type of genre.
3. How to write concisely and directly.

The Florida State study similarly found gaps between alumni's school preparation and their actual workplace writing in terms of writing in new genres, especially those engaging the visual and requiring unfamiliar composing technologies—making genre the most common challenge faced by alumni across the studies, including the national survey conducted by the Elon Poll and Center for Engaged Learning. In general, students need more preparation in genre writing, audience adaptation, writing concisely, visual composing, and writing technologies. The findings suggest opportunities for enhancement in curriculum design to include more genres, audience adaptation, connections between class and out-of-class writing experiences, and additional media/composing technologies, especially those engaging visual elements of design.

## Implications

Collectively, these alumni studies inform our recommendations for how program and campus-wide initiatives can support graduates' writing beyond the university. Faculty and staff who teach and mentor student writers, whether inside the classroom or in on-campus employment and other co- and extracurricular contexts, should provide students opportunities to write for varied audiences and purposes. Across the university, students have multiple opportunities to practice writing for academic conventions, but assignments that require students to write to a specific recipient, rather than the

teacher or a general reader, offer students much-needed practice in adapting writing to specific audiences and purposes. Writing for "real" audiences, in turn, also increases the likelihood that students will have opportunities to practice writing a range of genres in varied media, including visual genres.

Writing assignments and tasks also should vary in genre and style. Across several of our studies, alumni noted challenges with writing concisely. While not incompatible with writing for academic audiences, when course-based writing consists primarily of end-of-term papers or other long, academic projects, writing concisely and directly might not be the focus of attention, particularly if students are focused on achieving minimum word counts. Integrating a few short assignments for authentic audiences can help students practice organizing their ideas clearly and succinctly—while also offering alternate assessments of students' learning than afforded by an end-of-semester term paper. At the same time, our studies also suggest that multiple-term projects that give students agency, like mentored undergraduate research projects, have lasting value in students' development as writers. As the quotes above illustrate, these larger projects often integrate practice with multiple genres for real audiences and require students to engage in multiple iterations of recursive planning, drafting, and revision. This type of engagement with stages of the writing process also matters. Alumni expressed appreciation for practice managing extended writing projects and learning how to engage with feedback while revising.

Program directors and other university administrators can facilitate these efforts to support writers' development throughout their careers and lives beyond the university by making writing a college-wide commitment. *Writing across the university* initiatives—an evolution of previous writing across the curriculum (WAC) or writing in the disciplines (WID) efforts—signal to all campus members that preparing writers is not simply a curricular initiative. Student employment, internships, co-ops, residence life, and other student life spaces all function as sites of writing and should have an active role in supporting writers' development. Alumni in our

studies expressed appreciation for writing majors and minors and for writing-intensive courses and internship requirements in their majors (e.g., media writing, business communication), but they also highlighted long-term, mentored experiences (e.g., student employment in writing centers and other spaces, undergraduate research) that provided opportunities for contextualized writing for specific audiences and purposes, including disciplinary audiences. As university administrators implement these recommendations on their campuses, they should look to—or hire for—writing studies expertise both to support professional development for writing across the university efforts and to increase the availability of writing courses, minors, and majors taught by writing experts.

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# SUPPORTING THE WRITING AND WRITING EXPERIENCES OF LIFELONG LEARNERS

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This section explores how writers adapt their writing strategies for new contexts and how higher education faculty and staff can help prepare students for lifelong and lifewide writing. The section's first three chapters examine students' experiences as they navigate writing as college students, but significantly, the chapters also acknowledge that much of that writing happens beyond the classroom.

> *"Students' writing development is much more complex and sophisticated than is ordinarily reported in the existing literature; more specifically, students' writing development is located in many spheres beyond the university." (Chapter 4)*

In "'There is a Lot of Overlap': Tracing Writing Development Across Spheres of Writing" (chapter 4), Kathleen Blake Yancey, D. Alexis Hart, Ashley Holmes, Anna V. Knutson, Íde O'Sullivan, and Yogesh Sinha (members of a 2019–2021 research seminar team) document students' writing in and across several contexts in the United States, Ireland, and Oman. As their case studies illustrate, students' spheres of writing include community contexts, internships and other workplace settings, and cocurricular experiences. Their student participants perceive relationships among the spheres, which should facilitate students' ability to transfer and adapt prior writing knowledge to new writing contexts, and the chapter authors offer recommendations for fostering this writing recursivity.

*"In order to prevent lengthy periods of unsystematic trial and error, faculty teaching in WIL [work-integrated learning] contexts need to debunk the myth of transience (i.e., the idea that writing can be learned once and for all and then statically imported to address any writing situation)." (Chapter 5)*

In "Writing Across Professions (WAP): Fostering the Transfer of Writing Knowledge and Practices in Work-Integrated Learning" (chapter 5), another 2019-2021 research team focuses specifically on students' transition from curricular contexts to work-integrated learning settings like internships and other work placements. Michael-John DePalma, Lilian W. Mina, Kara Taczak, Michelle J. Eady, Radhika Jaidev, and Ina Alexandra Machura highlight data from interviews conducted in the United States and Germany, and they propose a curricular model to support students' repurposing of writing knowledge and practices as they move among these spheres.

*"The need for student writing support should be recognized by university program coordinators. Both in EFL and non-EFL contexts, the students are rich resources who can serve as support for themselves and for one another. . . . If institutions want their students to write better at the university and continue developing writing skills for academic and professional success, they need to help their students make use of sustainable resources and approaches." (Chapter 6)*

In "Examining the Effects of Reflective Writing and Peer Feedback on Student Writing In and Beyond the University" (chapter 6), Ha Thi Phuong Pham and Dominique Vola Ambinintsoa examine the longitudinal impact of two specific curricular strategies—facilitated reflection and peer feedback—on Malagasy and Vietnamese students' writing as they move through subsequent coursework.

The remaining chapters in this section shift attention from writing in higher education to writing in the workplace.

> *"Both professors and students navigate a range of writing genres (e.g., email, PowerPoint slides, academic writing) for a range of audiences and yet, like the respondents in our survey, research indicates that many believe the myth of transience. As with professionals, both professors and students are likely relying on tacit knowledge and routines, making it difficult for them to adapt to new contexts." (Chapter 7)*

"Bridging Academic and Workplace Writing: Insights from Employers" (chapter 7) highlights results from a survey of employers to illustrate how workplace perspectives on writing compare to writing practices often enacted in college classrooms. Jeffrey Saerys-Foy, Laurie Ann Britt-Smith, Zan Walker-Goncalves, and Lauren M. Sardi, representing three US institutions, share strategies for bridging this divide with incremental instruction and practice in writing across the curriculum.

Complementing this employer perspective, the final three chapters in this section look at new professionals' experiences with workplace writing.

> *"The workplace—with its various cues, structures, and relationships (or the lack thereof)—can affect how new workplace professionals develop as writers and respond to the writing they are asked to do in their jobs." (Chapter 8)*

In "Navigating Workplace Writing as a New Professional: The Roles of Workplace Environment, Writerly Identity, and Mentoring and Support" (chapter 8), Ann M. Blakeslee, Jennifer C. Mallette, Rebecca S. Nowacek, J. Michael Rifenburg, and Liane Robertson (members of a 2019-2021 research seminar team) highlight the experiences of eight early-career alumni from five US institutions to illustrate how supports in college and the workplace can prepare students for more successful transitions into workplace writing as alumni.

> *"We can see that both interviewees are writing in difficult situations—confined within complex systems and limitations*

*on their writing and composing to audiences that each want
something that is difficult or impossible to provide. In order
to be successful in their communications, each must negotiate
a balance between the ideal and the realistic, for the sake of
efficacy." (Chapter 9)*

Next, "'I'll Try to Make Myself Sound Smarter than I Am': Learning
to Negotiate Power in Workplace Writing" (chapter 9) explores the
experiences of two US-based workplace writers as they grapple with
new kinds of writing and learn on the job. Brian Fitzpatrick and
Jessica McCaughey interviewed over fifty participants, and in this
chapter, they focus on two illustrative cases that look at the writing
responsibilities and experiences of professionals who are not hired
as "writers" but who write regularly for their jobs.

*"Static heuristics learned in college do not acknowledge the
dynamic nature of workplace writing, where alumni encoun-
ter different audiences with a variety of expectations about
demands for writing." (Chapter 10)*

Finally, in "'What One Learns in College Only Makes Sense When
Practicing It at Work': How Early-Career Alumni Evaluate Writing
Success" (chapter 10), Neil Baird, Alena Kasparkova, Stephen
Macharia, and Amanda Sturgill (another 2019-2021 research seminar
team) examine the school-to-work transitions of twelve early career
alumni from the United States, Kenya, and the Czech Republic and
suggest a framework for supporting college students through that
transition.

Collectively, these chapters offer college educators a better
understanding of the writing that students and alumni do beyond
the university—whether in concurrent contexts while still enrolled
in postsecondary study or in workplace settings after they graduate.
This knowledge is critical to developing curricular and cocurricular
supports for current students, as well as alumni programming, to
prepare students for lifelong and lifewide writing.

# "THERE IS A LOT OF OVERLAP"

## Tracing Writing Development across Spheres of Writing

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**Ashley J. Holmes,** *Georgia State University, United States*
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**Yogesh Sinha,** *Ohio University, United States*

While considerable research documents the impact of first-year composition (FYC) on students, we know much less about what happens to college writers once they leave FYC, especially as they write in a myriad of contexts, among them classrooms, but also workplaces, cocurriculars, and internships. Our project takes up this question about the contexts where students write by going to the source—students who have completed at least two years of college—and explicitly asking them about (1) the contexts where they write, and (2) their understandings of relationships between and across these contexts. We call such relationships *recursivities*.

In designing our study of upper-division student writing, we operationalized students' writing contexts as *spheres* of writing. Like contexts, spheres of writing refer to circumstances and occasions for writing, but whereas contexts are also specific to given texts, spheres are neither time-bound nor text-bound. Like rhetorical situations, spheres of writing include authors, audiences, occasions, and exigences; spheres, however, are not tied to a single instance or

even recurring instances, but rather can host a diversity of rhetorical situations and actions (see O'Sullivan et al. 2022). In operationalizing spheres, we also identified seven potential spheres: self-motivated; cocurriculars; internships; workplaces; civic/community spaces; academic classrooms; and other spheres. Given this set of spheres, students were asked, first in surveys and then in follow-up interviews (1) which *spheres* they composed in; (2) what, if any, relationships, or *recursivities* they perceived between spheres; (3) how their understanding of writing developed as a result of these experiences; and (4) what recommendations they might make to faculty and program administrators about how to best support college writers.

Three research questions guided our study:

1. What, if anything, do upper-division undergraduate students (year 3 and above through graduation) learn about writing in their writing-beyond-the-classroom experiences?
2. What kinds of recursivity, if any, do they perceive among their non-academic and curricular writing experiences?
3. What are the implications for universities, globally, for the ways that they can foster and support students in making connections across spheres?

In the pages that follow, we briefly describe the project before detailing three case studies demonstrating the most common type of recursivity reported by participants: between the academic and the self-motivated spheres. Although each of the case study students noted the importance of writing in self-motivated and academic spheres, the participants' observations differ in two ways: in the intensity of the relationship they perceived between these spheres, and in the directionality they plotted between them. One student, Chris, reported a high level of intensity between the spheres, seeing them as nearly conjoined; Bushra, the second student, reported mid-range intensity; and Mel, the third student, reported low intensity. Each case of recursivity also differed in terms of spherical *directionality*: Bushra spoke about one sphere, the academic, influencing the self-motivated sphere *unidirectionally;* Chris relayed his view of the two spheres influencing each other equally, or *bidirectionally*; and

Mel described the relationship between these two spheres *centrifugally*, with learning from the self-motivated sphere extending outward to all of her other spheres. These students' accounts thus highlight the multiple spheres in which they write, the relationships they perceive across and among them, and the ways writing in them has helped shape them as writers.

## Methods Overview

This multi-institutional study included a large set of survey responses (n=239) and follow-up semi-structured interviews (n=24). Survey responses were collected in fall 2019 and spring 2020; we identified from the survey data a representative sample for interviews in terms of institution, year of study, and the number of spheres in which students write; and interviews were conducted online, after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, in spring 2020. Each interview included a mapping exercise, a series of interview questions, and a mapping revision. In the initial mapping exercise, participants identified and drew the spheres in which they write, the types of texts they write within each sphere, and any recursivities they perceived among the spheres. Their maps guided the interviews, as did a series of questions prompting discussion of participants' experience of writing in each of the identified spheres and representative samples of texts that participants shared ahead of the interview. Finally, participants could revise their maps after discussing the spheres and recursivities across them. Each interview was coded by two researchers as a means of ensuring inter-reader reliability, using a coding schema developed by the research team.

Collectively, the students who completed surveys and interviews represent a wide range of institutions: Allegheny College, Meadville, PA; Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA; Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA; and Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL, all in the United States; the University of Limerick, in Ireland; and Sohar University, in Oman. (See "Comparative Information for Institutions in Study" in the online resources for additional details.)

## Recursivities across Academic and Self-Motivated Spheres of Writing

The interview data and maps reveal that students in our study uniformly write in at least two spheres, and most students write in three or more. Students reported writing most commonly in two particular spheres: academic (n=24) and self-motivated (n=23).
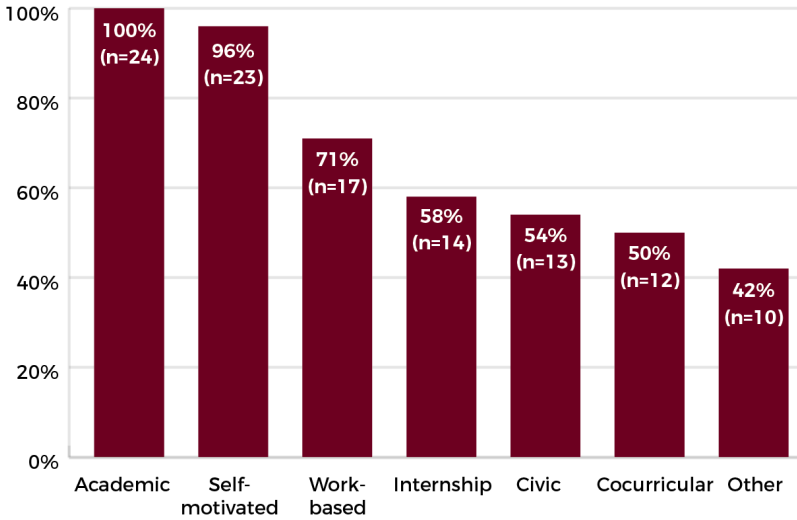


*Figure 4.1. Spheres of Writing Identified by Interview Participants*

Both our conversations with students and the maps they generated during our interviews demonstrated a great deal of recursivity between their academic and self-motivated spheres. Of the 338 instances of recursivity coded in the interviews, most prominent was the recursivity between these two spheres. Students articulated recursivity between academic and self-motivated spheres in terms of the similarities in discourse (e.g., syntax, voice, genre, as in our first case study, Bushra) and rhetorical situation (e.g., audience, purpose, genre, and subject, as in our second case, Chris), as well as in their sense of motivation and engagement with writing (as in Mel, our third case).

In some cases, student-drawn maps visually documented relationships between their self-motivated and academic spheres through

Venn diagrams or arrows; in others, the interview conversations highlighted intensity and directionality. For Bushra, the overlap between academic and self-motivated spheres moved in one direction—from the academic to the self-motivated sphere. For Chris, there was a bidirectional recursivity between self-motivated and academic spheres functioning as what he called a "two-way street." For Mel, the recursivity from the self-motivated sphere to other spheres seems omni-directional, a directionality we categorize—drawing on language in physics—as *centrifugal*, meaning the energy or force from one sphere moved outward to inform the others. We see the direction of recursivity as, in part, a function of the intensity these students saw between the academic and self-motivated spheres (see figure 4.2). As explained in the following cases, Mel's reporting a lower level of intensity between academic and self-motivated spheres results from the distributed nature of the centrifugal directionality, while Bushra and Chris wrote in fewer spheres but reported mid- and higher levels of intensity in their understanding of recursivities between those spheres.

The case studies profiled below explore more fully the pronounced relationship between the academic and self-motivated spheres, highlighting the *complexity* of individual iterations of recursivity between these spheres in terms of *intensity* and *directionality*.

### Case Study 1, Bushra: Mid-Level Intensity, Unidirectional Recursivity: "My course in university helped me"

Bushra's case showed mid-level intensity in the relationship between her academic and self-motivated spheres, with the direction of impact going from academic toward self-motivated. On the survey, Bushra reported writing in three spheres; during the interview mapping exercise, she drew spheres for work-based, classroom, and what she originally called "optimistic" writing but changed to self-motivated before sharing her map. The academic sphere was in the middle intersecting the other two, and the circles are graduated in size, with academic the largest (see figure 4.3). The first text Bushra submitted was an example from the self-motivated sphere, a grammar book she wrote for young English as a Foreign
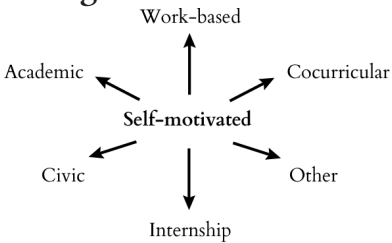
| | Intensity of recursivity between spheres | Direction of recursivity |
|---|---|---|
| **Bushra** | Mid-level intensity | **Unidirectional**<br><br>Academic ⟶ Self-motivated |
| **Chris** | Higher levels of intensity | **Bidirectional**<br><br>Academic ⟷ Self-motivated |
| **Mel** | Lower levels of intensity | **Centrifugal**<br><br>Self-motivated radiating to: Work-based, Academic, Cocurricular, Civic, Internship, Other |

*Figure 4.2. Intensity and Direction of Recursivity in Case Studies*

Language (EFL) learners. The second sample text was from the academic sphere—a classroom assignment. In discussing these texts, Bushra identified seven instances of recursivity between academic and self-motivated spheres.

In the interview, Bushra discussed her final-year course in the English language studies major, which focuses on professional writing and critical thinking. She reported recursivity here, saying the academic and self-motivated spheres have "a relationship between my course in university that's helped me to write more professionally, to manage my writing, and help me to know about what level I wrote." Moreover, she described the direction of influence from her academic writing to the self-motivated, where she writes books in English and her vernacular language. Explaining that her writing development in the academic sphere supports her
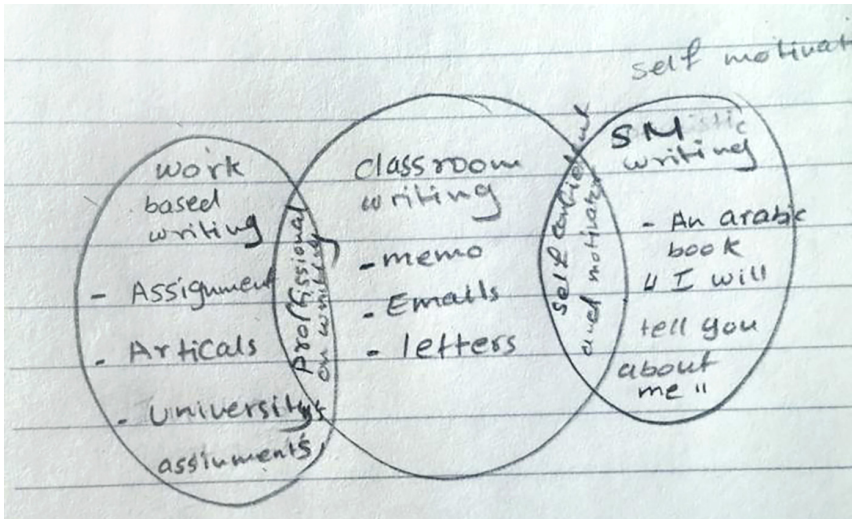
*Figure 4.3. Map of Bushra's Spheres of Writing (Case Study 1)*

self-motivated writing, she drew connections, noting: "That's the similarity between them. I wrote for the audience to attract them to my writing." The impact of the academic on the self-motivated sphere is especially pronounced in the books she has written outside of school, which promote academic literacy. When asked about the inspiration for writing her books, she said, "So the courses in university helps me." Bushra reported several times, though not as frequently as our high-intensity case study with Chris, that she had learned writing principles and strategies at school; in response to a question about how academic writing informed the other spheres, she indicated: "That's influenced my writing and organizing and arrangement [of] my writing."

Bushra's case emphasizes how a student's cultural context can influence their perception of recursivities among spheres. The substantial role of the academic sphere in Bushra's literacy landscape makes sense given the role of English in Arabian Gulf states: English language learning is perceived as a harbinger of positive change in people's social, academic, and professional lives. Moreover, Bushra's cultural upbringing taught her to show gratitude toward teachers; she stated, "The lecturers in my university, they do a good way of

writing. From my experience that's benefit me—a positive impact in my writing." Comments like this reinforce the linear directionality of how Bushra conceives of her spheres of writing, with the academic sphere impacting her self-motivated sphere at a mid-level of intensity.

### Case Study 2, Chris: Higher-Level Intensity, Bidirectional Recursivity: "I would say that it's a two-way street"

In his response to the survey, Chris reported writing only in the academic and self-motivated spheres. However, when prompted to draw his map, he included four spheres, one each for academic, self-motivated, work, and internship (see figure 4.4a). The academic sphere is the most prominent on Chris's map, followed closely by the self-motivated sphere. In his interview, Chris identified thirteen instances of recursivity (i.e., high-level intensity) between the academic and self-motivated spheres; he plots their bidirectional relationship as indicated by the double-headed arrow on his map and his characterization of the recursivity as a "two-way street."

As Chris noted, "[T]he two largest spheres for me were obviously classroom, which is probably everybody's largest. And then it overlaps a little bit with the self-motivated sphere, at least in my personal case." Within that overlap, Chris draws particular attention to "discussing music." In fact, the high intensity of Chris's recursivity between academic and self-motivated spheres is largely due to the number of texts he writes that are centered on his interest in music. As he stated,

> [O]bviously you saw that music is a very large interest of mine, and so that often overlaps with classroom work and academic papers. . . . So a lot of times [in academic papers] I'll compare music to film, or I'll talk about the rhetorical techniques in an album through the lyrics and the instruments. And so the self-motivated part of [writing about music is] sometimes I like to just sit down and write about, like try and put into words why I like [an album] so much.

Although Chris initially began writing about the albums he liked via stream-of-consciousness (or self-described "mental vomit"), he found himself drawing on more academic/authoritative genres to bolster his self-motivated music reviews, because "pulling the style of classroom to self-motivated makes the impact a bit larger, a bit more profound. . . . I mean, if I wrote in stream-of-consciousness then I feel like it wouldn't be as rigid in pointing out these different things. And music reviews are structured for a reason." In returning to his map at the end of the interview (see figure 4.4b), Chris added a notation elaborating on this point: "Some self-motivated compositions require a formal tone."

While Chris turns to academic structure and format to add credibility to his self-motivated music reviews, he finds recursivity moving from the self-motivated to the academic in his use of "a more natural voice" and topic choices for his academic assignments. For example, Chris describes the sample academic text he chose to share with the interviewer, an essay in which he "translates" the novel *Moby Dick* into metal music, as "the fusion of self-motivation and classroom because obviously . . . I'm a big music person. Listening to a lot of music, I was able to bring that over and really break it down and . . . figure out exactly why *Moby Dick* lends itself to this particular genre of music." On his map, too, Chris notes that his academic research papers are "often [about] SM topics" and "classroom works are often somewhat self-motiv[ated]."

Like Bushra, Chris saw movement between the self-motivated and academic spheres. However, for Chris, the bidirectional recursivity is provided by his persistent focus on the topic of music in both spheres. This dynamism and multidirectional movement leads us to our final case study, Mel, who saw recursivities between all spheres, with the self-motivated in the center informing all other writing.
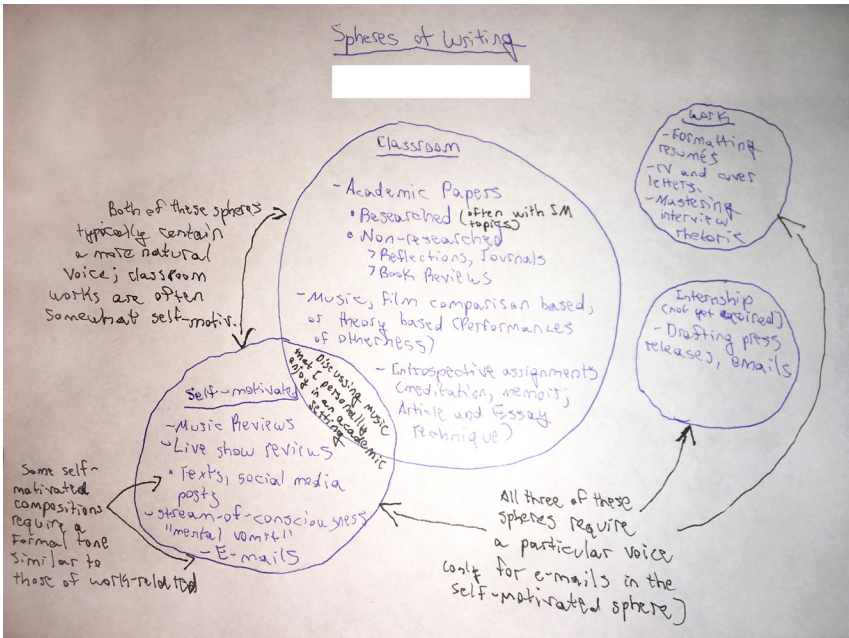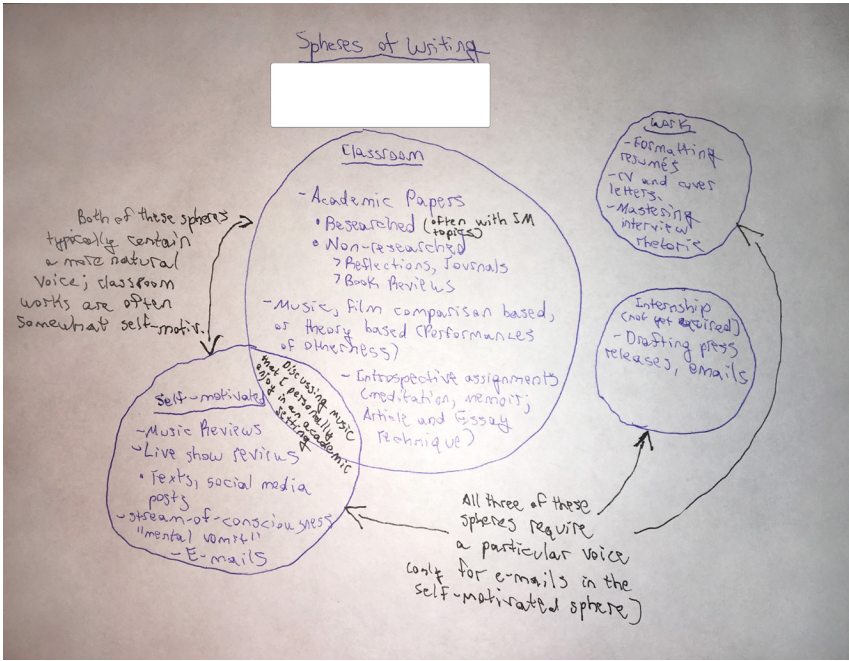
*Figure 4.4. Pre- and Post-Interview Maps of Chris's Spheres of Writing (Case Study 2)*

### Case Study 3, Mel: Lower-Level Intensity, Centrifugal Recursivity: "All of my circles will always lead towards self-motivated writing"

While Mel, a chemistry major with a math minor, traced multiple connections across spheres and exemplified what we call "centrifugal recursivity," here we focus on the connections she made between her self-motivated and academic writing. Inspired by Mel's scientific writing, we borrowed language from physics to describe the direction of her recursivity: just as centrifugal motion moves outward from a center, Mel approached writing in all spheres from the sphere she saw as most connected to one's "core": the self-motivated. Mel's story is one of development; while writing across spheres in college, she developed a more nuanced, multiperspectival view of the world. Mel constellated the four spheres in which she reported writing with the self-motivated sphere in the very center: as she stated after drawing her map, "All of my circles will always lead towards self-motivated writing."

Mel engaged in a rich range of composing activities and genres in the self-motivated sphere, including poetry, letters, drawing, editing, social media writing, and bullet-journaling. Mel positioned her self-motivated writing as aligned with her interests and "strengths in the arts," highlighting that she "loves color theory." Mel's love for design and visual rhetoric in the self-motivated sphere informed all instances of recursivity. When asked about creative and visual arts in her academic writing, Mel discussed composing scientific posters and demonstrated her understanding of rhetorical design choices, such as "not wanting garish colors" or nothing "too outstandish." Mel understood effective writing and poster design in the academic sphere through the centrality of her self-motivated writing, stating that she "sees a cross between . . . the two" spheres.

In Mel's personally held theory of writing (Yancey, Robertson, Taczak 2014), the self-motivated sphere seemed to anchor one's writing in all spheres due to its closeness to the self, or one's "core"; Mel's centering of the self-motivated sphere is also closely connected to intrinsic motivation and positive affect, calling to

mind Nowacek's (2011) discussion of the affective component of transfer in *Agents of Integration* (27). Mel stated that "self-motivated writing does lead into the other categories" because it is "what our true selves are speaking." She referred to self-motivation as the key to overcoming writing challenges in all other spheres: "If we can use what we take as our self-motivation, our core, and utilize that in the other spheres, then we've cracked it." Mel seemed to align affect and motivation with communicative efficacy: "If you don't feel passionate about it, I don't think your writing will translate exactly what you want very well."

The most compelling evidence of Mel's recursivity emanating outward from the self-motivated sphere can be found in her map revision. Mel made a number of changes in how she visually represented recursivities across all of her spheres of writing. Although her initial map didn't fully capture the dynamism and directionality of the recursivity, her revised map (see both maps in figure 4.5) at the end of the interview shows enhanced detail, attention to design, and what appears to be scientific reasoning. In the first version, Mel had two separate circles for "self-motivated" and "class-oriented" spheres, with pronounced space between them and no arrows. Returning to the map, Mel entirely redrew it instead of making additions/deletions, placing the self-motivated sphere prominently in the center, connecting it to all other spheres with double-headed arrows. Asterisks next to the arrows guide readers to a note describing the relationship between self-motivated and all other spheres: "you should have self-motivation to perform these tasks." This note reinforced that Mel saw self-motivation as a driver for writing tasks.

The visual details articulated in the revised map highlight the convergence of Mel's self-motivated and academic literacies: in the second map, she utilized visual literacies obtained in the self-motivated sphere (color-coding) coupled with scientific reasoning drawn from the academic sphere (arrows and interconnected placement of spheres). In some ways, her revised map resembles a concept map representing a chemical reaction that a chemistry major might draw for her notes.
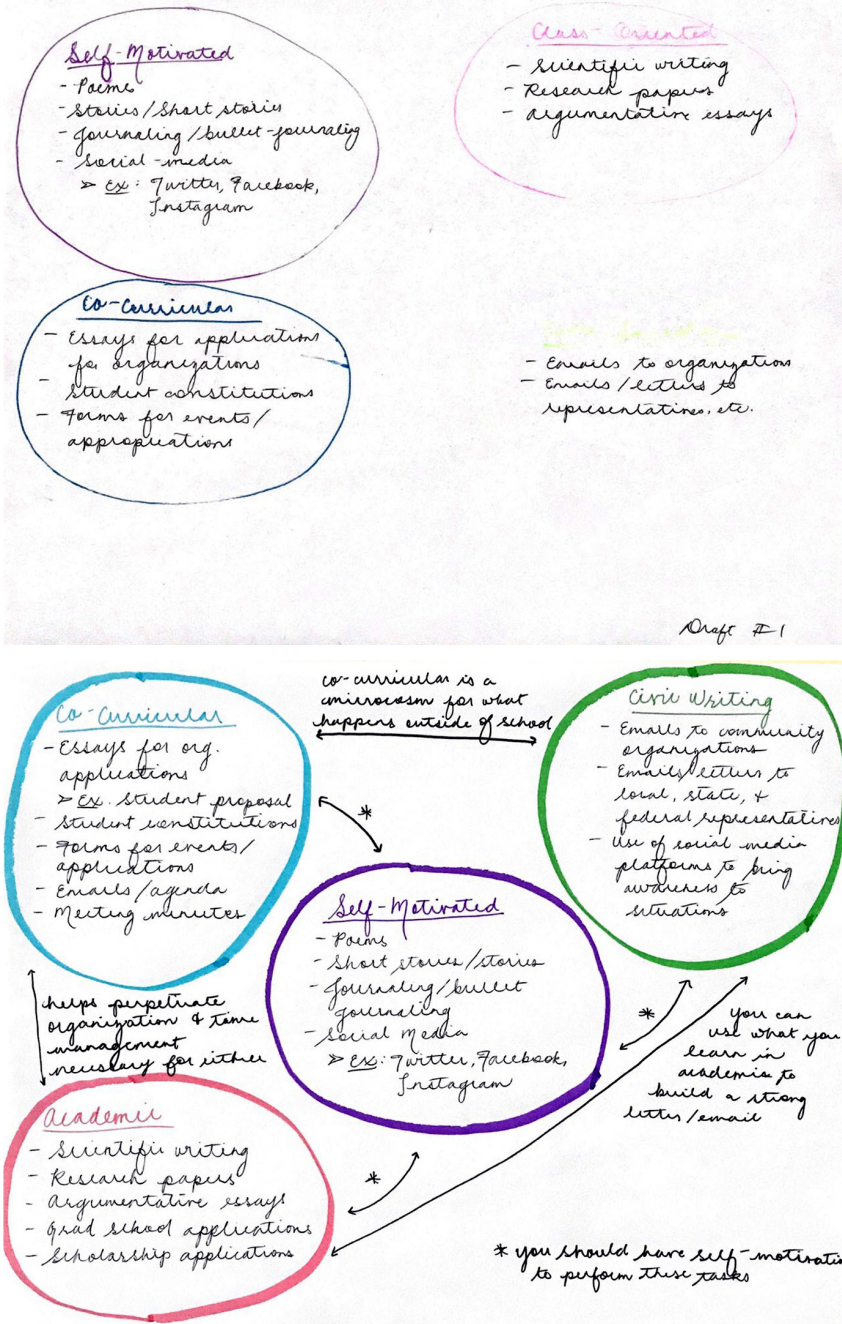
*Figure 4.5. Pre– and Post–Interview Maps of Mel's Spheres of Writing (Case Study 3)*

Ultimately, Mel's self-reports and map revision suggest that her personally held theory of writing positions all spheres as interconnected, with the self-motivated sphere occupying the most central position and informing her writing in all other spheres. Like Chris and Bushra, Mel saw a link between her self-motivated and academic writing; however, in her understanding, the self-motivated sphere informed writing in all other spheres, with motivation and composing competencies moving outward from the center.

## Implications

As these case studies demonstrate, students' writing development is much more complex and sophisticated than is ordinarily reported in the existing literature; more specifically, students' writing development is located in many spheres *beyond* the university. Our recommendations, accordingly, highlight ways that faculty, programs, and institutions can support such writing development in their own practices.

In keeping with prior research emphasizing the critical role of metacognitive reflection in cultivating transfer (Roozen 2010), we found that while most of the writers we interviewed seemed aware of connections between their writing in different spheres, they tested and refined these connections through the metacognitive work of the mapping exercises and interviews. Therefore, we suggest providing students with structured opportunities to map their spheres of writing and the recursivities between spheres to help them perceive and draw upon their prior writing knowledge.

We encourage instructors to explicitly draw students' attention to the recursivities at play in their academic writing and their writing-beyond-the-classroom (Rosinski 2016) to help them recognize how their practices in one sphere influence and inform their choices in the other spheres. As with Chris, who recognized the relationship between his academic and self-motivated writing was a "two-way street," other writers may begin to understand how such borrowings can be assets in multiple spheres.

The participants in our study overwhelmingly suggested that faculty can support students in perceiving, mapping, and strengthening connections across the various spheres in which they write by giving them more freedom and agency to create meaning within the academic sphere. Therefore, we recommend faculty provide flexible assignment options that allow students to make meaningful (sometimes personal) connections to their writing (Anderson et al. 2015; Eodice, Geller, and Lerner 2019). One participant recommended "having less structure" and making students "come up with their own ideas and find their own voice when they're writing." Another suggested that instructors "[open] up the topics to the interests of the students" to make it "easy for [them] to select something that [they] enjoy and bring it into the classroom sphere."

Similarly, along with John Bean (2011) and Dan Melzer (2014), we recommend that faculty assign a range of written genres. Our findings suggest that assigning a variety of genre types in academic settings can help students perceive and act on recursivities across spheres as well as provide opportunities to tap into and build on their prior knowledge.

We also suggest that faculty developers facilitate an institutional shift toward more "student-centered curricula" (Budwig 2018) and "holistic teaching" (Henderson, Castner, and Schneider 2018) practices. As Tia McNair et al. point out, student-ready colleges demonstrate "intentional leadership centered on student learning and belief in student capacities" (2016, 83) and "address the talents and assets all students bring to college" (2016, 87).

By facilitating faculty development to implement the curricular approaches we recommend above to value students' lived experiences and prior knowledge, program directors and senior academic officers can continue to challenge deficit models of student learning. As the writers in our study demonstrate, college students *want* to make meaning across the contexts in which they move; it is our responsibility as writing instructors, program designers, and educational leaders to provide structured opportunities for them to do so.

In closing, we echo McNair et al.'s urging of institutions to "intentionally design, deliver, and maintain the resources and culture necessary to ensure student success" (2016, 62). One element of such intentional design is making visible the interconnections in students' lives to help them "see how systems and structures work" (McNair et al. 2016, 87). Our research suggests that drawing attention to the recursivities in students' writing lives, including the social nature of writing-beyond-the-classroom, is one way to help them prepare to recognize and adapt to the structures and systems in post-graduate employment and civic engagement.

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CHAPTER 5

# WRITING ACROSS PROFESSIONS (WAP)

Fostering the Transfer of Writing Knowledge and
Practices in Work-Integrated Learning

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In this chapter, we offer writing across professions (WAP) as a
curricular model that faculty and administrators in higher education
(HE) can utilize to facilitate students' transfer of writing knowledge
and practices in the context of work-integrated learning (WIL).
A central goal of writing transfer scholarship is cultivating high-
impact pedagogies that seek to foster students' reuse and reshaping
of writing knowledge and practices as they traverse writing contexts,
genres, and media (DePalma and Ringer 2011; Yancey, Robertson,
and Taczak 2014). A primary objective of WIL research is designing
pedagogical frameworks that blend workplace practices with
academic learning in HE settings in order to equip undergraduates
across the disciplines for their transition from university contexts to
workplace environments. WAP connects these closely aligned and
burgeoning bodies of research with the aim of preparing students
who are engaged in WIL experiences for the writing that they will
do in their careers. In drawing together the insights from these
bodies of research, WAP foregrounds the centrality of writing

in WIL contexts and prioritizes the transfer of students' writing knowledge and practices as a key learning outcome of WIL.

Among scholars of writing transfer and writing pedagogy, it has long been recognized that the transfer of writing knowledge and practices to the exigencies of writing outside of the university constitute a significant pressure point for professional success as students attempt to navigate the demands of the workplace. For example, scholarship on internships, a type of WIL experience, notes the high degree to which students as well as industry partners and university supervisors emphasize the importance of writing transfer for employability and professional performance (Anson and Forsberg 1990; Brent 2012). Recent studies also highlight the lack of awareness and vocabulary needed to recognize, theorize, and adapt to the ways in which writing undergirds internship work, both as an epistemic and a professional activity, among some students, industry partners, and university supervisors (Eady et al. 2021; DePalma et al. 2022). To help students, professional partners, and supervisors in WIL experiences promote the recursive transfer of writing knowledge and practices across academic and professional contexts, our WAP framework capitalizes on the strengths of writing transfer scholarship, such as the Elon Statement on Writing Transfer (Elon University Center for Engaged Learning 2015) and on the innovation of WIL design for work-based learning (Dean et al. 2018). Drawing on an international, multi-institutional study of transfer in the context of WIL, our WAP framework provides empirically-based principles that faculty and HE professionals can employ to foster students' reuse and reshaping of writing knowledge and practices in WIL.

## WIL and Writing Transfer

Preparing students for the workplace is a central responsibility and primary focus of administrative strategic plans in an ever-increasing range of HE contexts (figure 5.1). Universities worldwide are thus building WIL objectives into strategic plans at their institutions. These objectives incorporate overarching values of the institution

and specific goals for the progression and attainment of WIL objectives. While the workplace readiness movement in tertiary education has taken several shapes, WIL is increasingly recognized as a generative framework and innovative curricular approach for preparing students for the demands of their professional lives. The term WIL accommodates a wide range of workplace learning activities, including cooperative education, internships, service learning, practicums, immersion, and placements. Dean et al. (2018) have created a classification system to simplify and explicitly define the categories of WIL opportunities in HE contexts. Figure 5.1 is the visual representation of the elements that need to be taken into account when classifying activities.
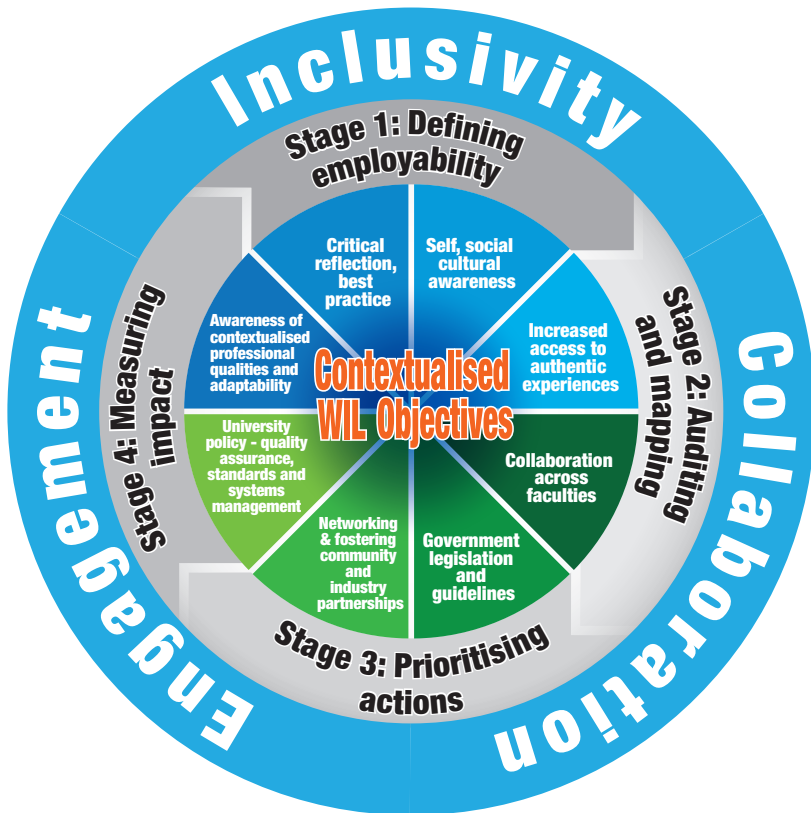


*Figure 5.1*

Dacre Pool and Sewell's (2007) conceptual framework of employability assists in understanding the value of WIL activities in the context of HE settings. In their model, WIL offers students opportunities to access and develop essential components of employability, including career development learning (CDL), work and life experience, subject area knowledge and skills, generic skills, and emotional intelligence. They also suggest that WIL provides a range of opportunities for students to reflect on and evaluate their employability skills, a process that enhances their self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-confidence as they move into professional spaces.

Left implicit in their model of employability and notably absent in WIL, however, is a focus on writing transfer. Writing transfer involves writers' "application, remixing or integration of previous knowledge, skills, strategies, and dispositions" when encountering new or unfamiliar writing situations (Elon University Center for Engaged Learning 2015). Given the centrality of writing to a range of professions (e.g., law, computer science, museum curation, engineering, medicine, nursing) (cf. Schrijver and Leijten 2019) and the need for undergraduates to be highly capable communicators in order to thrive in their careers, the cultivation of students' writing knowledge and practices across professions should be a key focus of WIL (Moore and Morton 2017). Thus, it is imperative that university faculty and HE administrators make it our priority to (a) prepare students for writing demands in the workplace, (b) involve industry and workplace practitioners in providing students with access to workplace writing, and (c) help support and scaffold workplace-relevant writing and reflection. In taking up this work, it is necessary for faculty and administrators to make the roles of writing in professional contexts more visible to students (Goldsmith and Willey 2018; Goldsmith, Willey, and Boud 2019) and to more seamlessly integrate a focus on writing into WIL by intentionally embedding opportunities for students to transfer their writing knowledge and practices across professional and academic contexts. WAP is a response to these exigent needs.

WAP is an empirically-informed curricular model that faculty and HE administrators can utilize to foster writing transfer in WIL contexts. It enables faculty to prepare students who are engaged in WIL experiences for the writing that they will do in the context of WIL and in their professional lives beyond HE by (1) introducing rhetorical genre theory and analysis; (2) teaching discourse community theory and analysis; (3) offering engaged feedback on students' writing; and (4) inviting critical reflection on prior and concurrent writing knowledge and practices. WAP is designed to prepare undergraduates for the diverse rhetorical demands that they will be required to navigate within and beyond the university.

To ensure that the WAP framework connects to employers' priorities, university standards, and students' prior knowledge about writing, we collected written as well as interview data from all stakeholders. This included WIL practitioners outside of universities in workplaces and schools, teaching faculty who support students in their WIL endeavors, and students participating in WIL experiences. For this chapter, our discussion is focused on data from WIL practitioners.

## Methodology: Data Collection and Institutional Contexts

Data for this chapter were extracted from a larger data set that was collected from five institutions in four countries. Specifically, we selected sixty-minute interviews with professionals (n=12 in the US, n=5 in Germany) who supervised students in their WIL experiences, namely professional WIL or internships. The professionals who participated in our IRB-approved study were recruited through email. The professionals in the United States are located in a medium-sized southwestern city and work in a wide range of jobs: non-profit directors, marketing and communication directors, educators, entrepreneurs, publishing professionals, business professionals, a veteran's support program director, a public policy director for a think tank, the vice president of strategic initiatives at a bank, and a community activist. In Germany, the supervisors are employed

as teachers in public secondary education with at least three years of teaching experience, and they oversee student interns and recent graduates in their first practical year as teachers.

After transcribing the interviews, we read through the transcriptions to identify emerging themes. In order to ensure high reliability, two researchers read the transcripts independently before meeting to discuss their coding and the themes they identified. The analysis of our data revealed several central themes across national and institutional contexts. We share those themes below.

## Findings

For the professionals in our study, writing is a vital dimension of their work that mediates a vast range of their workplace activities and has significant bearing on their ability to meet the demands of their professional roles. The professionals we interviewed are required to write in a variety of genres in their workplace contexts, and a high percentage of their time at work is spent writing. However, very few professionals in this study indicated their formal education in university or high school settings prepared them for the writing they do as professionals. Thus, in order to learn to write for their professional contexts, they engaged in three forms of self-initiated learning: modeling texts of colleagues in their workplaces, seeking feedback on their writing from colleagues, and studying the communication practices of stakeholders in their professional environments.

### Learning to Write for Professional Contexts

James, a managing editor at an academic press, described learning to write on the job as "baptism by fire." He explained, "There was no real training on what was expected and how I communicated. I just picked that up organically over time." Linda, a director, writer, and editor for a religious press, communicated similarly that she was never taught to write for her professional sphere in the context of her formal academic training. When asked how she learned to write for her professional context, she candidly responded, "How I learned? I don't know."

Similarly, in the German-language data set, none of the interviewed school practitioners (n = 5) who mentored the students in their teaching internship had learned how to write for their profession during their teaching degree programs. Mostly these "professionals–who–write" (Read and Michaud 2015, 430) learned by observation, by taking initiative to reach out to colleagues, or by searching for models and resources to familiarize themselves with genres relevant for their workplaces. Maria, an experienced teacher of German, English, and Latin in German secondary education, clearly articulated the contrast between writing practices in her degree program and the workplace writing that characterizes her teaching profession: "At university, it was rather writing academic texts, something that is no longer present in my everyday life."

## Three Self-Initiated Learning Strategies: Writers in the Workplace

Although three of our study participants identified high school or university coursework as contributing to their preparation as writers in their professional settings, the majority of the professionals we interviewed learned to write through self–initiated learning strategies in their workplace contexts. This observation holds across our US and German contexts.

### Modeling

One common form of self–initiated learning discussed by several professionals was modeling the writing of colleagues in their workplace contexts and in their wider professional fields. Elizabeth, a nonprofit organization director, for instance, conveyed that she "just basically learned off of examples" left by a former director of the nonprofit. Elizabeth explains, the former director was a "really, really good writer, and so I just kind of followed her lead in a lot of areas like her membership stuff, her grant applications." Similarly, Sina, a school teacher for German and mathematics in German primary education, reached out to a wide range of colleagues, even across schools, in an effort to learn to formulate her observations and assessment of students' behavior and performances. Sina explained

that for heterogeneous student groups, including children with special needs, she used "models from state regulations" and "inquired at other schools whether they had done something similar before that [she] could use as an orientation."

*Seeking Feedback*

Seeking out and providing feedback on the writing of other professionals in their particular fields of expertise was another important form of self-initiated learning utilized by several professionals. Angela, a public policy director for a think tank, for example, attributes feedback from seasoned professionals in her field as crucial to her formation as a writer in her professional context. She explains that during her early years as a staff member working for a state house representative, she had submitted a piece of writing that was given back to her with "the whole thing . . . redlined." For Angela, this experience and others like it gave her crucial insight into how to write in her professional field. Edward, a business owner, nonprofit organization founder, and former bank executive, conveyed how important giving feedback to other bankers was for his growth as a writer in his profession. "Editing," he remarks, "helped me become a better writer." In his role as a bank executive, Edward would regularly read and provide feedback on the writing of other analysts. Reflecting on this critical dimension of his work, he reflected, "I learned much from editing and reading other people's work."

Feedback and teamwork were likewise valued highly among three of the five participants in the German data set. Bärbel, a German language teacher, explained how she seeks feedback from not only one, but various colleagues for her writing: "Sometimes, I realize even while I am writing, 'The children are going to have problems with that if I don't put it differently!' And it helps enormously if a second or even a third person takes a look at it. And that is really how we do it." Interestingly, Maria in the German data set pointed out that a kind of digital divide hampered feedback and collaboration among teaching colleagues for writing tasks: "We have a cloud, and I can upload it there. Usually, there is no real exchange

about it. . . . What you can see is that the youngsters who are more interested in technology are ready to contribute, while the older generation prefers using things they have at home in their folder." However, the importance of forging relationships between writing mentors and mentees proved to be an invaluable facet of learning to write in professional contexts for many participants in our study.

*Studying Communication Practices*

A third self–initiated learning strategy that multiple professionals discussed in relation to their learning as writers was studying communication practices of stakeholders in their professional environments. Mark, a vice president of strategic initiatives at a bank, discussed how attending to the communication practices of clients and external advisory groups gave him insight about how to write in his professional role. He explains, "I've always gone to the source. . . . There's a lot of insights that we've learned through meeting with advisory groups and doing calls and asking questions about what's important to them. That allows you to create that content that can evoke an emotion that is positive, that makes people want to become a part of who you are." In the German data set, Karla emphasized how parents as stakeholders in her school communication have become a valuable source of insight about the comprehensibility of her writing, specifically during the period when schools remained closed due to the pandemic: "This was really intense and I think that a lot of our written communication has to be improved. Mostly, the feedback came from parents, whom we had never worked with so closely before." Through the intentional study of the communication practices of stakeholders in their professional contexts—whether they were colleagues, clients, constituents, or advisors—professionals in our study found opportunities to internalize discourses that would strengthen their ability to write in their workplace contexts.

All the professionals featured in this selection from our data set had gone through the tribulations of learning workplace writing knowledge and practices without prior academic preparation. One can assume that they will also expect student interns to take the initiative for acquiring writing knowledge in their WIL opportunities.

Crucially, for students to make the most of the connections and insights about workplace writing offered to them in professional settings, writing needs to be made visible as a relevant workplace practice before students go out on their WIL placements. Increasing the visibility of writing is a key dimension of what the WAP framework will contribute.

## Writing Across Professions (WAP): A Curricular Framework for Integrating Writing Transfer and WIL

WAP is a curricular model created to help faculty better prepare students for the writing that they will do within the context of WIL. Important to this model is the fact it centers on encouraging successful transfer between and among writing contexts. In accordance with the existing literature on writing transfer, our data show that writing is not a generalizable practice that can be learned and mastered in one context (e.g., high school, a first-year writing course) and then simply carried forward across writing contexts. Instead, writing is context-specific and learning to write for different contexts requires that writers both use and adapt what they have learned about writing in prior contexts in order to navigate new and unfamiliar writing situations (DePalma and Ringer 2011). Our employer data also show that the adaptation process tends to be arduous and haphazard in the absence of specific preparation in university contexts. Faculty teaching WIL thus need to emphasize that the transfer of writing knowledge and practices across contexts and genres is not simply a matter of following a universal set of rules that can be applied in any situation. Rather, transfer of writing is informed by the student's ability to analyze the genres and discourse communities that mediate a given writing task, seek and receive engaged feedback on their writing, and then critically reflect on what prior knowledge and practices may be used or reshaped to suit that writing task. In order to prevent lengthy periods of unsystematic trial and error, faculty teaching in WIL contexts need to debunk the myth of transience (i.e., the idea that writing can be learned once and for all and then statically imported to address any writing

situation). Instead, faculty teaching WIL should communicate that learning to write is a lifelong process and that all writers always have more to learn (see Rose 2015).

Our findings reveal that such a conception of writing would have served the professionals in our study well by setting up more realistic expectations concerning what learning to write in professional contexts entails. Similarly, foregrounding a conception of writing that is grounded in transfer research will serve students who are engaging in a range of WIL experiences around the globe.

There are several approaches that could be taken in an effort to create a sustainable WAP model across HE contexts. Ideally, universities would benefit by creating WAP directors who are equipped to facilitate the training for faculty teaching WIL courses centered on how best to integrate writing transfer theories, pedagogies, and practices in students' WIL experiences across disciplines. A central priority for WAP directors would be creating partnerships, fostering collaboration, and maintaining regular communication with employers and WIL faculty in order that they might be responsive to the dynamic and changing writing demands across professions. WAP directors would function much like writing across the curriculum (WAC) directors in that they would develop frameworks, pedagogical strategies, and training workshops that would equip faculty in their particular university settings to integrate writing in productive and meaningful ways in courses across disciplines. For example, training in theories, pedagogies, and practices in the transfer of writing to the workplace could be offered to faculty to introduce them to ways of embedding the WAP framework systematically in their existing courses. Such workshops could be customized for different programs based on their specific writing needs in the workplace (e.g., for accounting students who need to write audit reports or business students who are required to write marketing plans). The end result of such workshops would be to equip faculty with the pedagogical training needed to prepare students for the writing demands of WIL experiences and their future workplace environments.

The position of WAP director would likely be situated differently depending on the university context. For example, at some institutions a WAP director could be housed in a center for engaged learning, an institute for writing in the disciplines, a center for career and professional development, an academy for teaching and learning, or a center for WIL excellence. It could also be possible for a WAP director to work within the context of an already established writing program or WAC program, perhaps as an assistant WPA or an assistant WAC director. The placement of a WAP director will be based on the structures, resources, and needs of particular institutions. What will be consistent across institutional contexts, however, is the kinds of writing knowledge and practices that WAP directors will foster through the workshops that they facilitate with faculty who teach students engaged in WIL experiences of various kinds. The facets of WAP that directors will address in training faculty include rhetorical genre theory and genre analysis, discourse community theory and analysis, engaged writing feedback, and critical reflection on writing knowledge and practices.

### Rhetorical Genre Theory and Genre Analysis

A central dimension of WAP training entails preparing faculty to introduce students to rhetorical genre theory and genre analysis. A self-initiated strategy that several professionals in our study employed was modeling the writing of colleagues in their workplace contexts and in their wider professional fields. These professionals would have benefited from learning rhetorical genre theory and methods of genre analysis that grow from this theoretical framework. The same holds for students in WIL contexts who are being prepared for the writing demands of their professions. Rhetorical genre theory understands genres as forms of social action (Miller 1984) and forms of cultural knowledge (Bawarshi and Reiff 2010). These ways of conceptualizing genre make it evident that genres of writing are responsive to social situations, human motives, and exigent needs. Thus, professionals who write must consider the interplay between these factors and the textual conventions of a written artifact in order to produce writing that is appropriate for their workplace settings.

Teaching WIL students rhetorical genre theory and methods of genre analysis could therefore help better prepare them to learn how to use their knowledge of genres and practices of genre analysis to write for their particular professional contexts.

### Discourse Community Theory and Analysis

Another vital component of WAP training involves preparing faculty to teach the concept of discourse community and methods of discourse community analysis. A self-initiated strategy that several professionals in our study used was studying communication practices of stakeholders in their professional environments. Discourse community theory and methods of discourse community analysis would have certainly been valuable to the professionals in our study, and we are confident that teaching the concept of discourse community and approaches to analyzing them could be highly productive for students in WIL experiences. The notion of discourse community is defined by writing transfer scholars as a social group whose members communicate at least in part through written texts and whose written texts shape and are shaped by the goals, values, and social norms of the community (Beaufort 1997). Teaching students to analyze their professional environments through the framework of discourse community theory could thus be immensely helpful in preparing students to understand the dynamics and expectations of writing in WIL.

### Offer Engaged Writing Feedback to Writers in WIL

The next dimension of WAP training is to acquaint faculty with scholarship on responding to student writing. Even though a majority of professionals are required to write extensively and regularly to meet the demands of their workplace environments, very few view themselves as writers and many lack awareness about the important ways that writing mediates the work they do. One way to change the perceptions of future professionals with regard to their professional identities and the roles of writing in workplace contexts is to prepare faculty to provide students in WIL experiences with substantive and engaged feedback on their writing. Engaging with

students as writers throughout the course of their WIL experiences can help students begin to envision themselves as "professionals-who-write" (Read and Michaud 2015, 430), professional writers, or even writers who craft texts in order to achieve the aims of a professional community.

### Invite Critical Reflection on Writing Knowledge and Practices

A final aspect of WAP training would entail equipping WIL faculty to facilitate student reflection on their learning about and practices of writing in various contexts. In our study, professionals made many interesting connections among various sites of learning in order to adapt to the writing demands of their professions. While the links they forged displayed both their resourcefulness and creativity as learners, these professionals could have benefited from structured and systematic critical reflection on the ways their prior writing knowledge and experience might be reused and reshaped to meet the rhetorical exigencies of writing in their professional contexts. Writing transfer research emphasizes the important role that critical reflection plays in helping writers transfer their prior and concurrent writing knowledge and practices across contexts, genres, and media. Students who are engaged in WIL experiences could benefit significantly if given structured opportunities to critically reflect on the ways their prior and concurrent writing knowledge and practice might be used and reshaped for the writing they are doing in the context of WIL and for the writing they will do in their future professions (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014). A method of reflection that is particularly well suited to facilitating the transfer of writing knowledge across contexts is the 360° reflection (Taczak and Robertson 2016). The 360° reflections invite students to reflect in substantive ways on their writing knowledge, practices, and experiences before, during, and after the WIL experience, so that we may gather in-depth information about how, if at all, students' theories of writing, writing practices, attitudes about writing, expectations as writers, and writing knowledge were affected during the course of the WIL experience.

In sharing the dimensions of our WAP framework here, our hope is that HE professionals and faculty teaching in WIL will be better prepared to equip undergraduates for the diverse rhetorical demands they will be required to navigate in WIL and throughout their professional lives.

## Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER 6

# EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF REFLECTIVE WRITING AND PEER FEEDBACK ON STUDENT WRITING IN AND BEYOND THE UNIVERSITY

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Many higher education institutions in the world do not adequately support writing outside of coursework. This is the case in our contexts of Madagascar and Vietnam. In such contexts, self and peer support can be the most helpful strategies to support students with their writing and to assist them in gradually becoming autonomous. That is why we introduced reflection and peer feedback to our students. Earlier research has established that reflection can enable students to set goals, monitor, and self-evaluate critically (Wenden 1991; Little 2020), while peer feedback helps student writers raise audience awareness, enhances the quality of students' interaction, and facilitates revision, as well as improves writing quality (Berg 1999; Dizon 2016; Min 2005, 2006; Sánchez-Naranjo 2019).

Multiple aspects of student writing (e.g., writing self-regulation, writing quality, comments, and revision) have been studied, but most research has been short-term. What is lacking is long-term research which examines how sustainable writing approaches might be as student writing transfers during their undergraduate years and beyond. In English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts in particular, writing research has been modest, despite emerging calls for cross-cultural research to expand the discussion as to how second language (L2) writing can be effectively taught, to examine cultural

biases in teaching L2 writing, and to grow writing knowledge (Cozart et al. 2016; Donahue 2016; Horner, NeCamp, and Donahue 2011). To address these gaps, our study examined both short-term and long-term effects of reflective writing and peer feedback to see whether they can be effectively applied to contexts where there is little support for student writing. We focused primarily on exploring how the knowledge (or lack of) gained from reflection and peer feedback benefited students immediately after and during the two years following the interventions carried out in our contexts. We asked (1) what are the short- and long-term impacts of reflection and peer feedback to student writing, and (2) in cases where the two approaches were not effective, what was missing?

## Contexts

Though our two institutions are dissimilar in many ways, they have one thing in common: little support is provided for student writing. In Madagascar, English is considered a foreign language and is officially taught as a school subject from grades 6 to 12. English (reading, writing, and grammar) is one of the school subjects tested in the national high school examination. In higher education, English continues to be a mandatory subject regardless of the field of study. Writing is the skill that is assessed most often. In Vietnam, English was officially recognized as the country's major foreign language in the 1990s, following Vietnam's Economic Reform in 1986 (Tran and Tanemura 2020). In the national public education system (grades 1-12), English is a compulsory subject from grade 3. The most important English exam is the high school graduation exam at the end of grade 12, in which reading and writing skills are tested. Despite being one of the skills most focused on, writing remains one of the most problematic skills for Vietnamese test takers (cf. Educational Testing Service ETS, in Trinh and Nguyen 2014). While these authors argued that the reason for test takers' struggles with writing was due to teachers' approach to teaching it, Nguyen (2009) observed that Vietnamese writing teachers also struggle with raising student awareness as to why they need to learn to write

in English in the first place. Thus, at present, a mismatch exists between pre- and within-university language education's goals, where the former mainly targets reading and writing skills to prepare students for exams, whereas the latter gives priority to listening and speaking skills. Only recently, writing at university has received more attention, with teacher feedback, teaching approaches, and assessment being hot topics. However, academic discussions on writing and supporting student writers have remained significantly scarce.

We chose to work with students in English teacher training for the purpose of sustainability and transferability. We expected that even if they would not become teachers, they might still use what they gained from the experiences in their own personal and professional writing. During their study program, the participants took compulsory writing courses, which included Developing Fluency in Writing, Writing Proficiency, and Advanced Proficiency in Writing in Madagascar, and Basic Writing, Academic Writing, and Critical Writing in Vietnam.

## Research Design

In both contexts, our research was conducted in two phases. At the University of Antananarivo, Madagascar, phase 1 was an extracurricular nine-week writing course, called "Reflective Writing" (RW). RW was given to all twenty-two first-year students before they started their first compulsory course. In RW, the students were given three argumentative essay questions. For each essay, they produced three drafts (200 words each) in three weeks. They were guided to keep reflective journals in which they set goals and monitored and evaluated their own writing. They were also given opportunities to work in groups weekly to discuss their difficulties and suggest possible solutions. Also, they reflected every three weeks on the benefits and the difficulties of reflection in their journals. The students' journal entries were the data collected for phase 1. At Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Education (HCMUTE), twenty-six second-year students participated in a peer

feedback intervention. At the time, these students were taking the Academic Writing course in which they were taught to write short academic essays (about 400 words) on topics of general interest, e.g., education, sport, and relationships. Peer feedback was carried out parallel to participants' writing classes and outside their class hours, and the activity involved written feedback in Google Docs and face-to-face discussion.

Phase 2 of our research was carried out two years later when our Malagasy participants were in their third year, and the Vietnamese participants had left school and entered the workforce. We contacted those who participated in the first phase of our study and interviewed them about their experience of writing. Three Malagasy students were able to answer an open-ended questionnaire followed by email communications by the deadline we had set. Four Vietnamese alumni responded to a questionnaire, then attended one-to-one interviews.

## Methods

Our study was guided by the following questions:

1. Are there any short-term benefits of reflective writing and peer feedback to the participants' writing within the university? (Phase 1)
2. What are possible long-term effects of reflective writing and peer feedback on writing within and beyond the university? (Phase 2)
3. What would have made the reflective writing and peer feedback experiences more helpful? (Phase 2)

For question 1 (phase 1), a thematic analysis approach was used to analyze all the Malagasy students' journals, and text analysis was employed to investigate the Vietnamese students' comments. An adapted framework developed in Liu and Sadler (2003) was used to categorize comments into two groups: level of comments (macro or micro) and usefulness (revision or non-revision). For the post-study questionnaire, descriptive statistics was used. Regarding questions 2

| Context | Research phase | Participants | Major/Occupation | Data collected |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Madagascar | Phase 1 | 22 first-year students | English teacher training | Journal entries |
| | Phase 2 | 3 third-year students | English teacher training | Questionnaire<br>Email communication |
| Vietnam | Phase 1 | 26 second-year students | Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) | Students' written and oral comments on their peers' first drafts<br>Post-study questionnaire |
| | Phase 2 | 4 alumni | Teachers (2)<br>Sales administrator (1)<br>Customer service team leader (1) | Questionnaire<br>One-to-one interviews |

*Table 6.1. Contexts, Participants, and Data Collection*

and 3 (phase 2), thematic analysis was utilized to make sense of the data. Table 6.1 provides some information on our contexts and data.

## Results

### Short-Term Gains of Reflective Writing and Peer Feedback
Results of phase 1 showed that reflective writing raised students' awareness of writing goals and their own problem–solving abilities, and peer feedback was found to benefit students' writing at text level and enhance their critical thinking.

*Awareness-Raising*
Reflective writing helped our Malagasy students develop their metacognitive skills and raise their awareness of the necessity of having writing goals. This awareness helped them feel more involved in the writing task and perceive it as a more complex and involved activity. Then, awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in writing emerged. They were able to turn what they considered as weaknesses into specific goals to work on, which then motivated them to find appropriate learning strategies. They focused on their mistakes and were determined to correct and learn more about them. They noticed that their writing could improve thanks to multiple rounds of writing and revising, and by working on difficulties inside and outside class, with little feedback from the teacher. That gave them motivation, self–confidence, and a sense of personal development. These outcomes are in line with what Gere (2019, 289) says: "Writing development interacts with personal growth, and both achievement and confidence are interwoven with and supported by affective dimensions." That resulted in a developing appreciation for the importance of independence from the teacher and for interdependence among peers.

*Textual Benefits*
Our Vietnamese participants reported that peer feedback benefited their writing at both macro (organization, content, and ideas) and micro (vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics) levels. The examination

of 2,064 student comments showed that 57% of them were on the macro level, and 43% were on the micro level, as table 6.2 presents. Non–revision–oriented comments on macro level, as well as revision–oriented comments on micro level were the most common. A closer investigation of the non–revision–oriented comments showed that most of them were praise (70%) (e.g., Your ideas are great), whereas most of revision–oriented micro comments were on vocabulary and grammar. Our results echo previous research which reported that EFL/ESL writers commonly offer praise comments and that comments principally center on vocabulary and grammar.

| Comment types | Essay 1 | Essay 2 | Essay 3 | Essay 4 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Macro comments (revision–oriented) | 141 | 60 | 98 | 90 | 389 |
| Macro comments (non–revision–oriented) | 165 | 194 | 216 | 209 | 784 |
| Micro comments (revision–oriented) | 138 | 155 | 196 | 124 | 613 |
| Micro comments (non–revision–oriented) | 61 | 65 | 83 | 69 | 278 |
| Total | 505 | 474 | 593 | 492 | 2,064 |

*Table 6.2. Students' Peer Feedback Comments*

Almost 75% of students believed that, as the study progressed, they shifted their focus from micro-level issues to more macro-level issues. However, this only applied to the non–revision–oriented comments. Students said that peer feedback training facilitated the shift in their feedback foci. Probing further into the common practice of giving comments on grammar and vocabulary, we found that earlier experience had a strong impact on student comments. Most students said they followed their high school and university

writing teachers' practice where vocabulary and grammar were most commented on. Below are typical examples of student opinions:

> Commenting on local issues is my old habit. . . . I think it came from my teachers. When they give reviews, they focus on grammar and linguistic structures rather than organization or ideas, so I just do the same. [BE1587]

> I think the habit of Vietnamese teachers is to pay attention to grammar more than to other things. [JM1019]

### Beyond Textual Benefits

The interview data showed that the Vietnamese students not only became more critical of their peers' writing, evidenced in an increase in helpful comments on global issues in essays 2 and 3, but also of their own writing. For example, student HR1631 said: "If you write something and you don't have anyone to review your essay, it means that you always think that your writing is good, it has no mistakes. However, peer feedback helps me to realize that my writing always needs to be improved."

The development in students' critical thinking was also evident in their opinions on when peer feedback was *not* helpful. For example, DK1480 said: "But the thing was not many comments on global areas are made, and the most common type of comments that my peer offered are on grammar and vocabulary." By that, this student perceived comments on micro-level issues as unhelpful. Another student, CP1195, believed that "peer feedback would not be useful when my peer did not understand my points and made unhelpful comments." And yet another view was also expressed by student CP1195: "Her feedback was not always helpful because it was not critical enough."

Together, the first phase of our study suggests that reflective writing and peer feedback carry considerable potential as sustainable pedagogical approaches for learning to write, evidenced by the fact that students developed metacognitive skills and were capable of

helping each other improve writing on the textual level and become more critical in their thinking about writing.

### Long-Term Gains: Product to Process Thinking and Transfer of Learning

The findings of phase 2 showed that our participants' perspectives on writing evolved from product-oriented to process-oriented. For the Malagasy students, this shift seemed to stem from reviewing their essays repeatedly. This process impacted their perceptions of the purpose of writing, as one student said:

> I learnt in the course that writing is indeed an active process. . . . To write only for the sake of writing, or even simply for getting good marks should not be the motivational purpose when writing. . . . I learnt that writing is about "me communicating with me," and then "me communicating with my readers." . . . Engaging my heart and brain entirely into the writing by means of asking questions about what I write is a strategy that I learned from the "reflective writing" course. [MS0001]

Now an alumni and working as a teacher, IQ1029, a Vietnamese participant, said the introduction to process writing (i.e., revising, editing, and proofreading writing over multiple drafts) and what he gained from peer feedback experience were helpful to his earlier writing and present teaching. He said:

> I found that my work gets better thanks to several rounds of writing, revising, and peer review. Often-times, my peer can spot mistakes that I can't see or overlook. Now I also use peer feedback to my students so that they understand what process writing is like. Though my students' proficiency is still low, they are capable of giving comments on ideas, organization, and coherence. [IQ1029]

For alumna BE1587, she learned from the peer feedback experience that writing was not an enterprise that could be achieved after a single attempt. She said: "I write and revise and that cycle is completely unlimited." This emerging understanding became instrumental in enabling her to complete a writing task that she and her team were doing, which was to create training materials for her company. She said: "I have to say it's a process. . . . It wasn't a personal task. It's group work. I write first, but the whole team would read it, contribute to it, revise it, give me ideas to revise, and then I revise it. . . . After revising, the team will read it again, and after I feel it's OK, I will submit it to the boss for approval." [BE1587]

Additionally, a transfer of learning (Cotterall 2009) was observed, as all three Malagasy interviewees stated that they continued reflecting and using strategies they had learned in Reflective Writing (RW), such as setting writing goals, planning and organizing ideas, and self-correction. Two students said they applied self-correction to beyond-university writing. Those strategies would be necessary even after graduating from college, according to MS0002. She saw them as transferable and useful for future writing. MS0003 also commented on the lifelong nature of those strategies and the awareness raised in RW. She believed what she learned in RW resulted in her development as an "independent learner": "This course helped me to change my mind gradually about being an independent learner. Throughout my school studies from primary schools until high school I had always depended on what input I got from teachers." [MS0003]

Beyond the university, the pleasure of writing or the feeling of necessity to write that they developed in RW motivated the students to put their thoughts and reflections into writing. They used writing as a means of reflection on important events in their lives, on their personal growth, and on their interests, thereby nurturing both their writing and personal development:

> Ever since I learnt "reflexive writing," once an import-
> ant life event or a life-marking moment has occurred
> . . . I always took a pen and paper, and I reflected on

> the situation so as to write about how I felt and thought about it. . . . I also keep track in my journal the evolution of my passion and feeling towards my life goals as I grow up intellectually with time. [MS0001]

MS0002 described voluntarily writing summaries of the books she read. She evaluated her writing by comparing her current pieces with prior ones, which was a strategy she had learned in RW. Despite being her own audience, she constantly strived to improve her writing through the comparison:

> When I first wrote a summary, it was just a simple summary of one paragraph in which I wrote what I remembered of the story. . . . However, in my recent summary and the following, after reading one chapter, I write down the summary of it. . . . Now, my summary takes about 5 pages in my copybook. [MS0002]

## Suggested Solutions to Make Reflective Writing and Peer Feedback More Useful

The results reported in our first two research questions informed us that reflection and peer feedback can be applied as sustainable, strategic approaches for writing in contexts where institutional support for the student writers has remained alarmingly lacking. However, our participants' opinions also showed that reflection and peer feedback could be even more beneficial, provided some changes were made. For instance, integrating peer feedback into group discussions in the RW could be a way for learners to help one another with their difficulties, as a Malagasy suggested: "I would suggest that students should read their classmates' essays because sometimes it is easier to detect mistakes in someone else's writing. . . . In that case I think that the group discussion would be hugely helpful and interesting because I can really figure out where, for example, one of my group members had difficulties." [MS0003]

In the Vietnamese context, peer feedback could be more sustainable if the focus on micro aspects were addressed. From participant

MS0037's perspective, the peer feedback she experienced at the university was mainly about peers giving comments on micro-level issues, but it was very different from what she later experienced at a professional development training course (TESOL) she was taking. At the university, she often did one or two rounds of peer feedback in pairs, compared with multiple rounds of group peer feedback at her TESOL course where she was writing lesson plans. According to her, peer feedback was always more about macro-level issues, which was unlike what she had previously experienced. Besides, her prior peer feedback experience did not help her realize the importance of the audience, which she only discovered in her profession. She said:

> The difficulty is not much about the language, but more about the teaching skills, and we have to write so many times because of the ideas. Like he [her course instructor] doesn't agree with our ideas, or he gives us much more ideas. Then we changed the ideas. It's the reason why I had to re-write again and again. . . . Before, I didn't learn so much on writing for a specific audience or purpose, but now I have specific learners, specific tasks. . . . We have to do it seriously and critically. [MS0037]

Another participant also believed that peer feedback at the university was too much focused on micro-level issues, whereas her current focus of work writing was on ideas and effective communication. She said after receiving clarifications of information from her colleagues and clients several times, she began to pay closer attention to getting her message across. She said:

> At my university, I did proofreading because I have to revise my grammar and vocabulary, but now I'm working, it's not important anymore. The most important thing is information I give to the readers, not the writing style. They don't care if my writing skills are good or bad, they only care about information, correct information. [YT7501]

To address our participants' tendency to focus more on micro-level issues in peer feedback, one solution could be training, which has been reported as essential to effective peer feedback (Min 2005, 2006). The training should also incorporate guidelines on solicited feedback. Regarded as sustainable feedback (Geitz, Brinke, and Kirschner 2011), solicited feedback is the feedback students actively ask to have instead of just receiving feedback. Geitz, Brinke, and Kirschner (2011) argued that feedback only becomes sustainable when students play an active role in the feedback process.

## Implications

The benefits observed from this study suggest that reflection and peer feedback should be incorporated into writing courses. Both practices enabled our students to understand the purpose of writing. Our study focused on EFL contexts, but given the current global mobilization of students, it is anticipated that most institutions, including those not focused specifically on EFL instruction, will have growing encounters with EFL student writers. Therefore, our research implications expand beyond EFL contexts.

We suggest writing teachers should focus more on macro-level strategies for writing by guiding students to set goals, consider the audience, and make regular reflections on difficulties and improvements. In non–EFL contexts, writing mentors/advisors in writing centers can prompt students to focus on their writing process by giving them opportunities to review their own writing and providing space for them to give peer feedback.

In EFL contexts like the ones presented here, the need for student writing support should be recognized by university program coordinators. Both in EFL and non–EFL contexts, the students are rich resources who can serve as support for themselves and for one another. Therefore, the English writing curriculum should include self-reflective questions and guidance for peer feedback sessions. It should highlight the process nature of writing. If institutions want their students to write better at the university and continue developing writing skills for academic and professional success,

they need to help their students make use of sustainable resources and approaches.

## Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER 7

# BRIDGING ACADEMIC AND WORKPLACE WRITING

## Insights from Employers

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Why do many employers report that college graduates are not ready for workplace writing (e.g., Hart Research Associates/AAC&U 2015; NACE 2017)? Ethnographic research in writing studies and technical/professional communications (e.g., Dias et al. 1999; Beaufort 2008; Kramer-Simpson 2018) reveals differences between college and workplace writing that can make them seem "worlds apart" (Dias et al. 1999). To illustrate, consider Beaufort's analysis of "Tim's" experiences with writing lab notebooks in college and the workplace. Tim found that his lab notebooks felt "manufactured" for a grade (116), while writing at work "became a more meaningful tool both for accomplishing work and for personal reflection" (129). This example seems to highlight how writing in college and the workplace are different discourse communities—networks in which communication is structured by shared knowledge, goals, and norms (Beaufort 2008). In college, Tim's writing is structured by his goal of earning a grade, but at work it becomes a tool for him to reflect on his impact through his work. In this chapter, we will question the characterization of workplace and college writing as "worlds apart." Drawing on research in writing studies and responses

from a survey that we conducted with employers across sectors of industry, we will highlight the ways that college and workplace discourse communities converge and diverge, creating challenges and opportunities to foster writing workplace readiness.

## Research Methods

To characterize workplace discourse communities, we sent an online survey through the career centers of three institutions—Quinnipiac University, Franklin Pierce University, and Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. Although all these schools are in the northeast of the United States, they vary by size and student population. Ninety-one employers from over a dozen sectors (e.g., finance and investment, arts and entertainment) completed open-ended (e.g., "What are differences between writing in the workplace and writing in college?") and closed-ended questions (e.g., "How often does writing involve collaboration?") about a range of topics, including how employers assess the writing proficiency of applicants and how writing unfolds in the workplace. Survey questions and sample responses can be viewed on the "Employer Writing Survey and Supplementary Data" files in the online resources for this book. Readers interested in collecting their own data can email Jeffrey Saerys-Foy to get an editable Google Forms version of our survey.

To analyze responses to open-ended questions, we searched for emergent themes to create a coding scheme so that we could tally responses for each question. We read responses individually and generated categories, which we discussed as a group and iterated until we agreed on a coding scheme, but when we tried to apply the coding scheme, we ran into disagreements that we could not resolve. We represent different disciplines and therefore different discourse communities (two authors from rhetoric and composition, one from sociology, and one from cognitive psychology), and we realized that we were working from different assumptions about writing. For example, when analyzing responses to a question about what skills employers look for in applicants, some of us coded clarity and audience separately, while others argued that clarity is always

defined relative to a specific audience and, as such, implicitly invokes rhetorical awareness. As a result, we were unable to construct distinct categories to use to quantify responses for individual open-ended responses. Nonetheless, we agreed on broad themes in responses across questions.

As our goal was to characterize the discourse communities of college and workplace writing, we will organize our chapter around the knowledge domains from Beaufort's (2008) model of discourse communities:

1. Discourse community (goals, roles, and norms)
2. Rhetorical exigencies (i.e., audiences and purposes)
3. Genres
4. Writing process

For each domain, we will report results from our survey to characterize the workplace writing discourse community and then draw upon research from writing studies to characterize the college writing discourse community. Beaufort also includes a fifth domain, subject matter knowledge (e.g., relevant precedents for a legal case). Because subject matter knowledge is so dependent on specific workplaces and knowledge domains, we will not consider it here as we are looking for patterns across workplaces and domains.

## Workplace Writing Survey Results

### Discourse Community

Workplaces have an overarching goal of turning out a product or a service, which employees accomplish through specific tasks (e.g., writing emails, taking notes) to accomplish smaller sub goals (e.g., establishing a relationship with a client). Across multiple open-ended questions, employers sometimes referred to these goals, confirming the practical nature of workplace writing:

> "Our writing is submitted to federal Judges who often amend supervision conditions as a result of our recommendations/reports."

"We're writing short, strong sentences to help sell merchandise."

A further indicator of the practical nature of workplace writing is that 50% of our respondents indicated that writing is often, very often, or always associated with important outcomes (i.e., high stakes; see table 7.1).

| | Never | Rarely | Some-times | Often | Very often | Always |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collaboration | 4% | 26% | 37% | 13% | 18% | 1% |
| Feedback and revision | 1% | 22% | 31% | 15% | 20% | 10% |
| Template | 3% | 13% | 37% | 27% | 17% | 2% |
| Graphs and tables | 10% | 24% | 33% | 13% | 11% | 9% |
| Reporting numbers | 6% | 9% | 23% | 27% | 21% | 14% |
| Visual elements | 11% | 23% | 22% | 21% | 14% | 8% |
| External audience | 1% | 11% | 10% | 18% | 30% | 29% |
| Internal audience | 4% | 8% | 18% | 22% | 24% | 24% |
| High stakes | 9% | 19% | 23% | 20% | 19% | 11% |
| Low stakes | 6% | 9% | 24% | 17% | 28% | 17% |

*Table 7.1. How Often Workplace Writing Involves Each Element*

Across all open-ended questions in the survey, employers' responses often focused on correctness (i.e., spelling, punctuation, and grammar). Employers also frequently mentioned clarity and brevity. We interpret these responses as indicating that many employers accept the myth of transience—the belief that writing is a generalizable skill, transferable across contexts (Russell 2002). Consistent with this idea, we found many responses to be vague, using terms such as "professional" (e.g., "clarity, logical thinking,

professional appropriateness") and "business" (e.g., "business writing"), indicating they felt like these terms refer to a set of shared norms for workplace writing that are transparent to others.

In contrast to the practical nature of workplace writing, the overarching goal of college writing is to support and assess learning (Dias et al. 1999; Melzer 2014). Like our respondents, many professors subscribe to the myth of transience, focusing on correctness when providing information. This focus sends a clear signal to students, who likewise judge others negatively for making grammatical errors even more than conceptual errors (Johnson, Wilson, and Roscoe 2017) and who focus on fixing mechanical and usage errors rather than attending to conceptual issues when revising (Dave and Russell 2010).

### Rhetorical Exigencies: Audiences and Purposes

Though we did not directly ask about rhetorical exigencies, employers' responses often demonstrated a nascent awareness of these exigencies. Some respondents specifically mentioned the need to adapt writing to different audiences ("In the workplace, the audience is far broader than the professor. . . . Being able to tailor the writing to the audience is essential."). Others tacitly invoked the need to consider audience (e.g., "Tone . . . writing can come across the wrong way very easily.") or referenced the intended impact of writing (e.g., "Workplace writing often requires the ability to clearly state the purpose, key points, implications, and next steps to aid a decision or action."). For our respondents, workplace writing involves writing to a variety of audiences—internal and external—making it important to be able to tailor writing for specific audiences. The focus on correctness may also reflect awareness of audience. Professionals place a stronger emphasis on correctness when writing for external audiences, as audiences may judge writers as being careless, poorly educated, and poor communicators when they violate norms of correctness (Gubala, Larson, and Melonçon 2020).

Professors are nearly always the audience for students' writing (Melzer 2014). Professors come from different disciplinary discourse

communities, write for many different purposes, and apply different disciplinary norms for writing, but they most often assign writing with one purpose: to be informative. Informative assignments reinforce content for students and allow professors to evaluate students' content knowledge. Even when students vary the rhetorical exigencies of writing (e.g., writing for a different audience, such as a coworker), students often ignore these exigencies and focus on displaying knowledge for a grade, reinforcing the false belief that "writing is a generic skill that, once learned, becomes a 'one size fits all' intellectual garb" (Beaufort 2008, 10). Thus, college writing often reinforces the myth of transience, a filter that shapes employer perceptions of writing and their expectations for new graduates/employees.

### Genres

Given the multiplicity of goals that employees need to accomplish, forms of writing vary substantially within and across workplaces. When asked what types of writing workers engage in, employers mentioned a wide range of genres, including memos, grant applications, requests to the court, and technical manuals, with emails, notes, and social media being the most common responses across workplaces. Furthermore, at times employees must incorporate visuals, tables, figures, and data into their writing (see table 7.1).

Writing in these genres requires that workers be proficient in multiple computer programs: 71% of respondents use at least one Microsoft software (i.e., Word, Excel, PowerPoint), with 25% choosing a Google equivalent and 27% reporting using other programs, including webtools (e.g., Mailchimp and WordPress), social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), and discipline-specific programs (e.g., Maximo and Rehab Optima).

Like employees, students engage with a variety of genres, and must increasingly use a variety of digital tools. Melzer (2014) found that professors assign "lab reports, executive summaries, book reviews, ethnographies, feasibility reports, essay exams, abstracts, annotated bibliographies, editorials, case studies, court briefs, company profiles, press releases, literature reviews—the list is truly

extensive" (41– 42). As with the workplace, students must increasingly use a variety of technologies to communicate in a variety of forms (e.g., podcasts, videos; Knobel and Lankshear 2014). Although college and workplace writing differ at the level of goal or outcome, both require students to write in a range of genres using a variety of tools.

### Writing Process

The way that people write in the workplace also varies considerably. Most employers indicated that at times writing involves rounds of feedback and revision (see table 7.1). Some employers commented that writing is often "time sensitive" and "on the fly," providing little opportunity for drafts, feedback, and revision. Few respondents indicated that writing is never or always collaborative (see table 7.1). The most common responses were sometimes (37%) or rarely (26%). These numbers indicate that in most workplaces both collaborative and individual writing is the norm. A similar pattern emerged for using templates.

The emphasis in college writing is on assessing the individual student. While some types of writing (e.g., essay tests, in-class exploratory writing) require students to write extemporaneously, most formal assignments provide students with ample time to compose. However, even with generous deadlines, many professors assign writing without requiring drafts or providing feedback on drafts, discussing examples of good writing in class, or providing opportunities for informal, exploratory writing that allows students to prepare for the assignment (Addison and McGee 2010). Students often do not use effective composition techniques (e.g., prewriting, drafting, revising for content) because they can get a satisfactory grade without doing so (Wardle 2007). According to our results, employers perceive that college graduates continue to write in the workplace the way that they wrote in college, and that they are slow to adapt to workplace writing.

## Knowledge in the Workplace and College Discourse Community

When looking at employers' responses, we face a paradox: they believe in the myth of transience while, at the same time, insist employees adapt their writing to meet the needs of the situation. This tension reflects the tacit nature of knowledge about writing in workplace discourse. Tacit knowledge often takes the form of "knowing how," practicing until it becomes ingrained and taken for granted, below the level of awareness (Smith 2001). Through practice and experience, employees learn to navigate different writing situations within their workplace, internalizing the norms. Thus, employees who fit Rice's (2015) characterization of para-experts have "experiential, embodied, and tacit knowledge that does not translate into the vocabulary or skills of disciplinary expertise" (119), whilst lacking awareness of doing so. This allows employers to believe the myth of transience while expecting employees to write adaptively.

Likewise, both professors and students navigate a range of writing genres (e.g., email, PowerPoint slides, academic writing) for a range of audiences and yet, like the respondents in our survey, research indicates that many believe the myth of transience. As with professionals, both professors and students are likely relying on tacit knowledge and routines, making it difficult for them to adapt to new contexts. For college writers to become adaptive, they need the opportunity to reflect on their writing (e.g., audience, goals, linguistic choices) and processes (e.g., drafting, soliciting feedback) so they can gain awareness of and make better use of their tacit knowledge (Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2015).

## Pedagogical Implications for Teaching and Mentoring Student Writers

Although it is unrealistic to believe college writing instruction can prepare students for all the types of writing they will encounter in the workplace, successful curricular approaches exist. Colleges can best prepare students by providing them with the conceptual tools

needed to analyze the situational exigencies of writing, as well as opportunities to make intentional rhetorical choices and reflect, fostering metacognition (Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2015). We offer some strategies for accomplishing these goals.

### Goals, Roles, and Norms

One strategy is to design authentic assignments. Some employers suggested using authentic, goal-based assignments (e.g., "Have students execute applications-based projects from real-world current examples"), which can be effective (e.g., Peltola 2018). However, to make such assignments work, teachers must scaffold students to reflect upon and address the rhetorical exigencies of the assignment, otherwise students may focus on demonstrating knowledge for the professor (Dias et al. 1999).

The most salient convergence between professors and employers is the focus on correctness, which reinforces an insidious and pervasive norm in privileging English used by white, educated individuals at the expense of historically marginalized groups (e.g., Condon and Young 2017; Haas and Eble 2018). Within this context, other forms of English, such as African American English, are labeled "a detriment or barrier in school and professional contexts" (Young 2020, 17). If instead, goal-based assignments are reframed within an antiracist context, more languages become a resource to achieving a goal (Young 2020). Such a framing supports opportunities for students to engage in code-meshing, "which is blending dialects or blending Englishes" (Young 2020, 6). Allowing students to experiment with different forms of English encourages students to learn "to use the full range of their rhetorical skills for their purposes and audiences and help them revise, reason, and review their—and not our—rhetorical choices" (Young 2020, 16), promoting rhetorical awareness.

Positioning professors as the sole arbiters of grades not only privileges what Asao Inoue calls the "white status quo" (Lerner 2018), it fails to provide opportunities for students to develop metacognitive knowledge to assess and regulate their own writing. Inoue and others suggest using labor-based grading contracts, which involves

a process of negotiating grading criteria with students based on the quantity of the work they produce and having students reflect on their writing throughout the process (Inoue 2019; for a discussion of other grading alternatives, see Tchudi 1997, Nilson 2015, and Blum 2020). These suggestions may seem at odds with suggestions by some respondents (e.g., "Stop accepting mediocrity and recognizing people just showing up. Demand excellence!"). However, contract grading done well demands excellence while upholding equity and inclusion, going beyond just rewarding effort.

### Genres and Rhetoric

Writing in college and the workplace both provide opportunities for people to engage with a variety of genres and audiences, but in both cases they may not receive sufficient support to do so. Unless students understand the rhetorical nature of writing, they may write the same way across situations (e.g., different classes, different workplace situations) rather than adapt to the rhetorical exigencies of each situation. Some composition professors have advocated teaching students to use conceptual tools to analyze the rhetorical exigencies of assignments (e.g., Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2015). These approaches are only likely to be successful if instructors support students in courses beyond first-year composition. To do this, professors need support in designing assignments that require students to grapple with different rhetorical exigencies (e.g., different goals, audiences, genres, as Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2015 suggest) and provide students with opportunities to analyze these rhetorical exigencies, as well as engage in self-reflection on their rhetorical choices. Doing so helps students cultivate a mindful approach to writing that allows them to make intentional choices and assess their own writing.

### Writing Process

Unless students are required to do so, few are likely to use effective writing practices. Professors can provide support for students to engage in these practices by incorporating drafts into grading contracts, including opportunities for students to reflect, give and

receive feedback, and make revisions. Students can learn to assess their own writing by engaging in peer review and self-evaluation (for best practices on self and peer assessment, see Panadero, Jonsson, and Strijbos 2016). Additionally, timed writing assignments that simulate workplace writing situations with quick turnarounds, as well as opportunities to write collaboratively, enable students to gain experience valued in the workplace. Likewise, assigning short summaries or executive summaries for longer papers encourages students to be concise. Finally, assigning a cover letter or critical reflection in which students demonstrate the writerly choices they made in completing the task and state why they made those choices in relation to their audience is critical to transferring writing skills and rhetorical knowledge from one task and environment to another.

### Technology

Our survey suggests that employers primarily use Microsoft software (e.g., Word, PowerPoint) and their Google equivalents to write. Despite being "digital natives," students often have a limited knowledge of these tools and how to use their many features (Kirschner and De Bruyckere 2017), such as how to organize files and record audio in PowerPoint. Additionally, access to the internet and computers is not evenly distributed. In the United States, white individuals have higher levels of access to the internet and computers than Black and Hispanic individuals (United States Census Bureau 2017). Thus, it is important for professors to support students' proficiency in these technologies to promote equitable technological literacy and ensure workplace preparedness.

## Administrative Implications for Program Directors and Other University Administrators

We have proposed strategies to increase college graduates' workplace writing readiness. These strategies are unlikely to be effective if implemented solely in composition courses or writing intensive courses, as students are unlikely to transfer them across contexts unless they need to do so across the curriculum. Though professors across the curriculum do not need to become composition experts,

they must become aware of the norms that shape writing in their classroom so that they can adequately support students. For professors to use these strategies, they need development opportunities to make their tacit knowledge explicit, and to develop assignments that integrate goals, audience, and genres. Program directors and other college administrators must foster these curricular changes to ensure that students are gaining experience writing in different contexts and reflecting on their experience.

Schools may consider using writing portfolios to assess students' writing proficiency. Students' samples from different classes over time can illustrate whether they are adapting their writing across classes, as well as track their development over time. With these samples, schools can assess how effectively they are supporting writing across the curriculum towards workplace writing and adjust as needed. For writing transfer to be effective within the curriculum, there must be multiple opportunities for students to practice and reflect on their writing choices across classes in different contexts. They need the opportunity to make the often-invisible moves of effective writing visible. To navigate successfully from academic to workplace discourse, students need a compass as well as a map of the territory. The knowledge students learn about the four directions (technology; writing process; genres and rhetoric; roles, goals, and norms) will help them "read" the map of their particular workplaces and make thoughtful writerly choices as they become valuable workplace writers.

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CHAPTER 8

# NAVIGATING WORKPLACE WRITING AS A NEW PROFESSIONAL

## The Roles of Workplace Environment, Writerly Identity, and Mentoring and Support

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For many new professionals, the transition to the workplace is messy and challenging (Anson and Forsberg 1990; Dias et al. 1999; Johnson-Eilola and Selber 2013; Schneider and Andre 2005; Spilka 1993). But this transition also offers opportunities for these individuals to develop both professional and writerly identities. Many factors may influence identity development, and in this chapter, we focus on the workplace environment and its role in supporting early-career professionals as they negotiate workplace expectations and develop identities as both writers and professionals. We also examine connections among the workplace environment, writerly confidence and identity, and mentoring and support.

Gere and colleagues' (2019) research on developing writers in higher education identifies behaviors, needs, and preferences of college writers. As the researchers show, these writers seek out models, affirmation from instructors, and a safe space to share or submit writing. The early-career professionals in our study demonstrated similar behaviors in their workplaces. We know from transfer

research (e.g., Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014; Yancey et al. 2018) that the contexts between which transfer can occur can be vital to a writer's success. Our study suggests that early-career writers may need workplace contexts that facilitate knowledge transfer. These writers may also benefit from the kinds of support that helped them succeed in college: mentoring; opportunities to build confidence and expertise with feedback, support, and affirmation; and a workplace environment that facilitates these relationships and opportunities.

Given the importance of supportive structures in the workplace, we conclude by offering recommendations for faculty and programs as they help students prepare to transition into workplace contexts. Our research and recommendations draw on previous work in the transfer of writing knowledge and practice (e.g., Beaufort 2007; Downs and Wardle 2007; Nowacek 2011; Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014) and writing in the workplace (e.g., Blakeslee 1997; Johnson-Eilola and Selber 2013; Spilka 1993; Winsor 1996), and they parallel more recent work that examines the experiences of alumni in the workplace (e.g., Alexander, Lunsford, and Whithaus 2020; Gere 2019).

## Overview of Methods

Our IRB-approved study included a survey and two in-depth interviews, conducted between October 2019 and April 2021, involving early-career professionals (0-5 years in their current position) who are alumni from five US institutions—two in the Midwest, and one each in the Northwest, Southeast, and Northeast Mid-Atlantic regions. These participants, initially totaling more than fifty but reduced to just over thirty as the study progressed through the pandemic, represented a wide range of industries, experiences, and educational backgrounds. In this chapter, we feature eight of our participants (see table 8.1) to illustrate the importance of our findings related to workplace environment, writerly identity, and mentoring and support.

| Participant | Position/workplace context | Writing experience in context |
|---|---|---|
| Santiago | Writer/translator for a university office of inclusive excellence | Strong writerly identity; relied on supervisor and past experiences to develop writing approaches |
| Jill | Floor nurse at a major health system in a large metropolitan area | Confident as a nurse and as a writer within nursing (with both charting and academic writing); willing to seek help |
| Rae Ann | Data analyst for a center providing research–based quality improvement systems to support and ensure the quality of youth programs | Not confident as a writer; writerly identity not strong, even with positive feedback from supervisors; expressed desire to become better at writing |
| Meg | Marketing and communications at a telecommunication company | Confident in part due to strong mentoring experience; relied on collaboration with supervisor |
| Allie | Materials scientist for a large federal organization | Structured mentoring; environment encouraged seeking feedback |
| Joseph | Senior research analyst for a state organization | Not confident; writerly identity not strong; lack of mentoring and feedback contributed to less confidence and knowledge when approaching writing |
| Liam | Applications engineer conducting failure analysis for a technology company | Lack of workplace mentoring; confident writer; developed own approaches to writing |
| Teresa | Two positions: nurse and marketing coordinator for a community college | Strong writerly identity; lack of affirmation in one workplace context negatively affected confidence |

*Table 8.1. Participants' Workplace Contexts and Experiences*

## Findings

In this section, we explore the influence of the workplace environment and its effects on early-career professionals as they navigated different workplace contexts and experiences. We also explore the influence of individuals' confidence and writerly identity on their experiences with workplace writing and with mentoring and support.

### Impact of Workplace Environments

Study participants worked in a variety of environments that contributed to how they developed knowledge in the workplace and also impacted their identities as writers. In these environments, some participants struggled to find any support, others found ways to access support, and others had structured support opportunities. Of those who struggled to find support, Teresa, employed as a nurse by an agency providing in-home care, functioned outside of an established workplace environment since her workplace was patients' homes. Her supervisor was her sole source of feedback and provided it only to correct her writing or to inform her that its inadequacy necessitated revision. Without any workspace for regular interactions or opportunities to observe peers or writing models, Teresa had no collaborative support or frame of reference to understand the culture and practices of her workplace or its writing.

Liam and Joseph's workplace environments also affected their experiences on the job, but in different ways. A confident writer with a strong writerly identity, Liam worked in a fast-paced environment without structured mentoring, requiring him to develop his own approaches to writing. In contrast, Joseph lacked both confidence and knowledge, and he had difficulty navigating the challenges that came with a lack of structure. In addition, Joseph's workplace had significant turnover. In this environment, he not only lacked direct mentoring and structured support but also had no access to experienced coworkers. This sink-or-swim environment made it challenging for Joseph to learn workplace expectations, to develop confidence, and to find reassurance in his writing.

In contrast to these sink-or-swim workplace contexts, other participants worked within more structured and supportive environments. Jill, a nurse, was required to participate in a residency program for new nurses at the hospital at which she worked that included structured research-based writing tasks and supportive feedback. Jill also was mentored by more experienced nurses, and these workplace opportunities for support—along with Jill's disposition to ask for help—bolstered her confidence.

Like Jill, Allie was able to exchange ideas with her supervisors and participate in formalized mentoring programs. She remarked, "People are really good about giving feedback and explaining. . . . The environment is so safe in terms of like learning, and like people are always very excited if you ask them for advice or, like, guidance." The safety of and support in Allie's workplace environment helped her thrive. As a multiracial woman in a STEM field, she had experienced situations that made her feel like an outsider. Yet in this workplace, she found opportunities to receive feedback, mentoring, and support that helped her grow as a writer and as a team contributor. Whenever Allie wrote, for example, she could always expect feedback and access to templates.

Others (Meg and Santiago, in particular) lacked the structured workplace environments Jill and Allie experienced but had supervisors they were able to trust for feedback and with whom they could work closely. While their mentoring experiences were not formal or structured, their relationships with their supervisors still provided a regular resource. Meg, for example, trusted her supervisor to make sure her ideas were sound before she produced or shared her writing. Santiago's supervisor was an ongoing ally he relied on to develop approaches consistent with his strong writerly identity that also met the expectations of readers outside their office: "She was great with giving advice and . . . also with her knowledge of the school that I didn't have with the higher ups and stuff."

What these participants' experiences demonstrate is that the workplace—with its various cues, structures, and relationships (or the lack thereof)—can affect how new workplace professionals develop

as writers and respond to the writing they are asked to do in their jobs.

### Role of Identity

Workplace environments clearly influence the writing confidence and experiences of new professionals. Additional factors in their success included confidence in their writing abilities and their writerly identities. Our participants who identified strongly as writers—in particular, Santiago, Meg, Liam, Allie, and Jill—were able to call on that identity, even if that identity occasionally created conflict. For example, Santiago's identity as a creative writer initially put him into conflict with an outside editor, who had to approve and could ask for revisions of his work. Santiago characterized his interactions with that external editor as combative. He felt compelled to defend his emphasis on personal voice over what he described as corporate branding. He explains:

> That was the first tension I had with . . . the person that was editing the website because it was "too poetic" for the website, it wasn't "on brand." So that was one of the battles I fought . . . on voice. You know, how do I preserve this voice and not make it just a cookie cutter Q&A? So I had to . . . accommodate it.

While Santiago initially balked when his writerly identity was stymied, he found outlets for his creative writing outside the workplace. Rather than allowing the branded workplace writing voice to conflict with his more creative identity, Santiago learned to approach and embrace the different writing contexts separately.

In contrast to Santiago, other participants did not identify as strongly as writers. For example, Rae Ann, working in data analytics, did not see herself as a strong writer. She commented, "I wish I could be a writer. I always fantasize about the idea of it." She described herself as "probably a mid-level writer, but with an entry-level knowledge on the actual writing." She also saw herself more as a receiver of feedback than as someone who composes original documents. Importantly, her insistence on not being a writer

seemed grounded in her self-characterization as a filler of blanks in templates, which she did not see as writing. Although her supervisor praised her writing skill in performance reviews, Rae Ann did not embrace an identity as a strong workplace writer, demonstrating that successful writing does not necessarily equate with a positive writerly identity.

Conversely, someone who does identify strongly as a writer may not always be successful in transferring their writing skills to workplace writing tasks. Teresa, the in-home nurse, also had an MFA and wrote creatively but expressed that she was "slow and methodical" with her workplace writing. She found the urgency of writing notes and updating care plans challenging, citing urgency and haste as what she disliked in nursing generally but especially in the writing. Her meticulous and methodical approach to drafting, combined with her identity as a creative writer, interfered with her ability to write in the ways she was being asked in her nursing position. She shared that her writing had been mentioned in nursing performance evaluations as an area needing improvement, an assessment she could not reconcile with her writerly identity.

### Role of Mentoring and Support

For all the participants, their writerly identities—coupled with the circumstances of and relationships within their workplaces—played a role in their confidence and in their effectiveness in writing. For Santiago, his supervisor's support as an advocate for his choice to include personal voice in his professional writing was crucial to his confidence and success.

Like Santiago, Meg was a confident writer with varied experiences who also relied on mentoring to bolster her confidence in tackling her workplace writing. And like Santiago, Meg relied heavily on collaboration with her supervisor to generate content and "translating what they [subject matter experts] said into modern speech." Although she started her job feeling "very" confident about her writing, she acknowledged leaning on support structures within her company from the start, especially her supervisor's input, for her writing and design ideas.

Similarly, Jill expressed a great deal of confidence in two types of writing at work: charting, the primary writing she does as a nurse, and research writing, a requirement of her residency. Jill noted that an important goal of her residency program was to provide mentoring to new nurses: "It helped me to be able to talk to other nurses about just starting out and the struggles you have with starting any kind of a new job." Jill described herself as thoughtful and deliberate about writing, placing a high value on doing it well and being unafraid to seek help. She exuded confidence in her writing while also recognizing that it could always improve.

Teresa's experiences with mentoring in two different workplaces—in-home nursing and marketing—provided a direct connection between her confidence and level of success. In nursing, she said, her challenge was balancing jargon and "charting style," as she referred to it, with clear communication. She aimed to avoid the dreaded calls from her supervisor. She said, "I know when her name comes up on my phone that there's going to be something I didn't do well enough, and ninety-nine percent of the time it's about something I wrote, not something I did." Receiving feedback only when something was wrong and getting no affirmation of any success eroded Teresa's confidence. In contrast, collaborating with her supervisor in her marketing position provided affirmation and increased her confidence. Teresa reported the marketing writing as much more enjoyable than her nursing writing, noting the ability to work at her own pace. She described writing this way as a "collaborative, all-for-one approach," which also boosted her confidence.

Even confident writers need and want mentoring and support. While he identified as a confident writer, Liam noted that his confidence dipped when he was not supported in learning the writing practices in his workplace. Liam also discussed how feedback on his writing often came indirectly—from a lack of action or response—rather than explicitly and directly, thus communicating that his writing was ineffective. Ultimately, Liam was confident and believed he could effectively determine how to write in new situations, but other writers struggled in situations like these. For

example, Joseph explained his experience this way: "There's been no feedback system at all. It's just do your job and move onto the next thing. . . . I would have liked more feedback in terms of how people do communicate and figuring out the writing styles that most people find appropriate."

For Joseph, who lacked confidence in his writing ability and who, like Rae Ann, did not possess a strong writerly identity, the lack of mentoring and feedback meant that he struggled to learn the writing expected of him and had to rely on his own judgement. With more mentoring, he might have become more confident and knowledgeable about how to write in his workplace.

We also found that writers' willingness to ask for help connected in some cases to their confidence and perceptions of themselves as writers. For example, Rae Ann often felt uncomfortable asking for feedback, believing that she should just know how to do her job:

> I knew that having the relationships with my boss was important to having those one-on-one conversations about the content. . . . I made sure I had the time with him to talk through the white papers and get what I needed. . . . And the purpose was so that I could do my job well enough so that they didn't have to fix it. . . . I feel like—it's my job, I'm getting paid to do a job. I should be able to do it. I still will ask for support, but I would say I'm least comfortable with that part of it.

When writers feel reluctant to ask for help or feel that doing so may negatively influence perceptions of their competence, they may be unable to cultivate and/or activate the benefits of mentoring. This, in turn, may affect their ability to successfully call upon, develop, and potentially transfer writing knowledge from their university experiences to their workplace contexts.

## Recommendations

For our participants, even those in similar positions, no two workplace contexts were alike. But across all workplace contexts,

writers benefited from environments that provided the support, mentoring, and resources they needed to complete the writing they were assigned. Much like the conditions necessary for transfer (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014; Yancey et al. 2018), certain conditions may impact writing confidence and writers' perceptions of success: opportunities to build confidence and expertise with feedback, support, and affirmation; a workplace environment that facilitates these relationships and opportunities; and a willingness and ability to seek out relationships and opportunities to acquire self-efficacy in relation to writing.

As our recommendations below suggest, academic programs and faculty might do more to help students develop knowledge and aptitudes for adapting to varying professional contexts. We recommend 1) providing multiple, scaffolded opportunities for immersion in disciplinary genres; 2) providing and also helping students understand the importance of seeking meaningful feedback through mentoring; and 3) teaching and providing opportunities for students to engage in reflection, especially in relation to their knowledge of writing and its uses across disciplinary and professional contexts.

By enacting these recommendations, writing programs and instructors can help students develop a conceptual framework of writing knowledge that they can use to understand different contexts they might experience. They might also be able to use that framework to transfer that knowledge from one context to the next (Beaufort 2007; Nowacek 2011; Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014). We know that students bring prior knowledge and experiences that both help and constrain their ability to adapt to new writing situations (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014; Taczak and Robertson 2016). We also know that experienced writers who adopt a novice mindset in approaching new writing tasks are not as limited by previous expectations (Sommers and Saltz 2004). And findings from our research point to the importance of mentoring and other supportive relationships in helping professionals acquire confidence with workplace writing tasks. As our participants illustrate, the role of mentoring and feedback in building confidence

and an identity as a workplace writer is often crucial for early-career professionals. Through this mentoring and feedback, they are able to develop new and repurpose existing writing knowledge for appropriate use in different contexts.

As Adler-Kassner and Wardle (2015, 2021) point out, knowledge-making practices in the disciplines need to be named and better understood so that the knowledge and practices that stem from those practices become more explicit to writers, enabling their exploration and experience with those practices. To implement this recommendation, writing courses might explore both differences and similarities across disciplinary writing, capstone courses might assign research into writing in different disciplines, and faculty in majors can help students develop knowledge of writing as a means of communicating appropriately for different audiences and contexts within their disciplines, more aligned with what they'll experience beyond college. To that end, scholarship in writing development supports students having repeated and scaffolded opportunities to engage with the genres and conventions of different disciplines (Bazerman et al. 2018). The more students in all disciplines gain exposure to and practice with a range of genres and disciplinary writing contexts throughout college, the more effectively they might cultivate the flexibility that our participants found to be so important for their workplace writing.

Finally, how students are assessed, and the feedback they are given in response to their writing, can also be significant. Students benefit from scaffolded, meaningful feedback that allows them to grow as writers (Downs 2015; Ferris 2018; Sommers 1980). Such feedback can also help students become active, reflective writing practitioners (Schön 1983; Yancey 1998). By providing students with repeated opportunities to receive, analyze, and act on different kinds of feedback, instructors can help students become reflective writing practitioners able to plan for, seek, and respond to feedback once they enter contexts beyond college (Taczak and Robertson 2016). A reflective mindset is also essential for developing a writerly

identity that facilitates confidence and flexibility when encountering new workplace writing tasks.

While our recommendations can help prepare students to be agents of their own success in professional contexts, this agency necessitates the understanding that they can continue to grow on the job. They can do this by seeking feedback and by understanding their roles as writers within their particular workplace. It would be helpful, for example, for early-career professionals to understand (as Santiago and Teresa did) the difference between when they might draw on their own personal languages and writing identities and when they might be asked by their workplace to write in particular ways, as Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak (2014) suggested for first-year writers moving into other academic contexts.

Understanding writers' early-career experiences might identify pedagogical approaches that can help prepare fledgling workplace writers for those early-career experiences and potentially facilitate the transfer of writing knowledge from academic to workplace contexts. This research, in other words, can strengthen connections between the teaching of writing in college and writers' experiences with workplace writing tasks and the contexts in which those tasks are needed.

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# "I'LL TRY TO MAKE MYSELF SOUND SMARTER THAN I AM"

## Learning to Negotiate Power in Workplace Writing

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Work is, by definition, getting things done. And in a knowledge economy, writing is the mechanism through which most of that work happens. This chapter examines the ways in which two workplace writers from very different fields have adapted as writers on the job in order to do that work more effectively through a negotiation of language, identity, and power. For one of our interviewees, a marketing director for an educational software company, the work that must be done is primarily sales. For the other, a records management specialist for a network of museums, in this context, the work is confirmation of the completion of delegated tasks. These narratives offer us some insight into the ways in which writers continue to learn, adapt, and "get work done" in writing on the job.

We know that writing transfer is elusive, particularly university-to-workplace transfer (Beaufort 2007, 1999; Dias et al. 1999; Fennick, Peters, and Guyon 1993; Freedman and Adam 2000; Anson and Forsberg 1990; McCaughey and Fitzpatrick 2020), and a "complex phenomenon" (Moore 2017, 6). Student interns and new graduates often report feeling a "disorientation" upon entering the workplace (Anson and Forsberg 1990). They wonder why "they weren't better prepared for the writing tasks that they face in

their jobs" (Fennick, Peters, and Guyon 1993, 47), and they even report feeling "so struck by the differences between academic and workplace writing that they feel quite hurt by their institution's failure to provide them with easily transportable knowledge" (Brent 2011, 411).

What transfer research hasn't yet explored substantially is workplace hierarchies, decorum, and expectations about how professionals learn to "get the work done" through writing. In their book *Power and Politeness in the Workplace*, authors Janet Holmes and Maria Stubbe write that "people draw on a variety of discourse strategies to manage problematic workplace encounters" and that "considerations of politeness" are key to understanding such exchanges (2015, 52). Here, we would define "problematic" as both the challenges individuals face in completing job tasks as they depend on others, and the roadblocks they encounter as they try to do so. Holmes and Stubbe, although interested in "talk" rather than text, write that employees put forth "a good deal of effort" (Holmes and Stubbe 2015, 138) into communicating with an eye toward fostering and maintaining strong working relationships with their colleagues. Holmes and Stubbe write that the "interplay between the imperatives of power and politeness is especially foregrounded in cases of miscommunication and problematic discourse" (Holmes and Stubbe 2015, 139). And these two factors—power and politeness—are very likely at the heart of some of the most compelling challenges our writers in the workplace face, particularly as we see the writers below struggle to adapt and negotiate new writing contexts.

We argue here that one piece of the "elusive" writing transfer relates to notions of compromise when it comes to encounters with complex audiences and systems. Claire Lauer and Eva Brumberger write about "responsive" workplaces and the writers within them, claiming that the actions these communicators must take happen "across a vast landscape of contexts and rhetorical practices, affecting our very notions of what writing is and how it gets done" (2019, 636). Here, we witness precisely this: two writers working responsively, struggling to get things done in ways they could not have

expected when they were students in the university. Throughout our exploration of these narratives, we focus on the ways in which these writers navigate complex audiences and systems—whether these audiences and systems are bureaucratic, hierarchical, digital, or cross-industry. Both of our interviewees are negotiating between what Koerber calls "competing alternative discourses" (2006, 94)—particularly in email, which we primarily focus on below. Our marketing director must move between the corporate world and higher education, and in doing so, struggles to "sound smarter than I am." Our records management specialist takes the opposite tack, as she's learned to "play sort of dumb" when attempting to get a response from professionals above her in the larger bureaucracy. Leydens considers "rhetorical evolution in individuals over time" (Leydens 2008, 259) to be a crucial element in the development of a writer as they move from "novice" to "insider." We see these writers negotiate expertise and authority, as well as rhetorical skills agency—all in complex and unexpected ways.

It's our hope that this chapter will add to the growing body of work surrounding workplace writing broadly, and writing transfer specifically, and that such scholarship is taken up by both faculty and administrators to decrease the number of graduates who feel such disillusionment in the future.

## Participants

Below, we explore two interviews from our larger data pool in an effort to provide specific, illustrative examples of both on-the-job struggles and the on-the-job learning that arises from such struggles. While multiple interviewees speak to the ways in which they adjust their language in this way, these two participants provide what we see as the most robust and complete examples. First, we look to the narrative of our marketing director, who works at a technology company in the higher education space. Next, we turn to an interview with a records management specialist, who primarily performs archival work for a network of museums. These interviews come from a larger IRB-approved study that includes fifty-two

workplace writers across industries, collected over the past four years. Overall, we seek to better understand how writing works in these various workplaces and for these particular writers: the kinds of writing they do, the challenges of learning to perform it, and how these writers perceive that their university writing experiences informed, helped, or did not contribute to their ability to write successfully in their work lives.

These semi-structured interviews typically last between twenty-five and fifty minutes. In recruiting, we relied heavily on our personal and professional networks and on social media. We also saw success in the snowball method (Groenewald 2004), in which we used our relationships with participants to inquire about possible interviewees in their networks. Selection criteria were fairly simple; participants must have had at least a bachelor's degree and currently hold a position that requires some writing. We did not interview those who are titled writers or editors, as we feel other research in professional and technical communication has well explored such communicators (Hart–Davidson 2013; Henry 2007; Jones 2016; Karatsolis et al. 2016; Winsor 2003; Slack, Miller, and Doak 2006).

## Negotiation and Compromise in Action

Our two participants here, the marketing director and the program specialist in records management, primarily discussed their workplace writing that takes place via email. Patricia Welsh Droz and Lorie Stagg Jacobs (2019) deem the email form a "chameleon genre," one that "does whatever its users want it to do." By this they mean that an email might be straightforward, delivering logistical information, for example. It might also be "persuasive or narrative or informative; it can be conversational or formal; it can pick up where other communication modes have dropped off" (Droz and Jacobs 2019). We agree, and we go further. To the two writers below, email is in some ways this chameleon genre, yet even more so in email they become chameleon *writers*. These two professionals

show us the ways in which they move in and out of specific personas and tones in an effort to perform their jobs well.

Our first interviewee, the marketing director, discusses the challenges in navigating audiences in discourse communities of which he is not a part, particularly over email, stating, "You have to adapt to those audiences and sometimes change your tone and sometimes change the way things are presented." In his current role, his primary audience is university administrators, particularly those who make purchasing and curricular decisions. He states that he struggled especially to connect with this audience because "I'm not a member of the higher education community . . . so I have to immerse myself in that world." Yet even having "immersed" himself in the language of higher education, he recalls:

> I'm talking to somebody in the academic community, so I'll try to make myself sound smarter than I am, and so the writing comes across fake and phony. A president of a university is a person too, and they're going to respond differently to something that sounds fake and phony than something that's a little bit more organic. So, people will tone it down a little bit, and you know, "Back off of that a little bit, or maybe you rephrase this, and you don't have to sound so stuffy about this particular research study, it's not that big of a deal." . . . I think I would tend to overcompensate to try to make it sound a little bit more professional. But I've learned over time, these are people too, and they respond just like any other human responds to something.

The marketing director has learned through trial and error that his initial impulse, to situate his writing within the academic community by "sounding smart," actually impedes his ability to effectively communicate. Only through giving up the perception of in-group authority, the idea that he "belongs" to the same community as his audience, and instead writing more "organically" is he able to be seen as authentic and effective. He notes the difficulties in shifting

audience and emphasizes the need for rhetorical awareness and adaptation to be successful in his writing, especially in email.

Similarly, the program specialist must also often give up the perception of authority in order to achieve her writing goals. She states that emails are a "learn on the job type thing." She works in the office of her organization's highest ranking official, and often has to communicate with the heads of various museums and cultural institutions across the country, most of whom she notes that she's never met in person. She states that when an email request goes unanswered, she has to choose how to proceed. In some cases, she will "loop her boss into it," although this is rare and "uncomfortable." She works to get a "read" of the person she's communicating with, and very often learns "from back-and-forth email interactions with them [they] don't respond well to that, and they see that as some . . . challenge to their title or something." The program specialist then takes the opposite approach:

> And so, then I have to kind of play sort of dumb and pretend like, [pleading voice] "I know this is a real bother, but can you please, please do this and it's like a hassle, but like we just need it done and like once it's done, I'll close it out and it will be over with and you won't have to deal with it anymore." And that's sort of a strange way to interact with people. But that's kind of how the job works.

This professional must negotiate a complex system of authority capital—writing on behalf of an authority (the head office) to those who are protective of their titles and the capital that comes with them. She finds herself trying to avoid the discomfort of "tattling" on her unresponsive audience by looping in the head of her organization in follow-up emails, by sacrificing her own authority even further and "dumbing-down" her voice, playing to the ego of the audience. Despite her own expertise and the authority-by-proxy from which she writes, she chooses to supplicate herself and her position to achieve her purpose efficiently, because "that's kind of how the

job works." While it might be more expedient to immediately go to the head of the organization, she is aware of the importance of maintaining relationships through positive interactions with her audiences, despite the seemingly incongruent goals she has (to get a response) and those of her audience (to avoid response unless pressed).

Interestingly, we see the marketing director and program specialist negotiating challenging audiences in opposite ways—one by reverting to his authentic voice, which is less "scholarly" or academic, and the other by abandoning her authentic voice to appease colleagues—yet they ultimately achieve similar ends. Elizabeth Wardle notes, "Some new written practices may be opposed to newcomers' values and ethics; [and] may ask them to give up some measure of authority to which they believe they are entitled" (2004). The marketing director attempts to elevate his language as a means of establishing his authority. However, as he is not a part of the discourse community of his audience (broadly, academia), he comes off as "phony" and inauthentic, thus damaging his authority with that group. The way in which he ultimately finds success in his writing is by writing more organically/naturally and finding authority through authenticity.

On the other hand, the program specialist is writing to an audience that bristles if and when she asserts her authority, and she finds that they typically "don't respond well" when she urges action. In converse of the marketing director, who first elevates and then reconciles his language within his authentic identity, the program specialist intentionally becomes inauthentic; she voluntarily relinquishes her authority by diminishing her language, performatively pleading in order to mollify her audience and bolster their sense of authority in the transaction. It's important to note that although we do not know the genders of the audiences about whom the program specialist speaks, we must consider how much gender dynamics and expectations come into play as well, as we see this female employee relinquishing her authority to placate her audience. This is a potentially rich area of future study across industries.

While these two workplace writers apply opposing means, both achieve the same goal. They each must "read" their audience and flex accordingly. The marketing director recognizes that the academics will see through his attempts at miming their writing style, while the program specialist can tell when her audience will be resistant to prodding. Both must adapt their approaches (one by becoming more authentic, the other less) to get what they need from their audiences. We can see that both interviewees are writing in difficult situations—confined within complex systems and limitations on their writing and composing to audiences that each want something that is difficult or impossible to provide. In order to be successful in their communications, each must negotiate a balance between the ideal and the realistic, for the sake of efficacy.

Elizabeth Wardle, in her article "Identity, Authority, and Learning to Write in New Workplaces," examines the case of Alan, a computer specialist assigned to work with a group of academics in a humanities department (Wardle 2004). Alan struggled to adapt his writing persona when faced with a new expert audience and ultimately failed to become a member of the community. Alan fails because of an incongruity between his perceived and his actual authority. He sees himself as an ultimate authority and either refuses or is unable to bend in his asserting of that authority to his audience. When contrasted with Alan, we can see how these workplace writers, the marketing director and the program specialist, succeed where he failed. Workplace writers have to negotiate their own values, at times, in order to successfully participate in new communities, sometimes taking on roles or personas that are not congruent to their identities (Russell 1997; Lave and Wenger 1991; Wardle 2004). In Alan's case, authority is held by his audience (an academic department), but he believes it is his. However, our marketing director is fully aware that his audience, academic decision makers, hold the power, and so he, after initially faltering, is able to adjust his approach and adapt to them, approaching them more authentically and succeeding in his interactions.

The program specialist has the choice of either asserting her authority (by prodding or by bringing in the head of the organization to handle things) or by ceding authority (either genuinely or for show). While she could be "successful," in the sense that the tasks she needs done would get done, by looping her boss into every communication, she recognizes that this strong-arm tactic could damage relationships she needs to maintain. Additionally, this tactic might also backfire in that by asserting "authority" by proxy (via her boss), she might actually appear less competent and authoritative in the eyes of her employer—that she is unable to "get the job done" on her own. She chooses to downplay her authority to her audience and is successful in getting responses from them by appearing capable to her employer.

We aren't arguing, of course, that individuals should have to capitulate in this way, or that the kind of pleading our program specialist, for instance, performs is right or even the most effective method to getting work done. But as we can see in both of these interviews, some workplace writers strongly feel the need to take on dramatically different tones or identities in order to get work done.

## Implications for Teachers

The concept of the "chameleon writer," discussed above, as well as email as a "chameleon genre" that Droz and Jacobs (2019) propose, are valuable ones as we consider workplace writing preparation in the classroom. Droz and Jacobs further argue that writing instructors aren't teaching email writing—or perhaps any writing—in this way (2019). We see it as crucial that writing instructors and instructors in various disciplines who teach and require writing look beyond the classroom and devote deliberate attention to framing such complex rhetorical "shifting" not as a move that *may* occur in future work spaces, but one that students will no doubt encounter and be forced to confront. Even more so, we encourage those writing instructors who are lucky enough to oversee and mentor students through workplace internships to take advantage of the authentic and no-doubt complex rhetorical contexts these writers find themselves

in, however temporarily, and discuss negotiating authority via email to achieve goals.

Finally, we are happy to point teachers and administrators to the Archive of Workplace Writing Experiences (www.workplace-writing.org). It is in this archive that our workplace writer interviews are available in audio and written transcript form for classroom use, so they can play interviews in class and have discussions with students about negotiating power. Further, in the "Resources" section of the archive, faculty and administrators will find transfer-focused, authentic, and adaptable lesson plans, assignments, and activities rooted in these interviews which meet these needs.

## Implications for Administrators

This research, at its core, offers a glimpse into the gap between the writing, disciplinary and otherwise, that we teach in the university and the writing that these workplace professionals are being asked to do on the job. Every workplace—and every worker—must be responsive. Lauer and Brumberger write that "the workplace is, more than ever, an environment that requires the kind of rhetorical and critical communication skills that our students learn in our writing classrooms" (Lauer and Brumberger 2019, 660). It's clear that critical thinking and rhetorical flexibility are central to both environments, and many scholars and teachers, of course, argue for "critical thinking" models in the classroom (Bloch and Spataro 2014; Page and Mukherjee 2007; Paulson 2011). But we would ask program administrators to consider more deeply the nuance of negotiation between audiences, arguments, priorities, and goals that these writers—and many of the other writers in our study—must perform multiple times each day.

Bergmann and Zepernick write, "Longitudinal studies . . . make a strong case that the orderly progression implied by a FYC-to-writing-in-the-disciplines model is little more than an optimistic fiction" (Bergmann and Zepernick 2007, 125–26). While we likely wouldn't go that far, we do think that as we continue to learn more about the transfer-related struggles of our graduates in the workplace, we need

to continue to reconceive of such programs to better meet students' needs. We place this task on administrators as a foundational responsibility: View preparation for university-to-workplace writing as a mandate, and do so, first, by working to better understand, as a field, the incredibly complex nature of even seemingly mundane and "easy" workplace tasks, such as email correspondence. We call on writing program administrators to consider the ways in which such learning and development might be more explicitly built into curricula.

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CHAPTER 10

# "WHAT ONE LEARNS IN COLLEGE ONLY MAKES SENSE WHEN PRACTICING IT AT WORK"

## How Early-Career Alumni Evaluate Writing Success

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> What one learns in college only makes sense when practicing it at work. What we learn in college remains theory, but once you start to write such emails and documents at work, you start to figure it out. —Kioko

We begin with this short quote from Kioko, a recent alumna from Strathmore University in Kenya, because it highlights concepts important to the Alumni Writing Transfer Project. First, Kioko acknowledges a gap between theories about writing learned in school and their practice in workplace contexts. Second, rather than dismiss the knowledge gained from school experience, Kioko perceives value in that prior writing knowledge and seeks to draw on it when learning to write at work. Finally, learning to write for Kioko is not a process of wholesale application from college to work. Kioko has to "figure it out."

Learning how writers draw on their prior writing knowledge to figure out how to write at work, to learn the organization or company and how it handles communication, as Hyland (2016) puts

it, is one of the major goals of our project. In this chapter, we share preliminary results from the Alumni Writing Transfer Project, an international, multi-institutional study of how early-career alumni adapt prior writing knowledge. For this chapter specifically, we narrow our focus to explore how early-career alumni define writing success and its impact on writing transfer.

In the mid-2000s, the field of writing studies saw an explosion of empirical research investigating writing transfer, how writers engage prior writing knowledge when writing in new rhetorical situations. Because of the importance of first-year writing to writing studies, much of this scholarship focused on the critical transitions from high school to first-year writing (Reiff and Bawarshi 2011) or from first-year writing to writing in the major (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014; Baird and Dilger 2017). The transition from school to work received little attention from first-wave writing transfer scholars.

Early scholarship examining the transition of writers from school to work emphasized the difference in the purposes and goals for writing between school and workplace contexts (Anson and Forsberg 1990; Dias et al. 1999). As a result, Brent (2011) argues that a "glass-half-empty" orientation dominates, with scholars being deeply skeptical of writing transfer between academic contexts and those beyond the university. However, even though the school-to-work transition was understudied by first-wave transfer scholars, this empirical work deepened our understanding of "transfer." The complex metaphors for transfer emerging can 1) help scholars of writing beyond the university better understand what happens to writers within this transition and 2) help faculty and administrators design experiences that better support writers as they transition from school to work.

First-wave writing transfer scholarship found that transfer as wholesale movement or application of writing knowledge from one context to another is seldom possible. Scholars leaned heavily on Perkins and Salomon's (1989) concepts of near and far transfer. Near transfer involves transfer between similar contexts while far

transfer occurs between contexts different from one another. Far transfer requires what Perkins and Salomon call high-road transfer, which is the mindful abstraction or transformation of prior knowledge. Recognizing that learning to write is often a form of far transfer, first-wave transfer scholars began to employ metaphors suggesting that prior writing knowledge changes in the process of transfer: "transformation" (Brent 2011), "repurposing" (Roozen 2009), "remix" (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014), and "recontextualization" (Nowacek 2011). Drawing on the work of DePalma and Ringer (2013), we use the metaphor of adaptation to describe how prior writing knowledge changes as writers learn to write in new contexts. For writing beyond the university, such metaphors for transfer offer a "glass-half-full" orientation (Brent 2011), where scholars and others that have a stake in the school-to-work transitions should ask "not whether but how it happens" (Donahue 2016).

Writing transfer scholars seldom ask why writers adapt prior writing knowledge. That is, what are the goals for such adaptive work? This might be because most writing transfer scholarship focuses on transfer in school, where success is being able to demonstrate learning or to take up the writing expected in future contexts. Within workplace contexts, what constitutes success in regards to writing is difficult for newcomers to determine. Nowacek (2011) argues that typically someone with authority determines successful transfer. In school contexts, a teacher primarily determines what counts as success and how prior knowledge needs to adapt; however, learning what constitutes writing success is more difficult in workplace settings, where writing competency is often assumed and little support is given for learning to write, or where supervisors are not educators and may not be the best models for writing. Workplace writers also must learn to adapt to technological revolutions and ongoing change, a pressure that may be increasing with social factors like gig economies (Alexander, Lunsford, and Whithaus 2020) and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the difficulties defining success, workplace environments offer very rich contexts to investigate how writers adapt prior writing knowledge.

Like Kioko, most alumni in our study, regardless of geography, expressed perceptions of difference between writing for school and work and described episodes of disorientation when learning workplace expectations. Academic and professional contexts may indeed differ, and the Alumni Writing Transfer Project seeks to illuminate possibilities for bridging this gap, fostering confidence that writing transfer, though difficult, is possible. This chapter contributes to a framework that faculty and program administrators can use to support students' school-to-work transitions.

## Research Methods

To learn more about writing transfer as adaptation, four researchers designed an interview-driven case study, using twelve early-career university graduates, from police officers and social media content editors to major gift managers and software engineers, for two semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A: Study Participants in the chapter's online resources for a full list of participants). Four researchers, representing institutions in the United States (2), Kenya, and the Czech Republic sent questionnaires to potential participants from their institutions, with one sending a large-scale survey to 13,000 potential alumni respondents and the others sending to a small, purposive sample of alumni (see Appendix B: Institutional Context). Questions included work history, workplace writing history, and willingness to participate in interviews (see Appendix C: Interview Questions). Alumni were selected for interviews based on questionnaire responses. Questions from the first interview focused on exploring participants' writing lives at work, in-depth. For the second interview, alumni shared and reflected on two writing exemplars, texts written for work: one that was significant to them in some way and another piece that posed a challenge. In this way, we invited interviewees to be "self-reflective" (Bandura 2001, in Blythe 2016) and recall some moments of pride and challenges related to their early workplace writing. Figure 10.1 shows the interview process.

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│ Audio interview #2: │
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*Figure 10.1. Data Collection and Analysis Process*

## Data Analysis

Researchers transcribed and shared all interviews. Each researcher read all transcripts and wrote memos to share about distinctive features, which formed the basis of a series of conversations about prospective codes. These were refined through a trial coding of a transcript not included as study data. Peer review by other researchers was used in the refinement of the coding scheme.

All transcripts were coded twice, once by a researcher and once by a doctoral student, in hopes that different perspectives on the data could lead to a richer analysis. Coding consisted of assigning a code to a portion of the text, with portions divided by thought. Coders noted both the assigned code and the relevant quotes from the text. Then, coders extracted the coded quotations into documents separated by variable and by code. For example, if a quotation from a transcript referred to putting a lesson from school to use, that quotation was copied into a document for metaphor (the variable) under the heading "put it to use" (the code). One researcher surveyed all variable documents and generated a tentative list of themes. A second round of open coding further identified themes and a tentative set of relationships. Axial coding was used to assign relevant quotations to themes. In this process, researchers read the transcripts and identified segments

where content closely matched that defined in the theme. Where researchers differed, full–group discussion was used to resolve differences. The approach also allowed us to respect our different cultural orientations, as there are no calibration procedures to achieve a uniform perception and arrive at a 100% concordance (see Appendix D: Codebook).

## Results

Coding revealed that heuristics were one of the most prevalent ways alumni evaluated the success of workplace writing tasks. Below, we share examples of those heuristics and how alumni came to value them. Furthermore, alumni recognized the need to adapt heuristics to be successful because of perceived differences between writing for school and work. Depending on context, alumni turned to the Internet and coworkers or supervisors to support that adaptive work, and their approaches to these supports fostered difficulties in adaptation.

While most alumni were able to adapt heuristics for workplace writing, we learned alumni often lacked heuristics to deal with two differences between school and work: 1) writing as a tool for advocacy and 2) collaborative writing. Below, we share how alumni struggled to evaluate writing within these workplace writing subcontexts.

### Using Heuristics for Evaluation

Alumni in our study told us one way they evaluate writing success is through heuristics, which we defined in our codebook as "rules of thumb" for writing. Here are some examples and the wide range of contexts alumni pull from.

- "You follow this format: As a _____ (dash) you need to do X so that I follow X." (Mbugua, information technology and software development entrepreneur in Kenya)
- "As a journalist, that's what you want to say, lead with the most important detail that the people gave." (Ross, newspaper reporter in the United States)

- "I worked in the writing center for three years. Outlining was always something that I tried to help the students do because a lot of people don't outline and don't think it's super important, but I think it's so important to have an idea and some type of roadmap of what you want to say before you start writing." (Rachel, external communication for a nonprofit in the United States)
- "Fundraising has gone less from sort of like 'Here's what we need. Can you help us?' to 'Here's who you're helping. Here's their story. Doesn't it intrigue you to want to help people like this.' So, you have to make it personal and matter to them. And you do that by telling those individual stories." (Kate, MFA in creative writing who is a major gifts manager for a nonprofit in the United States)

Alumni recognized the need to adapt heuristics to be successful because of perceived differences between writing for school and work and changes in context. For example, between our first and second interview, Kate attended a webinar on marketing in the pandemic. Her original plan for fundraising was to draw upon her "here's who you're helping" heuristic by connecting the isolation felt at the beginning of the pandemic with the intense isolation felt by cancer patients: "Isolation is nothing new for them. Now you know what it feels like. So how do you say that without sounding snotty? 'Now you understand. Finally.'" Before moving forward with this social media marketing campaign, she attended a webinar on fundraising during a crisis, which had a powerful impact on her heuristics: "So then I started thinking about it not in terms of 'Now you know what it feels like to be a cancer patient' but more 'We're all in this together. Together, we can get through this.'" Her next Facebook post thus begins: "It's been a week. Together we will get through this, but imagine if you had to face this week knowing exposure to the virus could be catastrophic to your health, or mean you couldn't receive lifesaving cancer treatment," and the fundraising campaign hashtag #NoOneWalksAlone was born.

The support Kate receives is a reminder that contexts matter in "affording transformative reuse of knowledge" (Donahue 2016, 112), and environments that support adaptation make such transformation more straightforward. While some workplaces have established mentoring schemes to support their novices, many early-career alumni report a lack of support. For example, Nyambane, who works at a firm dealing with IT-related consultations in Kenya, noted that his use of the Internet to solve writing problems was one quality that made him a successful workplace writer: "Many different people have different ideas about how to do something. For example, if you Google how to write an internship offer, many sources will give different opinions. What I normally do is to pick what is suitable for a given situation. There is so much knowledge on the Internet. You just need to narrow down what is specific to your situation." Pavel, a coder for a global IT company in the Czech Republic, had difficulty finding a writing project challenging to him, but shared what he would do to resolve an issue: "I don't remember that I had any problem with any text. If there is any problem, I just use the Internet, so it's a problem that lasts a minute."

Still, other alumni wrote in workplace contexts where supervisors were seen as writing authorities, and finding ways to adapt heuristics, especially to multiple supervisors, was difficult. For example, Kioko, a financial accountant at a firm dealing with IT-related consultancy services, noted the following about her multiple supervisors: "There are some who were very mad at me because I used the word 'Hi' on an email. There are others who do not care about that and what is important is the message." Jackie's experience reflects Kioko's as she tries to figure out the multiple demands on her police reports: "It's tricky. Every supervisor does it differently, and it depends who's in charge that night. How do they like their reports and their citations written? It's difficult." The consequences are that writing choices come to be seen as idiosyncratic rather than responding to a recurring situation organizing action.

## Two Differences Between School and Work: Advocacy and Collaboration

While studies of school writing highlight the value of learning to write for future application, our participants highlighted the ways writing became meaningful through advocacy. We were struck by how alumni challenged heuristics learned in school when they began to see writing as a way of advocating.

Jackie, for example, has an ethic of care that transforms police report writing into advocacy on behalf of victims. She became a campus police officer as a result of a male police officer who didn't take vandalism to her car seriously. "When I was in grad school, my car kept getting vandalized. And we reported it to the city officer. He spent five minutes with us and was like, 'Well, we can't really do anything,' and that was that. It just felt incomplete. And it felt like I wasted his time basically reporting it." In describing how she might report on a college student suicide attempt, she said, "I care about my students, and I want them to know that they're not just a report to me. Every situation is important." As a result, Jackie writes longer, more detailed reports that are more time-consuming to write, and has pushed back against her supervisors, whose feedback encourages her to write more concisely.

For Ross, an assignment from his editor to investigate long lines at the DMV turned into a series of advocacy articles in which he also pushed back against heuristics for writing that are common practice in journalism, which are learned in school and reinforced in internships and on-the-job training. When an assignment required him to visit a DMV, he was struck by what he saw: "I've been in long DMV lines before, and I still have never seen anything quite like this. What's wrong?" His first newspaper article on the DMV received a lot of attention, resulting in a series of fifty subsequent stories that investigated managerial incompetence and new programs. When Ross comes to see his writing as advocacy, he pushes back against heuristics common to newspaper reporting, especially regarding introductions: "My editor told me, if you're going to do an anecdotal lead, if you're going to tell someone's story, it should not be

the very top of the story. You got to make it two grafs. But, I kind of ignored that, and I made it four grafs." In this way, ignoring the advice from his editor and drafting four paragraphs, which Ross felt better represent the conditions at the DMV, advocated for those impacted.

Finally, alumni seemed disoriented by the ways in which "acts of composing are shared and interactive" (Beaufort 2007, 280) in workplace settings. Lack of heuristics regarding collaborative writing seemed to inadequately equip alumni to negotiate issues of ownership and co-creation. For some, writing as advocacy encouraged alumni to reach out for collaboration, like Hana, who is an HR specialist for a global company, working on a document for on-boarding: "I sat down with my boss, and we were thinking what kind of information should be included in the very first email you receive if you join the company." Other alumni found themselves in collaborative situations that proved difficult. For example, Faye, who is leveraging a BA in film studies as social media content editor for a large zoo, described the zookeepers and scientists she works with: "They're very passionate about all the communication. Everybody cares very deeply about their work, and the keepers care very deeply about every single animal that they work with. . . . Really, it's less about how to make everybody happy and more about how to not make anybody mad." For Faye, heuristics for writing to her primary audience, in this case patrons of the zoo, were inadequate for the multiple secondary audiences that would need to approve her work before it began to circulate.

Phoebe, who works on internal and promotional communication for a nonprofit, shared that she needed to adapt attitudes toward the writing process in response to co-creation: "When the working environment is so collaborative, I think that I've had to learn to not take it personally. If someone prefers a different way or redrafts, I need to let it go and not take it as a personal attack if they don't like how I've drafted something." At the same time, she had to learn when to entrench herself and fight for rhetorical choices: "I feel like I've learned when to push back. Kind of pick your battles. I think

that was a little bit challenging because in undergrad I did a lot of group projects, but not a lot of group writing. What happened, frankly, is we would do the project together, and I would do a lot of the writing pieces, or we divided sections. It wasn't like we were editing on top of each other's sections like you do in the workplace."

## Implications for Teaching

**Learn how students turn writing instruction into heuristics and provide practice in adapting to multiple audiences.**
We found that our alumni rely on heuristics or rules of thumb to negotiate writing in the workplace, in contrast to the "flexible rhetorical knowledge that can be traced to much more general features of academic writing" (Brent 2012, 586) found in other studies of school-to-work transitions. Static heuristics learned in college do not acknowledge the dynamic nature of workplace writing, where alumni encounter different audiences with a variety of expectations about demands for writing. At key moments across the curriculum, faculty should seek 1) to learn more about how writing instruction becomes such rules of thumb for students and 2) to provide opportunities for students to practice adapting them for new writing tasks and multiple audiences. For instance, becoming a better writer is often conceptualized as learning to write to specialists in specialized ways; however, what if students were asked, after writing a chemistry lab report for example, to write about findings to a grantmaker or other lay audience? In this way, students will have experience that prepares them to adapt approaches to writing according to context.

**Provide guided opportunities to write collaboratively and to attend to the social dimensions of the writing process.**
Alumni in our study indicated that peer-peer, employee-supervisor, and writer-audience relationships and negotiations impacted their engagement with prior writing knowledge. Faculty should provide students opportunities to practice different roles in collaborative writing. In addition, scaffolded group assignments could discourage

the common practice of dividing longer projects into smaller pieces where each learner independently contributes a part that is simply concatenated at the end. Alumni indicated that in the workplace, sometimes an entire text is co-created, with multiple writers sharing work and responsibility for the whole text. More important, our alumni expressed difficulties negotiating the social dimensions of the writing process—the give-and-take that occurs with multiple, immediate audiences in the process of drafting. To do so, faculty can direct reflective activities toward the success and failure of the discussion and other forms of writing, like feedback and email, that structure negotiation during collaboration.

**Help students experience writing as advocacy and learn how to advocate for changes to writing systems.**
In school, students often find writing meaningful because of "personal connection" and "potential for current or future relevance" (Eodice, Geller, and Lerner 2016, 331). For many of our alumni, writing became meaningful because of its ability to advocate for an idea or for people. In using writing to advocate, some alumni came to realize that writing needed to evolve in order for it to meet their advocacy goals but had difficulty "selling" (Nowacek 2011) those changes to those in positions of authority. Faculty can help students experience writing as advocacy through assignment design and by working together to design concentrations or programs that emphasize advocacy, such as Missouri State's undergraduate certificate in advocacy writing. More important, here, too, faculty can design experiences to help students attend to the social dimensions of advocacy writing so the students can learn how to advocate for change to writing systems.

## Implications for Administrators

**Fully fund and robustly support high-impact practices that connect students and faculty with industry professionals.**
Because alumni report that writing demands are context-driven, teaching should focus on exposing learners to the demands for

writing in different contexts. Students then learn that expectations for writing in the workplace are not homogenous, a useful lesson given the societal trend of frequent job changes. Many institutions promote high-impact practices, like practical, project-based learning with clients, internships, service learning, and visiting instructors/ alumni, that connect students and faculty to professionals in industry. However, these high-impact practices often need more funding and support. For example, faculty often have so many duties that they simply can't establish robust relationships with industry professionals, and some internship supervisors supervise so many interns that true mentoring and reflection seldom take place. Additionally, professional development can help connect faculty with industry, such as Susan Conrad's Civil Engineering Writing Project, but faculty need support or time away from primary duties to devote time and energy to a series of professional development engagements across time, rather than one-and-done events.

**Create opportunities for faculty and other stakeholders to shift the objectives for writing transfer from accommodation to transformation.**

The adaptive work of alumni like Ross and Jackie, who actively pushed back against expectations for writing from authority figures in their workplace contexts, made us question some of the assumptions we were making about writing transfer. Many faculty hold the assumption that the goal for writing transfer is that of accommodation. That is, our approach to writing instruction is either to teach students the expectations for the writing of future contexts or to teach students how to figure out the expectations for writing, with the goal of helping students effectively take up the writing expected of those contexts. Jackie and Ross remind us that writing doesn't always respond effectively to the demands of a situation, and sometimes writing systems need to change. We thus challenge administrators, especially those in positions to shape conversations about writing across campus, to create opportunities to shift the objectives for writing transfer from accommodation to transformation. To return to Kioko whose epigraph opens this

chapter, alumni need to "figure things out" not just to fit in but to transform.

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# FACILITATING WRITERS' ONGOING SELF-AGENCY AND NETWORKED LEARNING

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In the final section of this collection, three chapters explore writers' ongoing self-agency as writers take what they learned in college and move into writing beyond the university contexts. The chapters in this section examine tools and practices that help students develop writerly agency in preparation for their workplace writing contexts, including practices that help students make sense of the writing situations they are moving into (and the connections to prior writing experiences and learning contexts), use writing to communicate their professional identities, and use social media to build networking relationships.

> *"The majority of students . . . were ready to engage in writing on their placement and . . . anticipated that they would engage in new types of writing." (Chapter 11)*

In Chapter 11 "Writing Transitions Between Academic and Professional Settings," Nadya Yakovchuk, Ryan Dippre, Lucie Dvorakova, Alison Farrell, Niamh Fortune, and Melissa Weresh (a 2019–2021 research team) draw on data from across three higher education institutions in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ireland, and across a range of programs—a graduate-level law school and undergraduate programs in education and in nursing, midwifery and paramedic science—to understand how students in pre-placement learning contexts make sense of the writing demands they will face in their placements. The authors are curious how these

sense-making acts connect to both the kinds of writing students have done and the writing instruction they've received. Yakovchuk et al. note the benefits to students of both practicing (completing familiar writing tasks) and experimenting (with elements of the writing process) as they move to writing beyond the university. The authors also found that students in all three contexts had an understanding and appreciation that writing in new contexts would be different than in their university contexts.

> *"Writing assignments that deeply engage students in a public health issue, challenge them to tailor their communication style to the intended readers, and prompt them to decide which information is most relevant to include will help them to . . . further develop their professional identity." (Chapter 12)*

Ella August and Olivia S. Anderson, in "A Framework for Designing Effective Writing Assignments in Public Health," offer an evidence-based method for developing effective writing assignments in public health (and in other fields) that enables students to partner with the community and prepare written documents that have "real-world" relevance. August and Anderson's framework offers eight recommendations for faculty and staff designing writing assignments, with recommendations such as "Require a document format used in the workplace" and "Allow for a process to support writing through specific tasks" that may be familiar to writing instructors but less so for faculty incorporating writing into other disciplinary curricula. The authors discuss their own application of this framework to "The Real-World Writing Project," a project that requires public health students to create a written product for an external public health practice partner.

> *"Learning how to learn socially and share knowledge with others while critically analyzing information not only disrupts hierarchical concepts of expertise but also asks*

*students to carefully consider what it means to be in conver-sation with peers—learning, teaching, advocating." (Chapter 13)*

In "'And Sometimes We Debate': How Networking Transforms What Professional Writers Know," US-based researchers Benjamin Lauren and Stacey Pigg argue that social media networking is essential for building writers' self-agency and suggest ways to teach networking as a transformative writing practice in the classroom. In addition, by learning about networking as a transformative practice, student networkers can then think critically about who is or is not in their networks, how to amplify underrepresented voices and ideas, and how to network ethically, as well as learn and practice the various writing and rhetorical practices involved with networking. Ultimately, Lauren and Pigg show the value of practicing how to have more intentional conversations among professional networks.

Across these chapters, the authors discuss how students prepare for the challenges of writing beyond the university by developing skills that help them make sense of new writing situations; approach those situations with a critical, inclusive stance; and foster productive collaborations.

CHAPTER 11

# WRITING TRANSITIONS BETWEEN ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL SETTINGS

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**Ryan Dippre,** *University of Maine, United States*
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Of the many pernicious misunderstandings that writing teachers battle, perhaps the most aggravating is the notion that writing is a skill that can be learned once for all purposes—like riding a bicycle. Research on writing transfer, as evidenced for example in the work of the Elon Research Seminar on Writing Transfer and in the companion Research Seminar on Writing Beyond the University from which our research is drawn, persistently shows that writing is more contextually sensitive, more embodied, and more complex an act than the deeply habituated actions to which it is often compared. Writing is messy, and the act of teaching writers to carry that messy business from one set of circumstances to another is not straightforward. The kinds of writing people see themselves doing, the audiences they imagine themselves writing for, and the strategies they enact to produce that writing are not pre-existing structures that writers can effectively employ in all settings. Rather, these considerations are *constructed* by the writer, emerging from their previous experiences, their dispositions, and their perceptions of both the immediate circumstances of the writing and the eventual circumstances in which such writing will be read.

Such complex social, physical, and mental work suggests many fascinating questions about the transfer of writing and how we might teach for it (see, for instance, Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014). It also suggests important questions about the ways we *currently* teach writing—what impact our teaching has on students, how they come to understand writing at the university compared to writing in their professional fields, and how they navigate the complex complementarities and contradictions moving from one setting to another.

In this chapter, we draw on data from across three higher education institutions, in three different countries, and across three different disciplines in an effort to understand how students about to start a work-integrated learning placement make sense of the writing demands that they will face. We outline the connections between those sense-making acts and the kinds of writing students have done, as well as the writing instruction they have received. By utilizing contemporary research on transfer and threshold concepts in writing, we identify patterns of anticipation and development in these writers and generate implications for future, holistic approaches to support transfer from the university to the workplace.

## Transfer as Multidimensional Activity

We treat writing transfer as a multidimensional activity, one that is simultaneously mediated by the materiality of context, shaped by interpersonal work, enriched by intrapersonal dialogue, and framed by past, individuated histories of literate action. Anson (2016) underscores the importance of such a framing, arguing that

> Our conceptions of transfer must understand writers' experiences as involving much more than knowledge of genre, content, rhetorical situation, or process. To them we must add less explored writerly factors such as language preferences, the degree to which certain habits and practices have become sedimented, and aspects of writers' identities, cultures, and prior experiences in

> particular communities (Wardle and Clement). (Anson 2016, 539)

If we wish our teaching to respect the complex, multidimensional nature of transfer, our research on transfer can only enable that complexity by searching for it in the data we collect and analyze.

Addressing the complexity of transfer in teaching is nothing new to the field of writing studies. Neil Baird and Bradley Dilger recommend that instructors

> be mindful of relationships between classroom practices and transfer, with support from stakeholders such as writing program administrators. As instructors share the language of dispositions with students, and explain their power to shape transfer . . . those conversations could help resolve the negotiations of complexity, difficulty, and identity that inevitably emerge in writing. (2017, 708)

In this chapter, we aim to show the complexity of transfer *in action*, as writers move from one setting (university) to another (their placement in a pre–professional program). By highlighting the ways in which expectations for, and understandings of, writing change between contexts, we can identify particular aspects of transfer that are challenging even in closely related settings, and use that knowledge to inflect our future approaches to teaching for transfer.

## Work-Integrated Learning as a Site for Studying Transfer

Placements may be categorized under a broader heading of work–integrated learning (WIL). Jackson, drawing on the work of Von Treuer et al. 2010, notes that WIL is "the practice of combining traditional academic study, or formal learning, with student exposure to the world–of–work in their chosen profession" with "a core aim of better preparing undergraduates for entry into the workforce" (Jackson 2015, 350). Other examples of WIL include service learning, fieldwork, and internships. While students on placement agencyare

not in full-time permanent employment, the setting is authentic and the writing-related tasks often represent authentic professional genres. As such, placements offer enhanced credibility and reliability in terms of professional writing demands in comparison to work-inspired university-based assignments.

A central factor in the multidimensional nature of writing on placement is the uniqueness of the context. While there will be patterns within the various demands placed upon students as writers as they move from the university to the workplace, the experience is still individual. This highlights a need, pedagogically, to balance the demands of the writing situations with one's individual development and agency as a writer. We aim to highlight broader patterns of engagement with writing in different settings that emerged across our data, so that teachers can use this information to tailor their pedagogy to individual differences within these broader patterns.

## Context: Foundational Writing at Our Research Sites

Our data collection was carried out at three different sites: Drake University Law School (USA), the Froebel Department in Maynooth University (Ireland), and the School of Health Sciences at the University of Surrey (UK). The specifics of each site are described below, with a focus on support for students' writing and the different shapes this takes in our settings.

At Drake, law students are introduced to legal analysis and communication. This first involves understanding a new type of source material that comprises legal analysis. Judicial opinions must be broken down into component parts and students must make assumptions about which facts most influenced courts' decisions. Using that source material, students first engage in predictive analysis, typically in a fact-based client situation using an established legal principle to predict how the law will apply to their client's claim or charge. Students learn how to construct rule-based reasoning, policy-based reasoning, and most frequently, analogical reasoning. First-semester law students focus on predictive analysis

communicated in interoffice memoranda. In the second semester students focus on persuasive analysis in the context of appellate briefs, petitions, and answers. In this endeavor they often solve problems in which the law is not clear or settled. In this situation the written persuasive analysis focuses on types of legal arguments, often in constitutional or statutory interpretation problems. As a result, the writing instruction across the first year focuses heavily on pre-drafting analysis and gathering source material that will be used to substantiate predictions and arguments in conventional legal documents.

At Maynooth University, bachelor of education students use a number of different writing genres over the four-year degree. Students are introduced to writing lesson plans and schemes of work which are then used in their various school placement settings. Writing in the role as a reflective practitioner is central to a number of modules, and the students develop this reflective writing over the course of their degree. Academic writing and referencing are also introduced in the first year, culminating in an assessed action research dissertation in students' final year. To support this academic writing, the students complete two modules in English competency, which focuses on their own ability in the English language.

The School of Health Sciences at the University of Surrey offers bachelor of science (honours) programs in adult, children's, and mental health nursing, midwifery, and paramedic science. In the course of each program, students spend around half of their training in different kinds of clinical placements. In the first year, in addition to exams, they are required to complete assignments in a range of genres from more traditional discussion-style essays to scenario-based assignments to critical appraisals of research papers to practice portfolios. Some guidance on preparing for these assignments is provided by course teams and/or invited learning development specialists. In addition, all students have access to a range of academic skills workshops and individual consultations available through the centrally-based academic skills and development unit at the university.

We can observe that across the three research sites there is a range of writing expected. Whilst some of this writing is similar to the writing required in professional settings, other types of writing are more of what one might find in university settings, such as the academic essay. In exploring our data using threshold concepts, we suggest the potential for developing transferable competencies and dispositions that might function in the university and beyond. We also offer observations about students' writing development by tailoring our pedagogies to accommodate individual differences within the parameters of writing within and beyond the university.

## Data Collection

The data we are reporting on were gathered across the three universities between 2019 and 2021. Students completed an anonymous pre-placement online questionnaire asking them about their current university-based writing processes and what they anticipated in terms of writing on placement. The questionnaire used was the same across the settings, with only one question "localised" to reflect different professionally oriented genres students

|  | n | Placement experience | Programs | Year of study | Upcoming placement context |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Surrey | 35 | Yes 22 No 13 | Nursing, Midwifery | First | First full-time clinical placement |
| Maynooth | 60 | Yes 59 No 0 Blank 1 | Education | Fourth | Final placement in primary schools |
| Drake | 22 | n/a | Law | First* | First or second placement in law practice setting |

*Table 11.1. Demographics of Students Participating in Pre-Placement Survey.*
*\* One participant at Drake was in their second year of study.*

were likely to encounter on their respective programs. Table 11.1 provides an overview of the student samples in this study.

## Data Analysis

In this section we present selected data analysis of the completed pre-placement questionnaires. As can be seen from figures 11.1 and 11.2, law (Drake) students reported spending time writing in a statistically significantly different distribution to education (Maynooth) and nursing and midwifery (Surrey) students (p = 0.005), and also reported statistically significantly different levels of collaboration (p = 0.001). Education and nursing and midwifery students reported these in a statistically similar fashion.

**AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT WRITING FOR UNIVERISITY**

■ Nursing & Midwifery ■ Education ■ Law
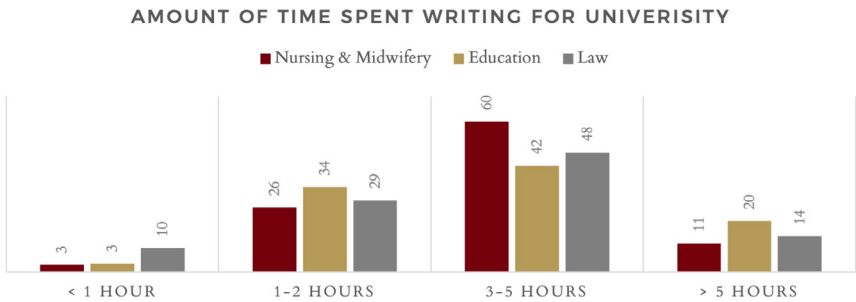


*Figure 11.1. Amount of time spent writing per day by students across the settings (expressed as a percentage of the total in each group)*

**HOW OFTEN STUDENTS COLLABORATED**

■ Nursing & Midwifery ■ Education ■ Law
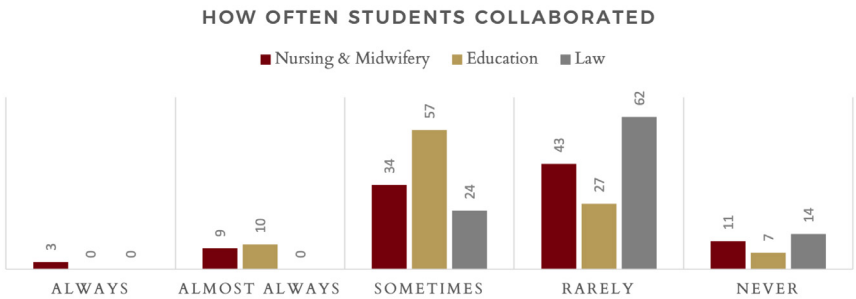


*Figure 11.2. Frequency of collaboration (expressed as a percentage of the total in each group)*

Table 11.2 presents the types of writing in which each cohort was engaged. It shows the overall number of selections for all the writing tasks within a particular category ("All"), as well as the number of all selections in each category that were in the top three writing tasks that students were engaged in ("Top 3").

Students' frequently used strategies (see figure 11.3) varied significantly across multiple categories. Statistically significantly more education (Maynooth) students reported collaborating and procrastinating on their writing compared to students from the other universities ($p < 0.001$ and $p = 0.001$ respectively). Conversely, fewer education (Maynooth) students reported reading aloud and drafting as a strategy during writing ($p = 0.005$ and $p < 0.001$ respectively). Next, fewer law (Drake) students reported frequently using self-imposed word count targets, preparing their writing space, and participating in collaborative writing groups when engaging with a significant task compared to students from other universities ($p < 0.001$, $p = 0.007$, and $p < 0.001$ respectively); instead, they reported creating timelines more frequently than other surveyed students ($p = 0.013$). Fewer nursing and midwifery (Surrey) students reported frequently using models or templates to write ($p < 0.001$). Finally, while there are no immediate patterns present, there is a statistical difference between how frequently students revise and revisit their ideas ($p = 0.002$).

When asked what they believe writing will be like during placement (figure 11.4), statistically significantly more law (Drake) students expected to encounter similar types of writing and to not have to use different approaches to write on placement, and consequently they also believed they were well prepared by the university to undertake this writing compared to education (Maynooth) and nursing and midwifery (Surrey) students ($p < 0.001$, $p = 0.013$, and $p < 0.001$ respectively).

## Findings: Patterns of Development and Anticipation

In this section, we categorize our findings in terms of patterns of development and anticipation. We use the lens of threshold concepts

| Thematic Group | | Education | | Nursing & Midwifery | | Law | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | All | Top 3 | All | Top 3 | All | Top 3 |
| Class/assignment associated writing (essays, presentations, reflective writing, worksheets) | | 496 | 164 | 222 | 109 | 56 | 12 |
| Personal and interpersonal outside class writing (e.g., emails, formal letters, social media, scheduling) | | 90 | 13 | 46 | 8 | 19 | 8 |
| Program/ field specific writing | Thesis/final year project writing (e.g., dissertation, thesis) | 72 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Practical teaching writing (e.g., lesson plans, teaching materials) | 115 | 66 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Practical law writing (e.g., briefs, memos, outlines) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 140 | 44 |
| | Practical medical writing (e.g., patient notes, case studies, scenario writing) | 0 | 0 | 52 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Research–associated writing (e.g., proposals, literature reviews, posters) | | 86 | 1 | 69 | 18 | 8 | 0 |

*Table 11.2. Typical Writing Tasks, Thematically Summarized*

## Frequently Used Strategies by Students
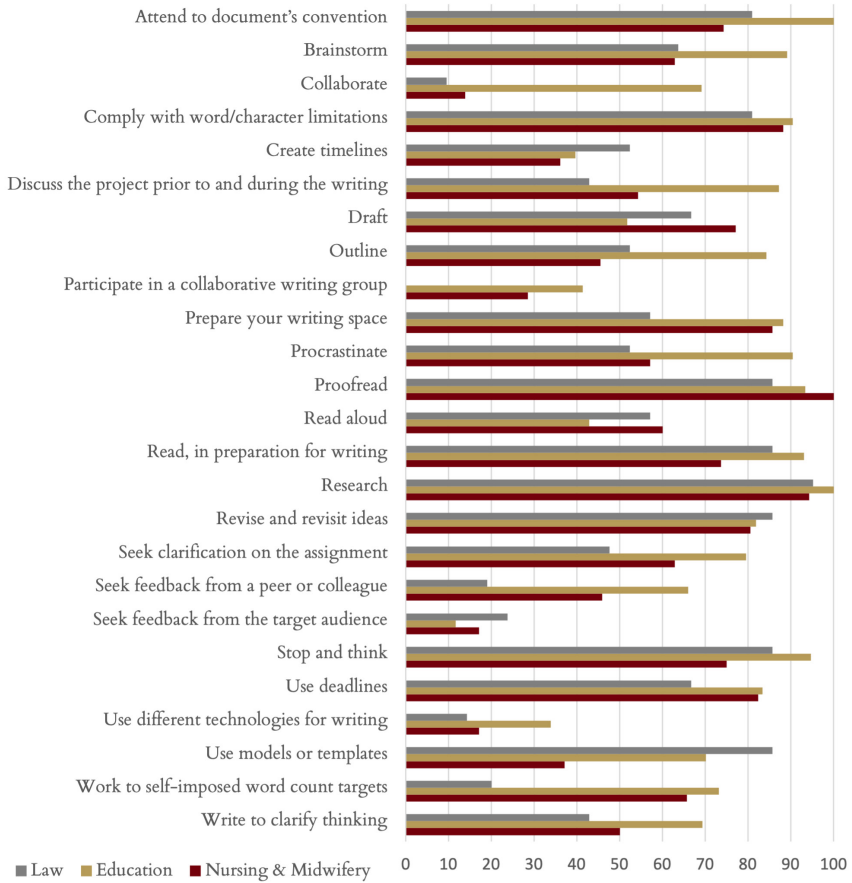


*Figure 11.3. Frequently Used Writing Strategies (percentage of students who reported using said strategy frequently or always)*

to help understand these patterns and their possible implications for future research and teaching. Glynis Cousin, drawing on the work of Meyer and Land (2006), notes that threshold concepts are thought to be "central to the mastery" of the subject (2006, 4). Adler-Kassner and Wardle (2015, 2) define threshold concepts as "concepts critical for continued learning and participation in an area or within a community of practice." We have chosen threshold concepts to guide the exploration of our findings because of their

## % Agreement with Beliefs about Own Writing
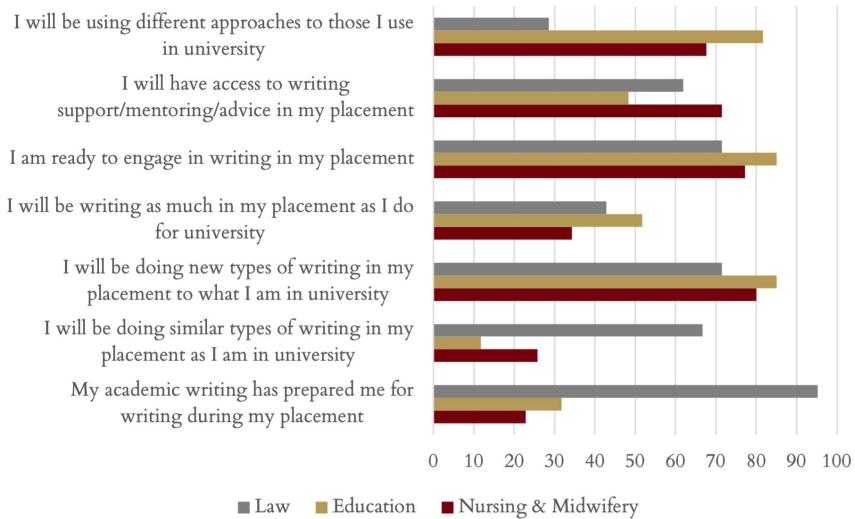


*Figure 11.4. Perceptions about own writing (percentage of students who reported agreeing or strongly agreeing with statements)*

presentation in Adler–Kassner and Wardle's edited collection as a "Naming [of] What We Know." We hope that by bringing the writing community's wisdom about the discipline and teaching of writing studies to our findings, we will be better able to identify, or *know*, possible navigation strategies which our students use in moving from writing in the university to writing beyond the university.

### Patterns of Development in Competence - Practice and Experimentation

In our data, we see a range of writing strategies in university writing and mixed student engagement across the strategies within this range (figure 11.3). The students in our research have an awareness of the processes involved in producing a piece of text and they have opportunities to practice their writing; most of them write daily (figure 11.1). From the data we can see that many students

across the three sites use some strategies frequently, for instance, attending to document conventions, complying with word limits, using deadlines, proofreading, reading and researching, revising and revisiting, stopping and thinking. Other strategies were used by fewer students; examples include collaborating, reading aloud, seeking feedback from a peer or the target audience, using different technologies for writing. And there was variety across the sites. Law (Drake) students used models and templates to a greater extent, education (Maynooth) students collaborate to a greater extent, and nursing and midwifery (Surrey) students draft to a greater extent. Thus, our students across all sites are practicing certain strategies but also experimenting with other strategies albeit less frequently.

Using threshold concepts as a lens through which to explore our data, we suggest that practicing and experimenting could go hand-in-hand in developing competency where the practice is associated with the completion of familiar writing tasks, whilst the experimenting might occur in the writing *processes*. As Andrea Lunsford explains, "When writers can identify how elements of one writing situation are similar to elements of another, their prior knowledge helps them out in analyzing the current rhetorical situation" (2015, 55). Kathleen Yancey (2015) asserts that "practice is the key" in developing as a writer, but she also remarks that it is important to engage "different kinds of practices" as the way for "all human beings to develop into competent writers" (65). For instance, in an education course, creating a worksheet would be a familiar writing task and thus something students would have practiced, but "seeking feedback from the target audience" for that worksheet would be unfamiliar and therefore in the realm of experimenting. In this manner familiarity with the writing task (or genre) through practice can be exploited in order to enhance the potential of the development of writing processes for facilitating transfer.

Certainly, in professionally oriented programs, an argument could be made for focusing on teaching and encouraging practice of the writing genres that will be used in the workplace as opposed to academic texts. Yancey emphasizes, "In the practice of writing,

we develop writing capacities, among them the ability to adjust and adapt to different contexts, purposes, and audiences" (2015, 64). As teachers we are mindful of these factors and may adjust them in order to support the agility of our writers. But this agility might also be supported by encouraging experimentation in terms of strategies and processes, even when engaging in the same types of writing tasks. We suggest that this is a way to facilitate ongoing learning about oneself as a writer, not least how our processes and capacities change with different kinds of practice, time, and effort, albeit within the same genres and for similar audiences. In this manner, instructors shift attention from the writing output to the writing process, and it is crucially the familiarity with the genres through practice that allows for experimentation with processes.

Providing opportunities to practice and experiment simultaneously may be of benefit to students as they move from university writing to writing beyond the university. As Shirley Rose notes, "All writers always have more to learn about writing" (2015, 59) and this learning will continue throughout their writing lives. A way of anchoring the learning for novice professional writers may be to provide them with opportunities to see that the "writing strategies that are effective for them in one context are often inappropriate and ineffective in another context in which they need or want to write" (Rose 2015, 59). Where they have had experience of seeing practice and experimentation as elements which co-exist in writing, they may be more comfortable with the openness that is required in encountering new writing challenges. As teachers, we might want to provide as many opportunities as possible to our students to try out and to recognize where and how they manage practicing and experimenting.

A companion pedagogical approach could be to personalize writing development so that writers have the opportunity to practice and experiment in the areas that are of most value to them. All writers have more to learn, but they do not all have the same things to learn. Neither are they bringing the same "prior knowledge and experience" which informs their writing (Lunsford 2015). Allowing

for choice in writing assignments would provide students with opportunities to engage in experimentation and practice in writing development which are most meaningful and worthwhile to them. A curricular approach and pattern of providing variety and choice allow for an accommodation of the individual nature of the development of writing. As Baird and Dilger point out, although context and community matter, there are individual "influences on transfer" (2017, 688). Accommodating and supporting the unique development of our students as writers within whole cohort pedagogies is an important consideration for teachers.

## Patterns of Anticipation in Disposition - Awareness and Readiness

Julia Bleakney (2020), considering what makes workplace writing meaningful, remarks on tensions which exist and on the way writers may seek "balance" between drawing on what they know about writing and being open "towards the unknown." Helping our students understand, and allowing them to experience, through experimentation and practice, that writing is an ongoing journey towards mastery may be a profound insight which may empower them as they anticipate and negotiate unfamiliar writing situations. It may "enable them to recognize that encountering difficulty in a writing situation is an indication that they are ready to learn something new about writing" (Rose 2015, 60).

In our research we asked students about their beliefs about their writing prior to going on placement (figure 11.4). An interesting finding in terms of anticipation was that, although there were clear differences across the cohorts between the types of writing students practiced and the extent to which they thought academic writing prepared them for writing on placement, the majority of students noted that they were ready to engage in writing on their placement *and* that they anticipated that they would engage in new types of writing. This positive anticipation is noted across the cohorts, together with the clear awareness for two particular cohorts (education [Maynooth] and nursing and midwifery [Surrey]) that they will be using different approaches in professional settings than in

university, and that they will be producing different types of writing on placement than in university. In other words, although our student cohorts differ in terms of the types of writing with which they have engaged (where law students' writing heavily emphasized professional genres and education and nursing and midwifery students to a lesser extent), all students seem to have had positive development in terms of the dispositional qualities of awareness and readiness. These ideas remind us of the work of Alexander, Lunsford, and Whithaus (influenced by Bazerman et al. 2017) who propose "wayfinding" in an attempt "to develop a way of thinking about writing and literacy that would place an emphasis on the complex and recursive movement in and out of different territories, realms, spaces, and spheres of writing ecologies" (2019, 121).

## Implications

As the principles, rules, and values governing different professional communities vary to a great extent, the possible implications of our research for universities, departments, and individual programs will inevitably be determined and shaped by the professional fields and individual contexts of each university program. There are, however, some general recommendations arising from our findings.

We suggest that it is important to ensure ample opportunities within the students' university experience to both practice and experiment, not least because both will be required in professional settings. Within these opportunities there should also be some scope for choice where students can personalize their learning and foster agility by focusing on the areas where they need to develop. This approach reflects the fact that every student has a unique experience of writing. Where possible, we should allow for development of writing as best fits the individual while recognizing that certain parameters will always exist. As Anson (2016) remarks, "We must see every writer, and every context into which the writer moves, as a unique amalgam of situation and human agency" (540). In turn, a scaffolded approach to writing development will support students in both practicing and experimenting. If this approach is sufficiently

flexible, it could allow students to develop at a rate to which they are best suited while being mindful of degree expectations.

Writing is an important skill in many professional workplaces (Moore and Morton 2017) and becoming a writer in a workplace setting will involve personal change as well as a connection with others in a professional community. In our earlier publication, which is also based on our multi-institutional research, we note that collaboration can be a strong feature of professional writing (Fortune et al. 2021). Our findings, however, suggest that overall, students across our cohorts did not seem to engage in a lot of collaborative writing (see figure 11.2). As such, we may wish to encourage more opportunities to practice writing as a collaborative activity. An interdisciplinary approach to both of these ideas could prove beneficial to students, not least because they could find themselves in interdisciplinary teams in their professional settings (this may be especially so for the Surrey nursing and midwifery students). Such an approach may require institutional support in practical terms such as course scheduling, but also in terms of program design and accreditation.

On a related note to collaboration, we might encourage our students to share their writing more openly in the university as a way to develop the transferable skills and dispositions around giving and receiving feedback, which will be essential in virtually all workplace settings, and indeed beyond. In our study, for example, seeking feedback from the target audience was a strategy used less frequently than many others (see figure 11.3); however, feedback literacy will be required in many professional settings. Experimenting and practicing with feedback from a broader range of audiences than faculty could be beneficial for students as they navigate the move from writing in university to writing on placement.

One finding that we have not discussed in our analysis, but which merits mention in terms of possible implications, is the fact that low numbers of students across all cohorts noted using "different technologies for writing." The continued rise of digital in all aspects of higher education and working life appears inevitable. Our

findings suggest that this is a gap in students' strategies, although it may have been addressed to some extent by the necessity for blended teaching and learning strategies required by many higher education institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic. In looking to the future, a concerted effort to include a digital inflection to the curriculum and pedagogies could be considered at program and institutional levels.

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# A FRAMEWORK FOR DESIGNING EFFECTIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS IN PUBLIC HEALTH

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Public health students must develop writing skills that support their ability to advocate for health resources, conduct and disseminate research, develop policy, correspond through media, and influence health behaviors, all with the common goal of promoting population health. The Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) underscores the significance of written communication for public health professionals as part of their accreditation criteria (CEPH 2016). Students of CEPH-accredited public health degree programs across the United States and in Canada are expected to meet the competency "Communicate audience-appropriate public health content, in writing" through didactic learning, experiential work experiences, and a capstone project.

Writing assignments, underutilized in some public health programs, provide a variety of opportunities for student growth (August et al. 2019; Beard 2018). For example, writing assignments that deeply engage students in a public health issue, challenge them to tailor their communication style to the intended readers, and prompt them to decide which information is most relevant to include will help them to sharpen their critical thinking skills and further develop their professional identity. Public health instructors may not have the tools to create such assignments as they are not explicitly trained in how to teach writing.

This chapter provides instructors with a framework for developing their own writing assignments; the recommendations we present can be adapted to a wide range of disciplines, but we present them in the context of public health education. We also offer an example that embodies our framework: The Real–World Writing Project (Anderson and August 2020a). This ongoing project connects students with partners in the community to develop written products used in the "real world" to promote public health. The recommendations and the Real–World Writing Project are further described below.

Our framework includes eight recommendations for developing effective writing assignments (Anderson et al. 2019; Anderson and August 2020b; August and Trostle 2018; August et al. 2019) (figure 12.1). We compiled the first six (August and Trostle 2018) from research by experts in writing studies, including the Consortium for the Study of Writing in College, a joint project of the Council of Writing Program Administrators and the National Survey of Student Engagement, and they are consistent with writing scholarship and best practices (Adler–Kassner 2015; Anderson et al. 2015; Bean 2011; Light 2001; Pace 2004; Soliday 2011; Wiggins 2009). The first six recommendations include the most relevant advice from writing studies experts for public health instructors. We developed two additional recommendations (figure 12.1) to offer advice that is specific to public health instruction that was not addressed in the writing studies literature.

## The Eight Recommendations

The eight recommendations for public health writing assignments are listed in figure 12.1, and we elaborate upon them below.

### 1. Present a Real-World Disciplinary Problem to be Addressed through Critical Thinking

Characterize the problem that the writing should address, for example, the challenges that elderly people with low incomes face in achieving diabetes control. Writing about topics specific to the public health discipline helps students to build their professional

## 8 Recommendations for Writing Assignments

1. Present a real-world disciplinary problem to be addressed through critical thinking.

2. Describe the purpose of writing.

3. Identify the intended readers.

4. Require a document format used in the workplace.

5. Allow for a process to support sriting through specific tasks.

6. Explain the assignment's requirements and criteria for evaluation.

7. Require a visual element.

8. Require a thoughtful title for the document.

*Figure 12.1. The eight recommendations for public health writing assignments*

knowledge and identity (Bean 2011; Light 2001; Pace 2004), and it sharpens their critical thinking skills (August and Trostle 2018; August et al. 2019).

### 2. Describe the Purpose of the Writing

Clearly explain the purpose of the writing. For example, the purpose may be to convince teenagers to become more physically active or to explain why informed consent is essential to health research; this information gives the student a goal and both student and instructor a benchmark for understanding whether the student's writing was successful.

### 3. Identify the Intended Readers

Define a target readership to whom students should write; for example: cardiologists; urban, low-income mothers; or high school basketball players. The intended readers may not actually read the student's work, but identifying a target readership is essential to

help students understand how to craft an appropriate tone, style, language, and use of jargon and to identify which information is important to include, to which values they should appeal, and the complexity of the information. Of course a target readership will often emerge once a student identifies a professional writing format. For example, choosing a target journal for a research paper will define the intended audience.

## 4. Require a Document Format used in the Workplace

Ask students to write in a format used in the public health workplace rather than a generic one; for example, a journal article that adheres to the author guidelines of a specific academic journal rather than a generic "research paper." Writing an article for a disciplinary public health journal, for example, will allow students to better understand how knowledge is created and disseminated in public health. Writing in a discipline-specific format helps students develop a deeper understanding of the activities, values, professional roles, and context of their discipline (AAC&U 2019; August and Trostle 2018; Graves, Hyland, and Samuels 2010; Leider et al. 2018; Light 2001; Quitadamo and Kurtz 2007; Soliday 2011; Wiggins 2009).

## 5. Allow for a Process to Support Writing through Specific Tasks

Include scaffolded activities to appropriately support the writing process. Activities, such as brainstorming, peer evaluation, and/or allowing for multiple drafts will support students in learning about and actively engaging in the writing process (Horstmanshof and Brownie 2013; Parkinson et al. 2007). Scaffolding provides students multiple opportunities to observe strategies for an effective writing process, to shape the writing for the intended reader, and to receive and respond to expert or peer feedback resulting in the creation of a meaningful product versus simply completing a task. Faculty can also include instruction for specific writing assignment recommendations; for example, through a short lecture or in-class activity, instructors can teach students what constitutes an effective title (see recommendation #8).

## 6. Explain the Assignment's Requirements and Criteria for Evaluation

Provide expectations for the assignment and how each component will be graded. For example, an instructor could provide a quantitative rubric including point values for each component, such as three total possible points for a compelling title or five total possible points for a visual element. The rubric should also explain the expectation for receiving full points for each component. If instructors explicitly provide this information, it will set students up for success.

## 7. Require a Visual Element

Require a visual element such as a figure, diagram, map, or infographic. Visual elements are a critical component of public health communication, and many types of public health documents rely on visuals to reinforce main points, present data in a compelling and efficient manner, and entice readers to review the rest of the document (Anderson et al. 2019). Requiring students to incorporate at least one visual element into their document will help them learn how to create persuasive non–textual arguments. These visuals should be tailored to the audience; for example, photographs and infographics may be most suitable for patients or other non–scientific audiences. On the other hand, detailed charts or graphs may work best for a scientific readership. The visual element should be tailored to the medium through which it will be distributed. For example, a visual designed for an electronic medium (e.g., a webpage) will need to be designed differently than one that will be used in a paper handout. An electronic document may offer such affordances as color presentation whereas a paper document may not be printed in color, and that should be considered when designing the visual element.

## 8. Require a Thoughtful Title for the Document

Require a compelling title. Titles are crucial to the success of grant proposals, journal articles, and other documents because after reviewing the title, readers decide whether to read the rest of the document. Students should be aware of the importance of

titles and practice writing effective titles. If the document is a fact sheet or a similar document, a "headline" can replace a title. For this recommendation to be most effective, the instructor should provide criteria for a good title that matches the document type. For example, fact sheet headlines should be simple and informative, but a journal article title will need more detail. The instructor should also consider awarding points for a good title. If an instructor indicates that three points will be given for a descriptive title, then the student will understand the significance of a title for the writing assignment.

Writing assignments that follow these eight recommendations will allow public health students the opportunity to develop an identity as a public health professional who can effectively communicate public health content; deepen their disciplinary ways of thinking; develop an appreciation of how knowledge is created in the field of public health; and understand how disciplinary conventions shape discourse and public health knowledge (August et al. 2019). Asking students to write in and engage with a variety of formats provides an avenue for students to connect their documents to activities, values, and various public health roles and intended audiences.

## The Real-World Writing Project

The Real-World Writing Project (Anderson and August 2020a) requires public health students to create a written product, for example, a fact sheet, short report, or series of social media posts, for an external public health practice partner. Partners include nonprofit agencies, government programs, local farmers, hospitals, and others. The overall purpose of the project is specific to the needs of the external partner, and students identify those needs through an initial meeting with their practice partner contact.

The Real-World Writing Project embodies our eight recommendations for public health writing assignments. The project presents each student with a public health problem to address and a writing purpose. For example, a student who develops a fact sheet for a local health department promoting breastfeeding practices to low-income women of childbearing age is addressing low

breastfeeding rates within a vulnerable population. Each problem is presented by the student's external partner with all the complexities that exist in the real world.

Students write to their intended readers and need to decide how much background information to provide, which content is most relevant to their audience, the writing style, the writing format, and the amount of jargon that will work best for this readership. For the fact sheet on breastfeeding, for example, students would need to gather additional information about their target audience, such as ethnic identity and language preference, to understand how to appropriately tailor the document.

The requirement to include a visual element, like a map, photograph, or figure, gives rise to important conversations about a range of topics. For instance, students need to understand what Internet images are appropriate to use for their fact sheet from a copyright standpoint. Photographs raise important questions about privacy and issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Other issues include the need to make visual elements colorblind friendly.

Titles and headlines will vary according to the document type, message, and target audience. Fact sheets require a simple head-line that conveys the main message of the document; for example, the argument that breastfeeding has protective effects for both the breastfeeding parent and child.

Finally, because the product will be presented to and used by an external partner, the stakes are higher than a traditional academic writing assignment and students tend to take these assignments very seriously.

The Real-World Writing Project affords the opportunity for students to improve their product through multiple revisions. The project is broken down into multiple assignments (see, for example, table 12.1) that include an initial draft, a structured peer review wherein they receive feedback from two classmates, a second draft on which they receive instructor feedback, a penultimate draft on which they receive feedback from their external partner, and the final product. This process allows students to develop their product

iteratively, helps them learn to receive and incorporate feedback from a variety of readers, and keeps the project on track throughout the semester. Clear instructions are provided for each assignment as well as a rubric (examples available from the authors upon request).

| Sample assignment goals that instructors can provide to students to support writing | |
| --- | --- |
| First draft | Initiate a draft based on the above summary of the writing product |
| Engage in peer review | Give and receive feedback from peers |
| Submit second draft | Revise the first draft in response to peer feedback |
| | Describe the revisions through a reflective cover letter |
| | Receive feedback from instructor on the second draft |
| Submit third draft | Revise the second draft in response to instructor feedback |
| | Receive feedback from practice site partner on the third draft |
| Submit final draft | Revise the third draft in response to the practice site partner feedback |

Table 12.1.
The authors will provide complete assignments upon request.

The Real-World Writing Project has been implemented in both undergraduate and graduate level public health courses (Anderson and August 2020a; August, Ansorge, and Anderson, forthcoming). To evaluate the Real-World Writing Project, surveys were distributed to participating students as well as their community partners. Public health students reported applying various skills such

as interpreting scientific data, using design software, and reviewing literature to create relevant public health written products like social media content, blogs, or fact sheets. Community partners reported that public health students conduct themselves professionally and that the Real-World Writing Project has resulted in quality written products for their organizations.

### Document Formats Help Intended Readers Navigate Public Health Problems

Writing instruction emphasized that document formats play a role in how people navigate a common public health problem or scenario that they may be experiencing. The "real-world" public health problem addressed in the example patient brochure (see figure 12.2) is the high prevalence of human papillomavirus (HPV) among women and the patients' need for information after a diagnosis is made. Instructors made connections between the situation and the purpose, the document format, the audience, and other elements.

### Purpose and Audience

The purpose of the writing example is clear—to educate women about HPV, including the consequences of having the virus, as well as to advocate for behavior changes such as practicing safe sex and getting the HPV vaccine. The document format helps achieve the purpose of the writing. Brochures are portable and patients can take them home after talking with their doctor as they continue to process their diagnosis and consider behavior changes that they might make in response to their health condition.

In class, we discussed the importance of identifying the intended audience and emphasized that the product will be more effective with a specific audience because it can be tailored to meet their values, cultural preferences, language, and informational needs. Instructors helped students navigate conversations with practice site partners who may have initially indicated that the document was for a "mass audience." Students were encouraged to open up a discussion with their practice site partners in an effort to narrow the

## What is HPV?

HPV stands for human papillomavirus. It's the **most common** sexually transmitted infection (STI)—almost every sexually active person without the vaccine has had it in their lifetime. HPV is **usually harmless** and goes away by itself, but some types can lead to cancer or genital warts.

HPV can be carried without symptoms and is usually cleared from the body without any health problems.

HPV is easily spread from sexual **skin-to-skin contact** with someone who has it. HPV is spread when your vulva, vagina, cervix, penis, or anus touches someone else's genitals, mouth, or throat—usually during sex.

**Low-risk types** of HPV cause most cases of genital warts. They are considered to be low-risk since they don't lead to cancer or other serious health problems.

**High-risk types** of HPV can sometimes lead to cancer. The most common type of cancer linked to HPV is cervical cancer.

## Additional Resources

For more information or to reference the material in this pamphlet, visit these sources:

**The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG)**
*Human Papillomavirus (HPV): Resource Overview*
https://www.acog.org/Womens-Health/Human-Papillomavirus-HPV

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**
*Human Papillomavirus (HPV)*
https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/index.html

**Planned Parenthood**
*Human Papillomavirus (HPV)*
https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/stds-hiv-safer-sex/hpv

MICHIGAN WOMEN'S HEALTH
A Division of Michigan Healthcare Professionals
28555 Orchard Lake Rd #120
Farmington Hills, MI 48334
(248) 489-1070
http://michiganwomensobgyn.com

## HPV
### UNDERSTANDING YOUR DIAGNOSIS

## Options after your diagnosis

**9** out of **10** HPV infections go away by themselves within 2 years

### Can HPV be treated?

Unfortunately, there is **no treatment for HPV** itself. High-risk types HPV can still clear from the body naturally. About 10% of high risk types of HPV lead to HPV infections or abnormal cell changes, which can result in cancer. Here are some **treatments/tests** to discuss with your provider if you have abnormal Pap results:

- **Colposcopy**: a procedure to look more closely at the cervix to see if there are precancerous cells
- **Laser conization**: a treatment using laser to remove/excise precancerous cells from the area
- **LEEP** or Loop Electrosurgical Excision Procedure: a treatment to remove precancerous cells from the cervix with an electrical current

**Regularly get screened for cervical cancer** if you are **21-65 years old**. Ask your provider how often you should get screened.

## Protecting yourself and others against future HPV

Practice **safe sex** by using a condom/dental dam every time you have vaginal, anal, or oral sex. While condoms and dental dams are not as effective against HPV as they are other STIs, they can still **lower your chances** of getting HPV.

Get the HPV vaccine. No longer just for adolescents, the FDA has approved Gardasil 9 for adults **27-45 years old**. You are unlikely to be positive for all strains of HPV, the vaccine can still protect you from other strains. If your partner gets vaccinated, they will also be protected from the most common strains of HPV.

The HPV vaccine can **reduce the risk** of HPV-related cancers by up to

# 99%

when **fully protected** with recommended doses.

## Talking to your partner about your HPV diagnosis

HPV can occur at any point in **committed, long term relationships** and is not indicative of infidelity. HPV can be introduced in previous relationships and carried without symptoms for years by either partner.

Your partner **likely already has HPV** if you have been together for a while. HPV usually clears from the body without symptoms, so it is unlikely they will have health problems.

Your partner can check for unusual growths, lumps, or sores, and should continue to have **regular check-ups**, including STI testing.

Long term partners are unlikely to be exposed to new strains of HPV. Short term, unvaccinated partners may benefit from **receiving the HPV vaccine**, as it is unlikely they are positive for all strains.

*Figure 12.2. Example of a student project. Public health practice site: Michigan Women's Health. Public health problem being addressed: How to respond to a human papillomavirus (HPV) diagnosis. Target audience: Women who have been diagnosed with HPV. Writing format: Patient brochure*

intended audience. The audience for the example patient brochure is very specific: women who have just been diagnosed with HPV.

## Supporting the Writing Process and Clear Expectations

Student writing was supported through assignments that required them to gather information about their product; develop an initial draft; receive and reflect on feedback from their peers, the instructor, and their practice; and synthesize feedback into revisions. The assignments for each class that offered the Real-World Writing Project were slightly different, but those for the example HPV brochure are listed in table 12.1. The first assignment required students to meet with their practice site partners and gather information about the purpose of the writing, the document format and length, the intended audience, as well as any other relevant information. After this meeting, but before they started writing, students completed a reflective writing assignment describing these elements. They also turned in a model of writing similar to their project (from their practice site partner or something they found on their own).

Additional writing process assignments included giving and receiving peer feedback. At the beginning of the review session, students introduced their product (purpose, intended audience, etc.) and flagged specific things they wanted the reviewer to focus on. They also shared the writing model with their peer reviewer. Each student completed a structured peer review form that required them to comment on different aspects of the product and to specify two specific things that worked well, and two concrete suggestions for improving the product. Students were asked to avoid focusing on things like typos and spelling errors to maintain focus on the bigger picture.

The student who created the example brochure—as well as the rest of the students—were asked to revise based on their peer review and submit the revision with a reflective cover letter. This cover letter highlighted changes made in the new draft and elaborated on their experience with the peer review process. Using a similar process of peer review, a revision with reflective cover letter was

completed after instructor review and after review from their practice site partner (in this case, Dr. Eisenberg at Michigan Women's Health). Assignment expectations were provided for each assignment including a rubric with points attached to each item.

### Visual Elements

Students learned about developing effective visual elements in class, including making persuasive arguments, making the visual compelling and relatable to the audience, adjusting the technical level of information to the audience, as well as tailoring it to the medium (e.g., electronic versus paper documents). There are multiple visual elements incorporated into the HPV brochure. For example, the visual on the front of the brochure shows a female silhouette, and the females using the brochure may identify with this visual. The tone of the visual is solemn and reflective. The brochure is designed to be inviting and easy to read, and detailed charts or graphs are not included. Finally, because the brochure will be printed on paper, no hot links were included. The color scheme was chosen to enable printing in color or black and white (either would look good).

### Titles and Headlines

Finally, the instructor led a discussion about effective titles in class, and the example brochure's title clearly specifies the purpose of the document and identifies the intended audience.

Collectively, these assignments help students prepare for writing beyond the university. Students made connections between public health problems and activities and specific document formats that connect to them. Students learned to gather information and clarify expectations with their practice partners initially, and then seek feedback on the penultimate version of the document. Public health is a collaborative field, and the process that students engaged in to develop their final product helped them incorporate multiple viewpoints and feedback.

## Conclusions

Assigned writing in public health and other health disciplines offers students an opportunity for meaningful learning experiences to help them thrive beyond graduation. The eight recommendations provide instructors with a framework to help guide them in developing engaging and effective writing assignments. Such assignments incorporated into a public health program will result in student competence to deliver public health messaging through various modes of written communication to diverse audiences. As instructors become more skilled in developing effective writing assignments, this is reassuring to administrators who may have to monitor and evaluate student competencies to maintain accreditation and prove their program is successful in developing a strong public health workforce.

Further, if public health graduates are equipped with written communication skills to support public health, these outcomes will reflect positively on their program and can foster sustained support and relationships across the degree-granting institution, alumni, and community organizations. The potential to effectively support students' ability to write can have measurable impacts for multiple stakeholders.

## Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER 13

# "AND SOMETIMES WE DEBATE"

## How Networking Transforms What Professional Writers Know

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> As knowledge workers increasingly rely on networked communication and work in distributed groups, professional communication scholars must provide a better understanding of the patterns of use that are evident within networked exchanges. (Jones 2014, p. 88)

Job seekers across technology-intensive fields are bombarded with advice to network. As with the term "rhetoric," many students enter writing courses with preconceptions about what "networking" means and how it might or might not relate to their writing practices. Students may consider networking to mean random requests on LinkedIn from people they will never meet, or handshakes and small talk with people who they assume have power or access to what they need to "get ahead." Networking can suggest impractical and impersonal cold calling for the possibility of future personal benefit or aggrandizing self-promotion. It can seem time-consuming, solipsistic, and perhaps a little painful. Beyond this, students may be skeptical about social media use given how often it is used to spread misinformation. In all these ways, networking is used to forward a personal agenda—to leverage technologies or relationships to get what one wants. However, we argue for a conceptualization of

networking that extends beyond a focus on self or simply becoming present in forums (e.g., LinkedIn, meet-and-greets) where others are gathering. Instead, we understand networking as a practice of connecting that is central to learning, and that participates in constructing professional knowledge, beliefs, and values.

Our view of networking is drawn from collaborative interviews we conducted with technical communication entrepreneurs across the world with different educational and workplace backgrounds. These interviews demonstrated how careers develop through written practices of interconnection across multiple genres and platforms (see Lauren and Pigg 2016a; Lauren and Pigg 2016b). The quotation that we've highlighted to begin this chapter comes from how one participant positioned the importance of dialogue with other professionals. The individual explained, "I know people all over the world because of all these conferences . . . and we all follow each other, and we all exchange comments, barbs, information, useful tips, etc. And sometimes we debate." The participant explains how connecting in between professional gatherings provides a platform for staying connected with geographically dispersed peers. These connections were not necessarily motivated by "getting ahead" or advancing personal interests. Instead, our participants used social media to connect—to help them build and constitute their field's knowledge base through interactions online. For this participant and others, informal, everyday "debates" about best practices, ethics, new technologies, critical infrastructures, new media, and many other issues shaped the choices they made in their writing and in their careers. In other words, networking was a professional communication practice that transformed what they, as writers, knew.

Networking, as we understand it, is thus an important learning model for professional writers who intend to adapt their practices to changing social, cultural, and technological circumstances. In this chapter, we outline an approach to teaching networking as a transformative, interconnective, professional writing practice. Our approach offers both conceptual guidelines and concrete practical

advice for an approach to teaching and learning networking that illustrates how:

- Networking can be framed as essential to building writers' self-agency as learners in and beyond the university;
- Networking can be understood as a transformative writing practice when making connections for learning, advocating, and peer–peer mentoring; and,
- Networking can increase the potential for developing understandings informed by and across difference (e.g., interacting with those with different training, lived experiences, and/or knowledge areas).

## Existing Pedagogies of Networking

Over the past fifteen years, technical and professional communication (TPC) scholarship has embraced the importance of social networking to TPC and has developed pedagogies to shape how networking is taught. Not surprisingly, these pedagogies take different approaches and emphasize different purposes. In most cases, though, networking is associated with using social media platforms, and pedagogies emphasize both functional software literacies and their critical use.

The pedagogical rationale for teaching networking emphasizes the kinds of writing and communication platforms that students are using outside the classroom or that they will encounter in future workplaces. In this vein, Bernadette Longo argues that integrating social media into TPC pedagogy can lead to "authentic learning that can prepare students for the workplaces practitioners now encounter. Using social media in classrooms, teachers can recreate professional settings" (2014, 30–31). Jennifer Bay's (2010) conception of networked pedagogies similarly "attempt[s] to leverage the erasure of boundaries between work and life through new media technologies." As Stephanie Vie puts it: "Social media play a crucial role in TPC professionals' lives, but TPC teachers will not learn how to incorporate social media most effectively without actually experiencing and communicating within these technologies" (Vie 2017, 346). Helpfully, pedagogies that emphasize teaching

networking can highlight how these platforms ground social learn-ing approaches, enabling students to use social media's connective potential for research, inquiry, and exchange. For example, many professionals share articles and resources, post opinions on emerging issues, and interact with colleagues. Accessing this information is a useful way for professionals to stay aware of emerging conversations in their field.

Pedagogical scholarship has also focused on how social media platforms require students' critical evaluation. Networking schol-arship grounded in a critical media approach argues for teaching rhetorical and critical literacies so that students can produce ethical, strategic communication. Amy Kimme Hea (2011), for instance, explained that people must develop a "critical media sensibility" (i.e., not taking information on social media at face value) for using social media as it is essential to community-based project work. Additionally, Melody Bowdon's (2014) experience teaching Twitter in the context of TCP focused on forwarding critical and ethical approaches.

We build on this existing scholarship but also shape our pedagogy by the ways that our research participants discussed the importance of networking in building and maintaining their careers (Lauren and Pigg 2016a; Lauren and Pigg 2016b). Our participants maintained connections in order to stay informed about developing field trends and eventually to influence those trends through circulating their own informal commentary and more formal written contributions (i.e., articles, blog posts). Also, our participants cultivated a diverse network so that their understandings and perspectives could be informed by people with different backgrounds and viewpoints. One participant in particular explained that technology fields often neglect the voices of women and racial minorities and that main-taining connections that cross race and gender boundaries is essential to ethical professional practice.

For this reason, in addition to emphasizing critical literacies, we emphasize networking as a critical praxis that crosses different technological platforms and interactive spaces. To define what we

mean by networking as critical praxis, we draw on scholars like Natasha Jones who positioned technical communicators as advocates who are "aware of the ways that the texts and technologies that they create and critique reinforce certain ideologies and question how communication shaped by certain ideologies affects individuals" (2016, 345). In terms of networking, this is important in several ways. First, networking as a critical praxis pays attention to how different technologies or interactive forums invite or deny access to particular individuals or groups. In addition, it is attentive to the diversity of collectives we engage in conversation. For example, if we are only including others from our racial and gender demographics or who are likely to agree with us, we may be developing ideas that have limited application, or worse, that may cause harm. We understand teaching networking as a critical praxis to be one concrete way to help TCP grow more inclusive. As a result, we introduce networking as a multi-sited phenomenon and a location for building more diversity into the social influences on field knowledge and practice, as well as on scholarship arguing for more writing instruction in networking and for advocacy (e.g., Bay 2010; Jones 2014; Jones 2016).

## Networking as Transforming through Connecting

To make the notion of networking as critical praxis concrete, we emphasize four guidelines and associated practices that enhance how we teach networking in writing courses. These guidelines were developed out of our previous discussions of networking and technical communication entrepreneurs previously referenced above.

- Guideline 1: Teach networking as a form of knowledge development;
- Guideline 2: Teach networking as a form of participation in professional communities;
- Guideline 3: Teach networking as a way to establish and develop a professional identity; and,
- Guideline 4: Teach networking as a form of advocacy.

We understand these guidelines as unique because of their emphasis on networking as a practice focused on collectives rather than individuals. Participants in our research cited personal benefit as a byproduct of networking rather than a reason to do it. That is, networking can benefit a professional field when the focus is on sharing useful knowledge and experiences, debating best practices, and inventing new ideas. The result of these exchanges may be that individuals build credibility within their communities, but that credibility develops as a result of the utility of one's contributions. Furthermore, through the idea of advocacy, these guidelines stress the importance of adopting a critical stance toward personal associations. We ask students to consider their own positionalities, and to critically interrogate their own assumptions and individual networks. For instance, they might ask questions like who is and is not part of my network? Where are there opportunities to build knowledge as a form of advocacy and/or amplification of underrepresented voices and ideas? How is knowledge represented and valued by my network? And finally, in what ways can writers participate ethically in networking activities when working to develop an understanding of difference?

In addition to broadening students' conceptions of networking, we want to broaden students' understanding of the writing and rhetorical practices that accomplish networking. While students may be familiar with amassing "friends" or "colleagues" online, they may be less familiar with the infrastructural writing required to maintain relationships and support collective knowledge work. Connecting with someone isn't enough. To shift students toward a focus on networking to build and transform collective knowledge, we associate networking with teaching the following writing practices that we learned TCP entrepreneurs regularly practiced as part of their work:

- Researching and listening (networking to learn, maintaining awareness of others, paying attention to others' contributions, reading professional practices)

- Writing mundane genres (keeping in touch, managing online identities, emails and professional correspondence)
- Building exponential relationships (circulating good ideas, bridging subgroups, brainstorming with others)
- Participating in collective knowledge-building (volunteering services, building local relationships, attending professional meetings).

Students should understand that listening is foundational to engaging, and that engagement with others is important to building exponential relationships.

## Examples of Teaching Networking as a Professional Communication Practice

We next offer two examples of teaching networking as a critical praxis in writing classes. For each class, we developed one assignment that positioned networking as a form of knowledge development, as well as a step in a research process. So far, we have developed our pedagogy of networking in ways that responded to the context of two courses we were assigned to teach. Our ideas about teaching networking have also evolved as a result of these teaching experiences, and so our examples emphasize and encourage students to achieve some of our guidelines and practices better than others. We look forward to revising these assignments, as well as to developing additional courses and units that focus on networking for transformative learning.

### Ben's Account of Networking in Professional Writing Theory and Research

The first assignment was designed for a graduate seminar in professional writing theory and research. The assignment is available in the online resource "Networking Project Assignment." For this project, the goal was to try and build on each of the guidelines that our research demonstrated (i.e., to research, to write, to build relationships, and to participate in knowledge-building activities). Students were offered the opportunity to choose a platform of their interest, including popular platforms like LinkedIn, Twitter,

Facebook, and so on. To get started, I wrote an assignment sheet that asked students to make a few considerations about how they presented their public profile as they developed a professional identity. The assignment sheet, for example, required that they choose a headshot and write a short biography of their work and interests.

Preparing students required a fair amount of discussion and reflection on performing an academic identity in different social spaces. For example, some students had always used their Twitter handle as a professional space, while others had used it for more personal interactions. Discussing the affordances of transforming the strategy of their Twitter account was an important part of our discussions. As well, learning to evaluate the tone and style of their Tweets proved quite important to their work. I suggested that students begin to closely follow other academics online, especially those whose work they admired, to see how they interacted with the Twitter sphere. This approach was meant to help them understand that a variety of approaches and personas are possible.

One week, we discussed readings on TPC that helped students theorize organizations and practices of communicating via networks. Our discussion questions for that day centered on distributed work, information communication technologies, organizational theory and culture, and entrepreneurship. The presentation focused on helping students understand the nature of temporary organization, such as that depicted by Potts (2014) and Spinuzzi (2015), and how many folks seem to operate at the center of their own kind of organization (e.g., Rainie and Wellman 2012). In this way, I advised students to understand organizations and organizing as a kind of networked experience with ties to others that can be understood as latent, ongoing, and intermittent.

From this discussion, students created a networking plan for a social or professional issue of importance to them. They were invited to work in small teams or on their own. Students had the opportunity to think through how they could advocate for this issue using social media. As well, they had to consider the limitations of their

selected platform to raise awareness or motivate action about this particular issue. Through these discussions, I designed the course to move students from the idea that networking communication is only about making deals or finding future job prospects, to the idea that it is an activity steeped in advocacy as a means for making change in the world.

In addition to in-class writing activities, we also discussed professional conversations happening on Twitter. During class, I worked to bring in ideas and materials discovered on social media. Modeling for students how social media can be a contact zone between practitioners and academics seemed important, and it also emphasized the importance of learning to listen online. We talked at length about the importance of listening both critically and empathetically to others' updates. Networking to engage can appear a passive activity, even though reading to learn is truly active engagement.

Throughout the semester, students were asked to provide monthly progress reports on their use of Twitter. These progress reports were reflective moments, meant to make time for them to think about how it felt to use Twitter to network. It was during these reflections where discussions related to anxiety about Twitter as a public platform surfaced. However, the assignment did not require students to Tweet a certain amount or to Tweet at all. Rather, the assignment asked them to engage in some way and use Twitter to network (i.e., to learn).

When I teach networking in the future, one thing I'll make sure to do is ask students to do an informational interview with a professional who uses a social media site for knowledge building. Doing so would help students approach networking as learning from individuals that do it effectively. Also, I would ask students to think about who is a part of their various networks and who is not. That is, I'd encourage students to think about the networks they were participating in and building around themselves. This sort of critical awareness of networking environments is key to networking towards growth.

### Stacey's Account of Networking in an Internship Course

I incorporated a networking pedagogy into an internship class for graduate students. The course taught theoretical foundations of professional and workplace writing while students participated in an internship experience. The course thus prepared students to transfer writing and rhetorical skills into workplace contexts by building their metacognitive foundations for understanding differences between professional and academic discourse communities. Students and administrators also understood another less articulated but just as important role for the course: they hoped that it will help students establish relationships with individuals and organizations that will eventually aid in their job searches.

I recently taught this course twice in two different contexts, and my class approach is indebted to Susan Katz, Huiling Ding, and Douglas Walls, who shared their conceptual frameworks, syllabi, and approaches. I first taught the course in the spring 2019 and taught it a second time in spring 2021. While the spring 2019 course was face to face, the spring 2021 semester course was conducted online asynchronously due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and students were all conducting internships remotely as well. Students faced isolation, as they were unable to "drop in" on internship mentors or academic advisors. In addition, some students had never met their professors or graduate colleagues face to face.

Our first step was to build a foundation for understanding networking as interpersonal, knowledge-generating work. In the spring 2021 class, we used a video recording and sharing program, Flipgrid, for writing and sharing media to set the stage for under-standing writing as a social enterprise and for building collegial relationships. While Flipgrid is designed so that students can record quick, off-the-cuff responses, students noted that they often had to work to record a video contribution to class conversation that would both appear casual and be useful to our collective. One student even shared her funny video outtakes. Students also responded to their peers with follow-up comments or videos. As is the case in many classes, this foundation in reading and conversation established the

importance of mundane genres, social contributions, and listening to individual learning and building collective knowledge.

Another step in building students' approach to networking was to have students take the *CliftonStrengths Assessment*. This aspect of the course extended Susan Katz's curriculum development by emphasizing that students have a range of strengths related to interpersonal work. In my commentary on their personal strength assessment reports, I discussed how students' strengths related to their ability to participate in networking, which differed for each student. For example, some students had strengths in mediating or bridging differences, which would allow them to effectively introduce concepts or people that might not otherwise become connected. Other students had strengths in instilling enthusiasm in others, or in archiving knowledge. My commentary offered students support and ideas for understanding how their individual strengths could be positioned as central to their own personal ways of orienting to professional networking.

Next, students proposed and completed ePortfolio projects to anchor their professional identities online. Workshops for portfolio-building encouraged students to build their portfolios not in isolation but instead as responsive to community conversations and conventions. This meant listening and positioning portfolios as tools for connection rather than as static artifacts for self-promotion. When students created and shared ePortfolios for the class, we treated the community of scholars within the class as a relevant and diverse community from which to learn. The assignment is available in the online resource "Professional E-Portfolio Assignment."

When I teach the course again, I plan to do some things differently. For example, while I consciously considered students' work on Flipgrid to be a form of networking, I did not overtly identify that terminology. It seems likely that students might not have made an explicit connection between the networking that we did (and often do) in classrooms to connect and build social knowledge and the networking that they can do in their professional lives for the same purpose. Likewise, I want to work harder to help students see

networking as advocacy by interrogating the diversity and limitations of their current networks and/or their field's networks. This aspect of our pedagogy has developed as we have discussed our teaching experiences, and it will be central to my next pedagogical iteration.

## Conclusion

Our model brings together two goals that writing pedagogies often have for students that are difficult to address in concrete ways: 1) how to encourage students to develop dispositions and practices that support continued learning once they leave our classrooms and 2) how to stress the importance of relationships—and diverse relationships—to professional life and learning. These two skills are crucial to students' success in writing beyond the university, when they are likely to have less structured tasks, feedback mechanisms, and instructions for effective practices.

The model we have described addresses some novel challenges faced by writing instructors and program administrators, and we conclude by offering key takeaways for those who work with student writers:

- Educators should position networking less as a phenomenon unique to social networking sites and more as a practice central to making and sharing knowledge.
- Relational writing is important to foster lifelong learning practices and should be taught explicitly.
- Educators should take the time to address students' potential negative responses to networking to help students work toward new dispositions.

Related to these implications, we understand our approach to have the following implications for administrators:

- Administrators can foster practice in networking across discrete formal and informal learning experiences. For example, networking learning and practice can happen in courses, as well as in the creation of professional portfolios.

- Investing in particular networking platforms is perhaps less important than teaching students how to access and navigate multiple forums and platforms for networking.

Learning how to learn socially and share knowledge with others while critically analyzing information not only disrupts hierarchical concepts of expertise but also asks students to carefully consider what it means to be in conversation with peers—learning, teaching, advocating. In this way, when we teach networking as part of our jobs as professional writers, we also clarify professional writers' role in advocating for more intentional conversations across workplaces, career paths, and intellectual domains. And we do so as learners—not as practitioners, students, faculty, managers, or entrepreneurs. In other words, we inhabit the actions and grace of what it means to learn in public, and to help others to do the same. This, we believe, is the kind of goal we should be ultimately setting for students' writing beyond the university.

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# THE FUTURE OF WRITING BEYOND THE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

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This collection offers insight into learning to write as a lifelong and lifewide process, examines the writing experiences of lifelong writers, and explores strategies for preparing students for their evolving writing lives. The research included here informs the recommendations and charges we've outlined below. Yet, just as learning to write is a dynamic, ever-evolving process, writing tools and contexts also continue to change—partly contributing to the lifelong and lifewide learning process! Therefore we initiate this conclusion with invitations for continued study.

## Ideas for Future Writing Beyond the University Research

The research teams represented in this collection are generating new knowledge that enhances what universities and scholars know about writing beyond the university; their studies also give us insight into new directions for future research. Much of the research is centered on the stories and experiences of individual writers, yet more research could explicitly examine writers' experiences based on their identity, socioeconomic status, or cultural context. In other words, how is writing beyond the university different for different populations of writers?

We write during the COVID-19 global pandemic, which required many industries to shift their work online. Even as we

look ahead to a move from COVID-19 as pandemic to COVID-19 as endemic, some businesses and organizations are opting to preserve remote work strategies. How will remote work continue to change the nature of writing beyond the university? And how can higher education continue to adapt to prepare learners for this fluid writing context?

In addition, the research teams' findings are leading to new recommendations about revising curricula in order to attend to the complex and varied ways that students write while in college and that alumni write after they graduate. Future studies could examine how curricula revised based on what we've learned about writing beyond the university prepare alumni to be more effective writers in their professional and personal lives. Across universities, writing across the curriculum programs might spearhead this research—examining the impact of curricular changes across disciplines and programs, and collaborating with other educational developers, such as experts in the scholarship on teaching and learning, in order to fully understand the impact of curricular change.

## Recommendations for Practice

Drawing on everything our authors are learning about writing beyond the university, we offer the following recommendations:

### Take Stock of Students' and Alumni's Writing

If we want students to be successful beyond the university—and we think that's one of the major goals of higher education—faculty, staff, and university administrators should know about **the kinds of writing their alumni are doing (for professional and personal purposes)**, their struggles and successes, and **how** their university educations are helping or hindering their writing experiences after they graduate.

Prior to their students' graduation, faculty, staff, and university administrators **should also know about the kinds of writing that current students are doing both in and outside of the classroom (again, for professional and personal purposes)**, including the writing instruction or guidance they receive, the experiences they

have, the genres they're writing, and the various writing processes in which they're engaging.

And we need to understand **how these multiple writing experiences intersect**—how these contexts impact each other, especially to understand if, when, and how transfer across these contexts occur.

### Integrate Writing Instruction and Practice Throughout the Curriculum

Once universities have a better understanding of these writing experiences, faculty, staff, and university administrators should consider how to provide students with the kinds of writing experiences they're likely to encounter after graduation. These experiences **must be built into the curriculum** in order to teach students about writing transfer from school to workplace or beyond the university. Some of the ways instructors can do this are to:

- Teach students how to understand the rhetorical situation for new writing contexts
- Give students practice writing for a variety of audiences and in a variety of genres
- Teach students how to adapt to and interpret workplace writing cultures, including how to ask for feedback and how to collaborate and network
- Use active-learning opportunities like client projects, internships, work-integrated learning, and service learning.

Ideally, students should get exposure to writing beyond the university discussions and experiences at multiple points during their college experience and in many ways.

Students need **multiple opportunities** to practice writing in and for real-world contexts and to make connections among the different kinds of writing they're doing, including professional and self-sponsored writing. **Classes across the curriculum** should teach for writing transfer both in and beyond the university. And all **faculty and staff** need to attend, at some point and to some extent,

to writing beyond the university—as teaching writing is *everyone's* job.

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### Reflect

- *Where* in their curriculum or in cocurricular contexts are your students currently learning about the kinds of writing they might do after graduation or the kinds of skills they need to write and work collaboratively with others?

- If you're not sure whether this instruction and practice is already happening, where might the curriculum be adjusted to attend to writing beyond the university? Early on, in first-year classes? In core or general education classes? In major and minor curriculum? In senior seminars? In student employment, writing centers, internships, and co-ops?

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Finally, our recommendations lead us to a few charges that we ask you to take up at your own institutions.

First, find out what faculty, staff, and administrators at your institutions know about the writing your alumni do after they graduate, in personal, professional, and civic contexts. If you know the types of writing alumni are doing, is this being shared with faculty, so they can make decisions about attending to writing beyond the university in their curriculum? If you don't know the types of writing alumni are doing, how can you find out? Who can you work with to gather this information? And seek partnerships with local employers, or employers who tend to hire your graduates, creating opportunities to learn more from each other about how students learn to write and about the expectations for workplace writing.

Second, find out what your institutional colleagues and administrators think about writing beyond the university. Would they agree that your curriculum should even address it? Would they agree that universities have an obligation to build in such writing instruction and practices? Most of our university colleagues would agree that educators should be preparing our students for the work and

writing they'll do after graduation, but some may be concerned that this focus might signal a shift away from a broad-based liberal arts education and towards more narrowly focused vocational training. We take the approach that a college education—from any type of institution, such as two-year colleges, small liberal arts institutions, and large land-grant institutions—is about preparing alumni who are engaged participants in their personal, professional, and civic lives. We know that a primary way people engage in these spheres is through writing. In other words, writing beyond the university isn't (only) about career training; attending to writing beyond the university helps writers stay engaged in all aspects of their lives by fostering lifelong and lifewide learning. So getting faculty and staff on board with teaching the kinds of writing that prepares students to contribute meaningfully beyond graduation is of the utmost importance.

Finally, consider where in your curriculum—and in the cocurriculum—writing beyond the university can be addressed or attended to. How can your university ensure that students have repeated and scaffolded instruction and practice with multiple types of writing they'll encounter beyond the university so that they learn adaptable strategies for examining each new context and purpose for writing and for responding effectively?

As you engage with these recommendations—or as you pursue future research on writing beyond the university—we invite you to join a conversation with our chapter authors. While traditional publications (e.g., journal articles, books) offer one venue for this evolving work, we hope you also will consider going more broadly public via outlets like higher education blogs and news sites. More specifically, we invite you to submit posts for consideration to our publisher's edited blog, which includes a category devoted to writing transfer in and beyond the university (https://www.Center ForEngagedLearning.org/category/writing/). We look forward to reading about your contributions to research on writing beyond the university and to learning how this research has (re)informed writing instruction and opportunities on your campus.

# GLOSSARY

**Cocurricular:** activities pursued in addition to—and complementing—academic coursework and requirements

**Disciplinary writing:** a systematic way of using language, evidence, and structure that is accepted by or conventional to an academic or professional field or discipline

**Discourse community:** a group of people that has a shared interest in a topic and uses communication to achieve common goals

**Genre:** a specific category or type of writing with socially constructed conventions related to structure, language, use of evidence, etc. that distinguish it from other types of writing

**Mapping:** creating visual representations (of experiences, of data, etc.)

**Multimodal:** texts that combine multiple modalities (e.g., text, images, sound, video, etc.), rather than relying solely on alphabetic text

**Networking:** intentionally and critically engaging in an exchange of information and ideas among others with a common profession or interest for the purposes of learning or improving

**Recursivities:** the relationships between and across the contexts in which writers compose (see chapter 4)

**Rhetoric:** the available means of persuasion, or the art and science of using the strategies and tools available to a writer to achieve their goals for writing for a specific audience in a specific context; may also refer to the discipline of rhetoric, when used in the names of departments or programs of study

**Rhetorical situation:** the context in which writing is produced, inclusive of the people involved (e.g., authors and readers), the exigence for the text, and the positive and negative constraints that inform how the authors compose the text

**Rhetorical training:** "the coordinated curricular and cocurricular experiences that immerse students in writing for different audiences, purposes, and contexts—from writing-intensive courses, to internships, to campus jobs in administrative offices, to consulting in the writing center" (chapter 3)

**Self-agency:** a person's control and autonomy over their decisions and actions; for writing, this includes a person's control and autonomy over how they write, use writing, or apply what they have learned about writing to future writing tasks

**Self-sponsored writing (SSW):** writing that people pursue for their own purposes

**Self-sponsored writing to learn (SSWTL):** writing that people pursue to advance their learning, outside of work or school contexts (see chapter 2)

**Spheres of writing:** the non-time-bound and non-text-bound circumstances shaping writing, including audiences, purposes, and available writing tools

**Theory of writing:** a framework that integrates writers' understanding of writing concepts and prior writing experiences to inform their production of writing (see Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014)

**Threshold concept:** when students learn something new and that was previously inaccessible, they cross a threshold that opens up a new way of thinking. Thus, threshold concepts are tricky or complex concepts that, once understood, give students access to new thinking about a topic or a theory.

**Wayfinding:** a conceptual mapping of participants' awareness of ongoing writing development through a range of intentional and accidental encounters, processes, and experiences (chapter 1; Alexander, Lunsford, and Whithaus 2020)

**Work-integrated learning (WIL):** a pedagogical practice in which students engage in authentic and meaningful work-related tasks in partnership with a university mentor and a workplace supervisor, with opportunities to reflect on their experiences and to integrate their academic and workplace experiences

**Writing across professions (WAP):** a curricular model intended to facilitate students' transfer of writing knowledge and practices in the context of work-integrated learning (see chapter 5)

**Writing context:** the circumstances shaping the production of a text, including the audience, purpose, and available writing tools for the text

**Writing for "authentic" or "real" audiences:** writing that has a specific audience beyond the teacher, such as a client or community partner

**Writing to learn (WTL):** writing to process or make meaning of new-to-the-writer concepts

**Writing transfer / transfer of writing knowledge and practice:** transforming or repurposing prior writing knowledge and practice for new contexts to adequately meet the expectations of new audiences and fulfill new purposes for writing

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