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Philosophy and Actions for Authentic, Meaningful, and Lifelong Learning

Anthony Klever
aklever@bgsu.edu

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PHILOSOPHY AND ACTIONS FOR AUTHENTIC, MEANINGFUL, AND LIFELONG
LEARNING

Anthony Klever

aklever@bgsu.edu

A Final Master's Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the English with a Specialization in English
Teaching

24 July 2019

Dr. Heather Jordan, First Reader

Ms. Kimberly Spallinger, Second Reader

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Anthony Klever

Dr. Jordan

ENG 6910

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Analytical Narrative: A Look Back and a Look Ahead

“There is nothing like looking, if you want to find something... You certainly usually find something, if you look, but it is not always quite the something you were after” (Tolkien 55). Just like Tolkien’s adventurers in *The Hobbit*, I started this Master’s journey by looking. I long wanted to offer more rigorous classes for my students, and I knew that meant building a new program at my school. I was excited when the opportunity aligned to take courses at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) and start the College Credit Plus (CCP) program – an Ohio program that allows high school students to take college courses – at my school. I was looking for something for my students, then I found myself a student again. I became a student to learn more about writing (for my students), then I discovered a world of technical writing and rediscovered my passion for learning about literature. I am lucky I looked into this Master’s degree. I found what I was looking for and so much more.

When I first began my coursework at BGSU, I was not in pursuit of a Master’s degree. I had just recently completed a Master’s in Education, but I needed additional credits to qualify as a CCP instructor. Because of this, I wanted to focus my courses on writing and teaching, which I was able to do. After the required eighteen credit hours for CCP, I was not sure if I should continue my coursework; however, I was very close to a degree, and I enjoyed the learning in the classes I had already taken. So, I applied to the Master’s in English Teaching Program, was accepted – then, I immediately deferred for a year when I found out my daughter was on the way

(life is very funny sometimes). After my time off, I took several classes that I would not have normally pursued. Most of my initial coursework was in teaching, composition, and technical writing because these are areas I regularly teach. But, by chance, I found myself taking film and literature classes in the latter half of my degree. This is not what I normally would have chosen, but I ended up really enjoying them. I rediscovered learning about literature and developed the confidence to teach literature courses as well. Although they were not part of my original goals, these courses were a welcome surprise.

Accordingly, my portfolio is largely made up of work that I pursued in my initial goals for teaching and writing, but I did include one critical piece on literature. This compilation reflects the major focus of teaching and writing with a touch of the unanticipated venture into literature courses. However, one idea that does unify all of my work is a student-centered drive at the heart of each piece. Whether it is research, a teaching philosophy, or literature, each piece is designed with the interest of students and better learning at heart. In some pieces this is a change to practices and laws, in others it is how we approach writing or reading in the classroom. In any case, each piece seeks a way to make the learning experience more meaningful, effective, and lasting for students. I am thankful for all of my classmates and teachers along this journey. Most importantly, I am eager to use all of my work to help my students find an enjoyable experience in the English classroom and develop a lifelong love of learning.

Substantial Research Project

Incomplete Instructions: Building the Future of Technical Writing in Ohio Education

As a teacher at a local Career Center, technical writing has become very close to me. I eagerly dove into my technical writing courses, and luckily, I was given the opportunity to pursue extensive research into the technical writing field. I wanted to make something that

would not just satisfy the learning in the course but could later be used as a practical impetus for change. I decided to tackle the issue of underdeveloped technical writing studies at the K-12 level in Ohio. This essay examines the current status of technical writing and how we can enhance Ohio's community, economy, and to make the students' learning experience better. Moreover, this should result in Ohio becoming cutting edge in technical writing education and the careers our students eventually assume.

Initially, I had hoped for the audience of my research to be a bit narrower so that it primarily targeted teachers, administrators, and lawmakers. However, some of my revisions were to add some resources that make the research more relevant to parents, students and the community at large. The primary audience remains the same, but this expansion to auxiliary audience members is necessary to include the voting public in decisions that will likely require taxes, politicians that focus on these policies, and issues that may end up on local and state ballots. Overall, though, all audience members are still framed within the state of Ohio.

Fortunately, Dr. Heba left me several substantial leads to clarify and expand some sections of the essay. I bolstered the introduction with more relevant connections for a wider audience, and throughout the essay, I added some more sources to enhance the connections to real life resources audience members can follow up with for training and implementation of technical writing. Both of these upgrades are solid changes to the project. I hope to reach more people with this message, and I hope there are plenty of avenues for practical application. Overall, I want this project to develop plenty of support and become more than a read – I want the ideas to become a reality.

Unfortunately, clarity is something that I worry can be lost when I am so close to such a deeply researched project – I want this writing to feel accessible. Also, heavy research can come

off as quite monotonous and overwhelming. I wanted to make sure this writing has enough compelling and inspirational emotion to be motivational. The research is great, but I want people sparked into action with these ideas. Accordingly, that leads me to the resources. I want practical “next steps” available to audience members. Although some ideas may be generalized, I hoped to have substantial specific resources that can help develop technical writing material and serve as motivation for schools, communities, and the state to further invest in developing technical writing. Overall, I feel this selection in my portfolio is an excellent representation of my research and analysis skills, and it is a testament to my desire for practical change to help students, their future careers, and their communities with improved learning.

English Teaching Project

Reflective Narrative: My Journey as a Student and My Map for Teaching

I intend this piece to capture a philosophy of teaching explained through a journey of my own experiences as a student and the pedagogical knowledge I have been exposed to throughout my coursework. Ideally, this piece is guidance for me, as an educator, and possibly a good explanation of my practices to others – perhaps my students/parents/guardians or peers/employers. Sometimes, it is difficult to understand why a teacher selects a certain lesson or what the goals are for learning. This piece should illuminate the reasoning behind my teaching practices and my high hopes for students in my classes.

I actually chose to make the majority of revision based on combining two of my previous projects. The first was a narrative reflection of my experiences and their effect on my teaching practices. The second was a formal addressal of my teaching philosophy. I believe both works had some great moments for reflection and future thinking, but my main struggle was aligning them together. Ideally, the two works offer a larger representation of my experiences and goals,

but I want them to flow smoothly as one piece now. I really admire this fusion of works because the first piece is from early in my Master's studies and the second is from near the end. By splicing them together, I feel I can capture the great spectrum of ideas and the ways in which they matured throughout my Master's experience. Ultimately, this selection is an explanation of my teaching practices and philosophy by explanation of my own experiences and my current hopes for students.

Composition Philosophy

Meaningful Revision: Revise for a Day, Teach Revision for a Lifetime

I intended this piece mostly for high school and college writing instructors. My hope was to engage high level composition teachers in understanding the styles and effect of feedback. My goal was to present several feedback options and the ways in which feedback can become meaningful, i.e., not just cast aside, rather, assimilated for a lifetime of future writing. Ultimately, if we can provide feedback in a useful way, then students will hopefully become better writers.

I already had substantial research concerning the effect of different feedback styles and strategies for teachers. So, my main revisions focused on adding commentary and resources that students could engage for extra support or clarification on instructor feedback. My hope was to add several resources that teachers could give to students to help support the ongoing learning that happens after feedback is received. Additionally, this is a research heavy piece and I wanted to make sure it has enough engaging moments to overcome too much of the boring feeling that too much data can have. Perhaps most importantly, "Student Motivated Support" was a new section that I wanted to add for a dimension of practicality. I have always liked when my projects can lead to the next steps of actual implementation. This piece is a very particular

extension of my teaching philosophy and practices. It now serves as a nice roadmap for me and, hopefully, for others as well.

Critical Essay

The Illusions of Illiteracy: Can We Learn to Read All Literature?

This piece came from one of the classes I had not anticipated taking. When I returned to my Master's studies, I was very focused on teaching and composition, which I knew would serve my students and me. However, I am thankful that I happened to be in a literature teaching course because I discovered that I may actually enjoy teaching college-level literature. It was something I had no idea I was looking for, but now I feel prepared for. This piece is actually influenced by my experiences in another film and literature class as well. Altogether, I tried to imagine how literature can be more meaningful to my students, especially those who do not have a solid connection to the classical definitions of literature. So, I sought out ways to explain how other media can resonate and impact students in the same ways that classic literature is lauded for.

Although I believe society abroad could really be a great general audience for this piece, it probably has a stronger effect on teachers, students, book critics, librarians, etc. that are invested in considering literature and its effects on society. My goal with this piece it to break the mold of literature. I am sure many of us have experienced in literature (or perhaps another artform) the perspective that rigid qualifications need to be set to "count" as art. This piece argues that we are actually disadvantaging ourselves if we are too exclusive, and furthermore, that an enlightened inclusivity could be to our great benefit as individuals and society.

I made a lot of clarifications and adjustments throughout to my thesis ideas, the clarity of my criteria, and the overall purpose of the essay. I think, initially, this essay attempted to tackle

something too complex and ethereal. I hope to have a more stable approach with a simpler argument and easily graspable support ideas. To do this, I tried shortening some phrasing and by carefully selecting words/phrases that precisely connected to my main idea. Ultimately, this piece is something that illuminates my literature teaching in my traditional high school classes. I hope to bring all of these different media to my students in hopes they find something that resonates with them. Hopefully, this critical essay can also help others reevaluate how we perceive literature and encourage them to adopt an open stance on teaching and studying literature.

Conclusion

As I mention in the works included in this portfolio, I am often guided by the teacher adage “Show them where to look, but not what to see.” I was very fortunate to have creative freedom on my projects and the guidance of my peers and instructors to find my own personal approach to each of these topics. I hope these works serve as a catalyst for philosophical discussion and provide direction/resources for those who want to pursue the next practical steps. When I started my Master’s work, I was looking for a way to teach another class – I found that and much more. Now, I am happy and proud to have looked back on all of this work. I am excited to look ahead and imagine all of the times this work will be useful to my students and me. And hopefully, this portfolio will help teachers and students find somewhere to look as well.

Works Cited

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Anthony Klever

Dr. Heba

ENG 6460

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Incomplete Instructions:

Building the Future of Technical Writing in Ohio Education

Plato once said, “The direction in which education starts a man will determine his future life” (“Forbes Quotes on Education”). Often, this has been translated into modern education as preparation to make students “college and career ready” (“Ohio's Learning Standards for English Language Arts” 2). And so, as educators, administrators, politicians, and parents/guardians, we must ask ourselves, “What is that direction we set for the rest of students’ lives?” Will the education we provide truly set them up to be college and career ready? According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics,

Employment of technical writers is projected to grow 11 percent from 2016 to 2026, faster than the average for all occupations. Employment growth will be driven by the continuing expansion of scientific and technical products. An increase in Web-based product support should also increase demand for technical writers. Job opportunities, especially for applicants with technical skills, are expected to be good (“Technical Writers: Summary”).

Consequently, we should recognize that students will need to be technical writers or interact with technical writing and technical writers in the future. With this knowledge of the future, we can help our students find a successful life path by preparing them with the proper skills to successfully navigate in the world of technical writing. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics also

defines technical writers as those who “...prepare instruction manuals, how-to guides, journal articles, and other supporting documents to communicate complex and technical information more easily. They also develop, gather, and disseminate technical information through an organization’s communications channels” (“Technical Writers: Summary”). Although this is a succinct definition, there are many aspects to technical writing. Gerson provides us a list several common examples of technical writing that many of us encounter daily, even though we may not identify as *technical writers*: “memos and e-mail letters, reports, instructions, brochures and newsletters... web pages, fliers, PowerPoint presentations [and] graphics” (1). We are obviously immersed in technical writing, and items are continuously added to the list as our society develops.

Even though the Ohio English Language Arts (ELA) standards do include references to technical reading and writing, most of those directives are optional or supplemental (“Ohio’s Learning Standards for English Language Arts” 62). Furthermore, many standards – such as “Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience” (11) – might allow or allude to technical writing, but nothing is directly, formally required. This atmosphere of optional and supplemental material has created a “second class citizen” effect or perhaps totally lost sight of truly addressing technical writing. Sadly, this means that technical reading and writing can fall by the wayside, which leaves our students disadvantaged for their future endeavors.

Additionally, PBS reports “As traditional blue-collar industries decline across the country, the casualties of automation and offshoring, they are increasingly being replaced by skilled service jobs such as those in health care, information technology and finance, according to research by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce” (“With...”).

This concept further indicates that skilled jobs, like the ones listed, will need a refined skillset; reading and writing technical documents will be essential to separate these jobs from something that could be fully automated by machine replacements. Furthermore, Peter Greene reports in his *Forbes* article that,

Now it is finally occurring to some folks that A) college is not necessarily the best choice for all students and B) the world needs people who do what Mike Rowe always called the jobs ‘that make civilized life possible for the rest of us.’ Done well, new studies show, it can boost both academics and wages for students.... And so Career and Technical Education (CTE) is coming back into its own.

We should recognize that altogether, we are moving towards more technical jobs, or at least technical job aspects. It would be woefully irresponsible to ignore this trend and to underprepare our students for this future.

However, the fact that technical writing is addressed in the Ohio Department of Education Standards means that the door is very much open to take this glimmer of an opportunity and turn it into a beacon for better learning. There is attention and structure in place that could be upgraded to take technical writing from an axillary feature to a fully integrated and directly approached topic in our learning standards. Current Ohio English/Language Arts curricula can and should include specific attention to technical writing because this addition will support already established education standards; and, it will better prepare students for the authentic application of technical writing skills in their future education and career. As educators, lawmakers, and communities, we need to work together to increase the resources, presence, and application of technical writing in K-12 education.

Building on Established Foundations

As aforementioned, we should begin the process of empowering technical writing by building on the foundations of current Ohio Standards. There is no cause to reinvent the wheel here. For nearly every standard, there is an open way to interpret technical writing into the directive given. And, all the learning in these standards can directly improve technical writing. Take, for instance, the core principle of one writing standard, “Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content (“Ohio's...” 42). This skill set can easily be interpreted into a technical writing assignment. However, it is not explicitly stated to do so, which may be an innocuous feature if explicit direction was not presented elsewhere in the standards. For example, the language in the Ohio standards reads:

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. Apply grade 8 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Analyze how a modern work of fiction alludes to themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, and religious literary texts, such as (but not limited to) the Bible and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, including describing how the material is rendered new”). (Ohio’s... 40)

In this particular example, the Ohio Standards set a precedent that they value work done with “literature”, “the Bible”, and “*The Epic of Gilgamesh*”. Again, this may seem like an innocuous suggestion for educators, but when we compare these two moments side by side, we see that specific directives for producing content can be given for “traditional” ELA items, but technical writing is obviously absent when it could just as easily be included in the same way. An easy solution could be to mirror the literary directives with similar technical writing ideas. For

instance, include the phrase “technical writing” and a specific item or two such as “lab report” and “industry work order.”

Moreover, the “second class citizen” effect is painfully apparent in phrasing that devalues the necessity for technical writing features. For example, this standard, “Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia to aid comprehension, if needed” (“Ohio’s...” 42).

At first, this seems like a glowing standard to address technical writing save for the final phrase “if needed”. Such a phrase very powerfully switches the standard from a requirement to a suggestion. This not only devalues the importance of the skills therein, but it also allows these skills to be skipped and to still remain in compliance with teaching all *required* standards.

Unfortunately, this is the only truly direct standard that addresses technical writing specifically... and it can be skipped in instruction. Even more unfortunately, the phrase “if needed” is only ever mentioned in the aforementioned standard. Although this may just be an oddity, it also powerfully suggests that *everything else* is mandatory except for technical writing. Fortunately, the solution here is yet again simple. We could strike the phrase “if needed”, and that would change this standard to a required task.

Ultimately, we can save a good deal of our Ohio Standards’ foundation, and with a few small upgrades, we can fully address and empower technical writing. Fortunately, this will also leave the other standards intact. Consequently, learners will still receive valuable training in reading, writing, and speaking in relation to the humanities and traditional academic composition style. However, they will also have the advantage of understanding and producing technical writing. Changes will require a push by educators, districts, and politicians to revise the

standards. The main hurdle is projecting the need and desire to change the standards to address technical writing. Revising standards is a relatively frequent occurrence, so attending revision conferences should not be difficult. Standards are the fundamental elements to our instruction and learning. Securing a place for technical writing will help us better prepare our students for their future interacting with technical writing.

Building Technical Writing into Existing ELA Courses

Integrating technical writing into the traditional ELA classroom may seem easy from the standards perspective, but, as with everything new, there will be challenges and resistance/apprehension to changes. Baake and Shelton conducted such a classroom experience and documented their progress in “Writing the Trenches: What Students of Technical Writing and Literature Can Learn Together.” The article analyzes the many strengths and weaknesses to teaching students creative writing, literature, and technical writing in the same course. Needless to say, perspectives collided. Sometimes, this created a disagreement on terms and function; other times, it allowed students to see connections and similarities between these disciplines. What we can take away from Baake and Shelton is that students are not already equipped to delineate and mitigate these different genres. Although, it also tells us that we can accomplish teaching all of these genres in the same course. Frustrations aside, including technical writing into the established ELA curriculum is something both our teachers and students need more experience with. And, when practiced to a refined experience, we can hope it yields more of the positive connections and illuminates with fewer of the frustrations.

Additionally, Leah Zuidema argues in “Technical Writing: An Overview” that we should not use technical writing as a replacement, rather, we should use it to support the course goals in place. She even offers several targeted Michigan standards that can easily support technical

writing features or products (216-217). Ohio should consider creating a document like Zuidema's; although our state standards are slightly different, there are considerable similarities. For instance, Zuidema suggests on page 215 that we could address technical writing through Resumes, PowerPoints, Memos, Emails, Newsletters, etc. These projects can easily fit into the few aforementioned Ohio standards discussed – and many other standards as well. The good news is that many ELA classrooms do some of these projects already, so integration may simply be adopting a direct approach to acknowledging technical writing aspects. For instance, a PowerPoint could be just text, full blocks of sentences, just some clip art, and no real flair for headings, bullets, and sections. Sadly, we have all seen or maybe even been part of dreary presentations like this. But, how can we expect students to produce something better if we never address that this is technical writing with specific features? Students can draw upon their composition logic like paragraphs to understand section divisions. They can pull from their sentence structure knowledge to make clauses that are effective bullet points. But also, they can learn new features like graphics and color schemes to help divide and draw attention across the presentation. If we address what our students may not know or know to recognize, we can hopefully prepare them better to keep recognizing technical writing when they see it in the future.

Fortunately, Gerson has designed an easy to use, free resource for helping teachers. The textbook, *Writing That Works: A Teacher's Guide to Technical Writing*, has many sample lessons and assignments. Following the aforementioned PowerPoint example, we can easily take a presentation tool commonly used to display content into an assignment that displays content *effectively* – with careful attention to presentation as well as source material. Gerson's PowerPoint lesson featured on pages 63-65 (see Appendix) focuses entirely on presentation

elements. These stylistic features can be added to almost any content. The peer revision form could also be adapted to supplement existing assignment rubrics. Altogether, we can synthesize existing ELA lessons and existing technical writing lessons to create attention to presentation, which, consequently, will result in a more powerful delivery of content.

However, one major barrier to the described plan above is that it hinges on a teacher knowing what to encourage students to learn and how to evaluate them. This may not be the case for all educators currently. Warren's article, "Learning to Teach and Do", reveals that technical writing training might not be in everyone's toolkit or even readily available for learning. He shares his frustrations with his initial limited experience, but ultimately, he recommends that teachers should "Become active in one or more of the professional societies, involve yourself in the industrial side of technical communication, and read all the latest material that you can find in the technical communication journals" (Warren 400). We will likely need to encourage teachers to seek professional development to recognize how they can make these technical writing additions to their courses. Zuidema's article is actually based on a professional conference series and has an excellent set of information accessible to a teacher new to technical writing. We should encourage similar opportunities for Ohio teachers. This could be accomplished by school districts and state organizations taking a specific initiative to offer sessions dedicated to technical writing, which could include inviting technical experts to present seminars and run workshops. Altogether, with a few reimagined moments in current standards and additional training, we can incorporate technical writing into our existing Ohio curricula efficiently, consistently, and meaningfully.

However, we need an investment in easy to access resources to make this transition easy for teachers. The Ohio Department of Education website offers a few lesson plans on technical

writing activities, but the emphasis is on *few* (“Lessons and Activities”). We need a resource library that is much more extensive to give teachers a hand hold for upgrading activities. ODE should acquire or develop a library that includes more subject matter and extends the intensity of the resources beyond just the couple pages of advice each activity currently provides. Similarly, the National Education Association is tragically underprepared to facilitate increased Technical writing training and classroom resources. Their website only has fifty cursory results for a search of “technical writing” (“We Found 50 Results for Your Query ‘Technical Writing’”). These upgrades to our leading institutions, and by extension teacher lessons, will upgrade our existing work to easily give students advantages in technical writing that they may have missed partially or entirely before.

Building a Technical Writing Unit

For the more direct and emphasized approach we could design specific units to address technical writing. This could eliminate frustrations in finding ways to “force” technical learning in units that do not lend themselves easily or that educators want to leave intact as purely traditional/humanities ELA experiences. Although, this could limit the connections to other writing by isolating technical writing too much. In any case, each option to address technical writing will clearly offer distinct advantages and disadvantages. Pursuing a unit may just be one of the many options a teacher could select from to adapt their course for more technical writing emphasis.

Fortunately, designing a technical writing unit resembles many of the familiar procedures that educators are comfortable with. Again, a huge advantage is that we do not have to reinvent the wheel, rather, we can put our good curriculum design skills to use – we will simply use technical writing as the topic instead. Bush and Zuidema’s article, “Professional Writing in the

English Classroom: Designing a High School or Middle School Course (or Unit) in Professional Writing”, walks through familiar steps to design a technical unit. In the article, Bush and Zuidema ask educators to “Identify Essential Questions” and “Design Learning Activities and Assessments.” These are comfortable ideas for most educators and should change what may seem like a daunting news task into a familiar process. The only truly new hurdle to teaching technical writing will be the content. Bush and Zuidema offer several examples of questions, activities, and projects. It may be best for educators to start by making a unit of these pre-designed ideas to get a sense of the technical writing unit. Later, educators can expand their questions or tailor their assignments once they have a sense for the unit progression and how their students interact with these elements.

This may be a developing process, that may even take several iterations to start perfecting; however, each iteration will better prepare students for technical writing in their future. Furthermore, one very distinct advantage to the unit is the direct and constant focus on technical writing elements. Students will likely encounter full technical writing assignments in their other courses and careers, and this unit will prepare them to jump fully into the technical writer’s mindset to tackle more consistent and larger writing tasks than just integrating with the established standards. Students capable of these sustained and large-scale tasks will not only be better prepared for technical writing, but also the associated atmosphere often connected to technical writing in real world applications.

Building a Technical Writing Course

The next option will require the most investment, so again, we must ask what we can expect from advantages and disadvantages. Offering an entire course on technical writing could be a very daunting task. Unlike the two previous integrations, there may need to be more

training and infrastructure to establish an entire course. This could depend on the resources available to districts and the confidence/competency of educators to undertake an entire technical writing course. Although, this is merely another available option that may work well for some districts and not others.

Also, this could be something that districts become more comfortable with and see as more valuable as they refine the previous two integration strategies. Ultimately, districts should ask what kind of advantages they expect from a course. Potentially, this course could be a survey of technical writing and prepare students for a variety of futures, or this course could be a highly specialized set of technical skills that directly advantages students for specific college degrees and careers. Potentially, a district may even have use for both kinds of technical courses. Boettger discovered in research related to a survey style course that, “An aspect students seem to respond positively to was the real-world relevance of the assignment descriptions.... This approach possibly aided students in transitioning from academic writing styles to technical ...” (53). So, we may take this to mean the survey course is likely useful to many students. A specialized course will obviously require greater forethought for value, such as, who needs the course and what kind of specific effect can it have for students – this will likely be a judgement that is highly situational. A traditional high school may not have a need for a specialized course, but career technical education and vocational schools could likely make use of specific technical programs for highly specialized writing tailored to their disciplines. Again, districts will have to decide what best prepares their students for the future, but both of these options are certainly better than none.

Selecting a Course Text

The most defining feature of many courses is the material set used to deliver ideas, and in many cases that material set takes the form of a textbook. A great initial investment could be Stephen M. Gerson's *Writing That Works: A Teacher's Guide to Technical Writing*. The text offers several advantages: it is free online (very crucial to districts budgeting their investments tightly), it is very accessible and user friendly (this allows both novice instructors and students an easy tool), and it is a good balance between short and comprehensive (perfect for a survey course). The textbook makes a course nearly ready to deliver, which also means after short familiarization and planning, technical courses can take off relatively soon after a district decides to pursue the idea. There could also be a potential advantage in all of Ohio adopting this book, or a comparable one: the fundamentals of technical writing in Ohio will have a uniform standard. Especially considering Ohio Standards are a large part of the greater conversation, teaching the same textbook offers a dimension of standardization that can satisfy the consistency and accountability state education standards pursue. Unfortunately, it is far too daunting to offer a suggestion for every specialized textbook that may be used in the specialized technical course. However, the principles of price, accessibility, scope, and uniformity can be used for districts pursuing this option. Hopefully, districts offering similar specialized courses can collaborate and align ideas. In either textbook case, the vehicle for course delivery will be a crucial feature for a technical writing course. Although it can mean a considerable investment of time and/or money for a district to research and prepare a course text, it will have stable benefits in producing more effective learning for students to prepare for their futures in technical writing.

Designing a Course Syllabus

The second most defining feature of a course curriculum is a syllabus. Instructors are tasked to decide the most relevant material, order, assessments, and pacing for the course.

Markel's "Introduction to Technical Education" is a great, short resource for initial designs in a technical course's syllabus. His ideas present meaningful reasons for technical writing in the world, break down the particular skillsets in technical writing, and provide a variety of examples that can serve as the inspiration for units and projects. Districts and educators can use Markel and, perhaps simultaneously, a text like Gerson to plan the most effective technical writing course. Again, these resources address the survey style course better than the specialized course, but we can continue to look for fundamental similar concerns. In both cases, a district will need to decide what kind of course delivery it can sustain – will this be a quarter, semester, year course? Will this course replace traditional ELA required credit, will it be an elective, or additional required credit? Many of these features could define the length and rigor of the class, which will be key factors in designing the syllabus. Ideally, a survey course would cover as much as it can, however, even a limited survey course would be better than nothing. Districts could consider designing smaller survey courses then expanding as they refine their delivery – for instance, start with a quarter course, then a semester, then a year. Or, make technical writing an elective then consider applications for replacement or required credit. In any case, a well-designed syllabus will help districts, educators, and students plan the best integration of a technical writing course to fit their constraints and needs. The University of Oregon has a webpage with some course elements available for public viewing, including a syllabus for a technical writing course and a great introductory video. Although these would obviously need adaptations to fit K-12 and specific course needs, they are solid models to facilitate initial designs ("Technical Writing Course - Online"). Allowing for unique approaches will always help each individual set of students prepare for the future in the best way for them.

Special Option: Online Courses

The advent of online learning has truly become more widespread in modern times. Many institutions offer something online, either blended learning, online courses, entire degrees, or entire schools. We should not forget that this online option may be a useful avenue to pursue for a technical writing course. Drew Virtue studied the delivery of technical writing courses online and discovered several variables to consider. Mainly, he discovered the lack of face-to-face interaction is a break from traditional learning that many students and educators struggle with. He found, "...small groups and peer moderators offer a foundational point for instructors to create more meaningful discussions in online courses—discussions that move beyond students posting responses as an independent exercise to an environment that is more conducive for interaction and collaborative learning" (231). Although this may be common for all online courses, it does specifically manifest in technical writing courses online as well. We want to be sure we have the same cautions and concerns when delivering technical writing online. Sadly, technical writing can be characterized as stoic or robotic, but it still requires the collaborative and interactive learning we wish to integrate for all of our courses.

Furthermore, a well-designed online course may offer additional opportunities for students to access a technical writing course. This can be a schedule work around if the school day/year is full (it can be offered outside of school hours or in the summer). Additionally, it can be offered at a distance, so schools could allow students from other places (districts without a technical writing program or from other states and countries). This could also be offered outside of a required curriculum, students could take it for no credit or it can be offered to the community as an adult education class to help (re)train adult workers. There are a lot of potential adaptive and community connection opportunities associated with online learning. This

could prepare all students better for the future – our traditional and nontraditional students can benefit from a technical writing course.

Special Option: Other Disciplines and Highly Specialized Curriculum

As aforementioned, many of the previously provided suggestions are geared towards ELA and survey ideas. However challenging it may be to develop connections to every other discipline or specialized content, we can look at one example to provide a foundation for specializations outside of ELA and technical writing survey courses. Garver et al.'s "Building a High School Math Research Curriculum" is a great example of a mathematics-oriented research course. Mathematics does not always include writing, but this article discusses how students can take the explanations and implications of mathematic formulas and turn them into a written research paper. There are also considerations for the many visuals math can use, which is a very technical feature. Most importantly, on page 36-37, Garver et al. provide a list of prerequisites and expectations for students. A highly specialized course should consider doing this as well. Although this may vary greatly, Garver et al. provide a great set of sections to consider for students: Experience, Excitement, Expertise, Exploration, and Extension. Addressing these areas should help specialized courses find the right focus and, more importantly, find the right students for the course. Although specialized technical writing courses may not be for every student, the option could highly advantage the futures of involved students by heavily refining their skills for a particular discipline or writing style.

Building Ethics into Technical Writing

A common issue in the technical writing field is ethics. Often, ethics can have very powerful implications as technical writing guides important industry and community decision making. Markel's *Technical Communication* warns us that unclear technical writing could result

in expenses and dangers (12). This can cause huge problems in the career world, and to prepare students for the future, we should start ethical training and discussions early. For example, poor technical writing could result in the disastrous “Move fast and break things” mantra (Statt) that also lead to faulty terms of service preceding Facebook’s modern misinformation production (Legum) and data privacy fiascos (Singer) that harmed users and the company. These issues harmed Facebook’s company standing in many ways and greatly inconvenienced its users – possibly, it even put their privacy into risky or unwanted hands. However, a lack of ethical attention is a longstanding issue that may be even more serious than information mismanagement. Driskill discusses the many audiences and influences for a technical writer that may force the writer to assume a “hat”. In some cases, this may be the hat of an engineer or the hat of a manager. In the Space Shuttle Challenger Explosion, Driskill analyzed that a pressure to pursue the profit motive prompted a technical analysis of data wearing a manger hat, when in fact the safety of the astronauts truly required the analysis of someone wearing an engineer hat. Sadly, that morning the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded killing all crew aboard (63-67). Unfortunately, we have dealt with the fallout of technical writing ethics for some time. We owe it to our students and the society they will serve to ingrain a sense of technical writing ethics early and often. Hopefully, this sense of ethics can connect to other standards and disciplines, but it is certain that ethics concerns are extremely important to technical writing, which means we cannot ignore this area. Most unfortunately, only one Reading Literature Ohio Standard mentions the word ethics – and only twice (20). This is obviously a huge omission, whether it is an oversight or seen as less valuable to the other standards, Ohio has failed to adequately address the issue of ethics.

Perhaps the best guiding principle is brought to us by Hall and Nelson, “We may be spending too much time trying to get [students] to write and speak *like* professionals without also imbuing them with sufficient understanding of their responsibilities to behave *as* professionals” (45). Technical writing is certainly professional, and we want to emphasize that feature, but we need to integrate the very real implications that follow technical writing. Unfortunately, students may not have very much experience with writing that has real ramifications. Therefore, we should look at our previously discussed implementation suggestions and consider where ethical training can fit into them.

Building Ethics Philosophy

One way to produce a mass integration of ethics is to weave the philosophical approach into each technical writing assignment. Rubens suggests, “...linguistic, psychological, and philosophical implication of textual ‘openness’ in technical writing. We must also investigate the ways in which a text is ‘read’...” (333). Something like this can be as simple as audience and impact activities at the beginning and end of writing. This can teach students to anticipate how documents will be read and anticipate the results of that reading, which will automatically generate ethics thinking. Students should discuss Rubens’ idea that technical writing should illuminate issues with language, not intentionally obscure situations – Rubens suggests fostering conversation about the charge or neutrality of words like: “waste” versus “garbage” or “stores” versus “bullets, rockets, and bombs” (336). Additionally, Walzer suggests that technical writers must anticipate the suspicions and susceptibility of their readers (156). This could be integrated into early topic research for technical writers: who is the audience and what are they expected to know/want to know/need to know? In any case, we can help students become better prepared for

their future if we can ingrain a philosophy of questioning that has them address ethics, rather than ignore or omit it.

Building an Ethics Unit

Much like our previous discussions on teaching technical writing, teaching technical ethics can vary in intensity. Districts and educators should consider how they can best deliver this training; something is better than nothing, but an entire unit dedicated to ethics will provide a much more comprehensive approach to technical writing issues. Sadly, we do not want students ill equipped to manage an ethical dilemma in the future – those dilemmas are so vast and varied, that diverse training is likely the best we can do to approach as many general situations as we can. An ethics technical writing unit can accomplish this and better prepare students to face their dilemmas.

Fortunately, Markel has an entire article, “A Basic Unit on Ethics for Technical Communicators”, which covers five major items:

A brief definition of ethics and an explanation of some of the standards... obligations to the employer, the public, and the environment... ways to analyze the common dilemma... discussion of the role of the code of conduct... A case study showing the dilemma faced by a technical writer, followed by an explanation of how to use the case in the classroom. (332)

This unit will offer the most concise yet comprehensive approach to ethics. Major ideas are covered and there is ample interaction for students to fully absorb the values and outcomes of ethics in technical writing. Understandably, we could offer an entire course on ethics, but that would likely fall under the constraints of the previously discussed highly specialized courses. This could be great for certain students to explore the ethics of disciplines that interest them;

however, this may not be for everyone.

Ultimately, we need to take technical ethics very seriously. Sadly, some technical ethics instruction studied by Hartung concluded that attention to ethics is “cursory” and the inclusion of a few quotes related to traditional rhetorical ethics is “truncating” (378). We do not want an ethics approach that gives a false sense of completeness. The current Ohio standards mostly omit ethics, but we should not feel that the two brief mentions “check a box” or do justice for properly considering ethics. Zuidema, and Bush encourage us to remember,

...we want our students to be prepared to think: about the most effective means of achieving success and also about critiquing the task and acting ethically within a potentially unethical situation. In doing so, we are helping to create thinkers who are more than just *good* technicians of print and design, but also *good* writers who can recognize and navigate the ethical dimensions of writing. (98)

In fostering good ethics, we empower technical writing and provide a better society for all users and consumers of technical documents.

Building a Future Worthy of Plato’s Vision

Plato realized that what we do with education will define a person forever – multiply that, and it defines communities, organizations, companies, and society forever. We sadly have a disparity between technical writing skills and the need for those skills. Elizabeth Tebeaux, a longtime technical writing educator categorizes the major issue as,

Too many students lack practical writing skills that would make them attractive to U.S. corporations (along with some common sense). As I point out to students, I have never seen job ads for highly-skilled jobs that did not include “excellent communication skills” in the description. For example, J. P. Morgan states that business and technical writing

skills stand at the top of the list of required competencies needed to apply for a permanent position. (9)

We are not just trying to take our students from a good future to a better future, rather, we may be closing a gap between a disastrous future and a better future. We need to answer the call of our real-world careers – a call for competent technical writers. But, let us do it correctly. We have a large task ahead of us to prepare students in technical writing effectively. Plato’s future can be a good one for all of our students.

Action Steps

There are many dimensions and possibly even phases for us to address to fully recalibrate the Ohio approach to technical writing. Firstly, we need to start at the foundations by adjusting our standards. Some of these upgrades are small revisions, but we can always pursue a more direct and empowered approach to teaching technical writing skills. Likely, this movement needs to take place with encouragement from teachers, students, parents, districts, and voters to work with the state and politicians to recalibrate the standards to set a framework for the technical writing work ahead.

Secondly, we need to start incorporating technical writing into classroom learning. This may require training and resources, but we should start wherever we can. Perhaps that is a small integration of little activities and philosophy, but it can become projects, units, and courses. And, we must not forget that an attention to ethics should be an integral part of whatever we choose to produce. We need to find a variety of ways to implement. If we pursue this implementation passionately, we can refine a variety of opportunities that will be uniquely beneficial to individual students and districts. Eventually, we should be able to offer comprehensive and immersive technical writing on a large scale at the high school level.

Finally, we will need continuous support from all Ohioans. We will need a culture of continuous improvement from teachers and districts while voters and politicians will have to carefully safeguard and encourage progress. Likewise, there will need to be a continuous influx of resources. We should consider how these initiatives can be worthwhile to Ohio's future by investing taxes and also setting teams to pursue grants, which we can hope the federal government recognizes as important based on the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' acknowledgement of our growing need for technical writers.

Impact

If we truly want a better Ohio, we should take Plato seriously. Our education will define our future. Do we want an Ohio that is productive, efficient, specialized, and ethical? We could provide this great future for our students and our state. We could also serve as a leader in education and industry. Ohio has a very real chance to grasp the opportunity for a better tomorrow. Perhaps Plato's teacher, Socrates captures this best, "He is not only idle who does nothing, but he is idle who might be better employed" ("Forbes Quotes Thoughts...").

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Appendix

PowerPoint Presentations



PowerPoint is an amazingly valuable and versatile tool

You can do so much with PowerPoint including oral presentations for reports, user manuals, and websites. Teaching students how to create PowerPoint presentations helps them become more familiar with technology (more and more important every day on the job) and helps them practice good technical writing skills: clarity, conciseness, document design, audience, and accuracy.

Plus, every computer has PowerPoint, so it's easy for students to access and use. In fact, PowerPoint presentations are a wonderful option to websites (which can be very difficult due to computer challenges).

More About Fonts...

Weird but interesting fonts, like **GALLERY**, **Old English**, or **YEARBOOK OUTLINE**, are not only hard to read but also will not always be compatible with whatever computer you might use to show your presentation.

Script fonts, like *MalsonCasD*, *Lucida Handwriting*, or *Challenge*, are almost totally unreadable in PowerPoint.

Criteria for PowerPoint

Fonts. Use common fonts, such as Times New Roman, Courier, or Arial. In fact, Arial is considered the best to use, since *sans serif* fonts (those without **feet**) show up best in PowerPoint. Use no more than three font sizes per slide.

To make your slides legible, use at least between 18-point font size and 24-point. Bigger is better, however. Titles can be in font sizes 48-54; main text titles in 32 point; smaller text lines in 24 point.

Color. Never use red or green text (individuals who are color blind can't see these colors). Use color for emphasis only. Strive for optimum contrast between your text and your background colors. In fact, a dark background with light text gives the best contrast in PowerPoint. For example, white and yellow letters look great on a blue background.

Text. As with all good technical writing, the fewer the words, the better. Strive for open **white space**. Limit the text to six or seven lines per slide and six or seven words per line (think "6 X 6"). Two or more short and simple slides of text are better than one slide with many words. Use no more than 40 characters per line (a character is any letter, punctuation mark, and/or space). Use headings for each slide.

Graphics. Use graphics instead of tables. Keep your graphics simple. A graph that is too complicated, containing too much information, will not be easy to read or understand.

Whatever techniques you use to create your PowerPoint presentation, be sure to test it on two or three different projection systems or computers. Rather than be surprised, be prepared.

Simple Graphic

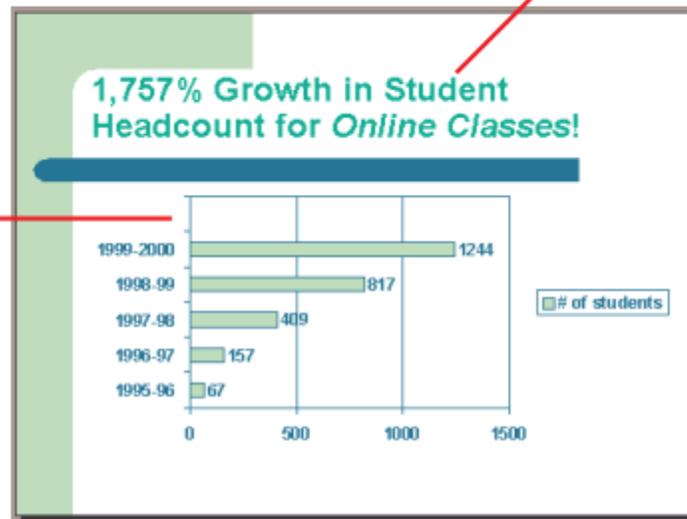
On the next page is the **Peer Evaluation Checklist for POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS.**

5 lines of text
32-point Arial

Criteria for PowerPoint (continued)

Emphasis techniques. To call attention to a word or phrase or idea, use color (sparingly), boldface, all caps, and/or arrows. But don't overdo it. A little goes a long way. Animation can be effective, but do not use every special effect (sounds and fade-ins). Pick one effect and use it consistently.

Sample PowerPoint Slides



Source of Information

Note: All numbers given in this report are from the March 6, 2001 Distance Learning Enrollment Report, prepared by the JCCC Office of Institutional Research.

PEER EVALUATION CHECKLIST

Writer's Name

Reader's Name

Reader's Name

**POWERPOINT
PRESENTATIONS**

	QUESTIONS	YES	NO*
1	Does the presentation include headings for each slide?		
2	Is an appropriate font size used for easy readability?		
3	Is the appropriate font type used for easy readability (Arial, for example, vs. a script font)?		
4	Are no more than 3 different font sizes used?		
5	Has color been used effectively for readability and emphasis, including font color and slide background?		
6	Have special effects been used effectively (vs. being overused)?		
7	Has text been limited on each screen (remembering the 6 x 6 rule)?		
8	Are graphics sized correctly for readability, avoiding ones that are too small and/or too complex?		
9	Have highlighting techniques (arrows, color) been used to emphasize key points?		
10	Have you avoided grammatical errors?		

***If the answer is no, specify what is missing and suggest a solution.**

Reflective Narrative:

My Journey as a Student and My Map for Teaching

Anthony Klever

Bowling Green State University

Author Note

This paper was originally prepared for ENG 6200 taught by Dr. Lee Nickoson with additional material added that was originally prepared from ENG 6090 taught by Dr. Kim Coates.

Abstract

A narrative reflection following influential experiences in writing according to the author, Anthony Klever. The reflection builds on these experiences to form current goals and possible outcomes in the future of writing instruction. Implications are presented in regard to grammar, rhetoric, pedagogy, and inspiration. Finally, the guiding principles of teaching philosophy are defined for the most meaningful and lasting learning experience.

Reflective Narrative:

My Journey as a Student and My Map for Teaching

There is an old teacher adage passed around to inspire the right kind of instruction: A teacher shows students where to look but not what to see. I am not sure I was ever shown where to look, so it is no wonder it has taken me so long to see.... I really feel that I was not ever formally taught writing. I am from a family of teachers (my father was an English instructor): we always read, writing and expression was encouraged, and a family member was always willing to edit a draft. I think this made me go pretty far on talent and circumstance alone. I knew some big words and how to be detailed... so, I never really got much feedback – maybe spelling and grammar feedback here or there, but never instruction on *rhetorical strategies*. My teachers were plenty inspirational and maybe they were busy with peers of mine who were truly struggling, but I want to deliver a different, more complete, experience to my students. Additionally, I want to cultivate a learning experience that will be robust, meaningful, and lasting for all learners.

Personal View of Writing

I view writing as the art *and* science of communicating. I think writing is an art because of its ability to be beautiful, complex, and majestic. On the other hand, it is like a science in that it demands order, clarity, and efficiency. Most recently, I think my feelings on writing are best captured by a combined Expressivist passion and voice (Tate, et al., 2014, p. 113) and the knowledge shaping efficiency of New Rhetoric (Berlin, 1982, p. 774). I believe that writing should be unique and engaging, but the writer should have the power to create communication (wholly or partially) that guarantees the delivery of certain ideas. Boredom and confusion are writing's main enemies. Therefore, writing cannot be drowsy or hazy.

The Teaching of Writing: Challenges and Benefits

The introduction to *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* helped me understand that writing needs to be amorphous and adaptive. Tate *et al.* (2014) suggest that there is no one way to teach writing nor even a universal set of goals (p. 1). I think that embracing this idea will help me to eliminate challenges and create advantages. Berlin (1982) describes The Positivist or Current-Traditional Rhetoric as exceedingly concerned with structure that regard empirical statements and “cookie-cutter” form. I think that forcing all writing into a form like this can cause many problems. It limits expression and seems to have a myopic approach to the power of writing. I think that all aspects of writing need to be taught so students know when to use and not use certain strategies. It may be challenging to teach them the wisdom to use the correct techniques at the right moment, but at least they will have a full toolbox rather than a limited one.

View of Myself as a Writer

As a writer, I view myself as a guide. I imagine that I can do anything from hold my reader’s hand to open new doors for them to explore. The trick is making sure I do whichever of those things I set out to do. My high school creative writing teacher gave me a lasting piece of advice, “Once you give your writing to the audience, it is no longer yours.” I constantly think about what my audience will have once I give them my writing, mostly because I never get to make that writing mine again. I want them to end up with the message I intend and/or be free to think about the things I choose to leave implicit or open.

View of Myself as a Teacher of Writing

I hope to be a deliverer of ideas. Ultimately, it will be up to my students to use and refine their writing, but I can arm them with the best thinking and technique available. I also view

myself as a curator of powerful writing models and catalysts. Farris tells us that meaningful literature can “...show new awareness of how language shapes their thinking and the ways in which metaphor is fundamental to culture and common ground across genres and disciplines” (Tate *et al*, 2014, p. 169). I hope this means that a good model can lead my writing pupils to understand the power of form and the majesty of aesthetic writing. Farris also suggests that we should use texts that ““leave some work for the readers to do”” (Tate *et al*, 2014, p. 167). I believe these readings are the fuel for the ““So what?”” (Tate *et al*, 2014, p. 168). One of the moments I really remember from my Senior Advanced Placement course in high school was my instructor’s suggestion to upgrade our conclusions to contain an *impact*. I never forgot how meaningful that forced me to be in my writing – I hope to impart this sense of purpose to all of my students. If I can guide them to writing an impact, then we are on our way to successful, meaningful writing.

Students’ View of Me as a Teacher

This is a tough one. I want students to view me as a guide and a resource, but simultaneously, I want to push them to independence. I should be reserved for unfamiliar and complicated ideas – they should try to take control of the familiar and routine. I think that there is still a lot of seeking for me to do in this area. Hopefully, there is a way to present a balance of these ideas. Hopefully, students will gain an awareness of that balance and push for independence, which may help them find the power to be strong writers and their own voices. I hope students can choose their own strategies and come to me for guidance less and less.

View of Myself as a Grammarian

I will never forget my college grammar professor, a guy who literally *wrote the book* (our textbook) on grammar. One of the first things he said to us was, “You’ll never be good at

grammar.” He went on to explain that grammar is such a vast and variable concept that we will always need to look up rules and argue over them. I remember being very rigid in my view of grammar up to that point, but his philosophy slowly sank in for me. At this point in my philosophy, I argue the importance of all caps, profanity, sarcasm, and slang as I teach things like *Whale Talk* by Chris Crutcher and the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. I have come to notice that all parts of grammar, from the perfect and efficient, to the inappropriate, bent, and broken, can all serve a purpose in communication. Of course, understanding when to use and not use them is *quite* important. Grammar can lull a class to sleep at a moment’s notice, but an *interesting* (and short) approach can keep the “Grammar Sandman” away.

The Goals for My Students

Ultimately, my class focuses a lot on structure and explanation. If my students leave with a strong concept of organization and the ability to cite/explain ideas, then I would be happy/content that they made important improvements to their writing. However, I hope to instill a passion and appreciation for writing. Specifically, a willingness to want to understand complexity, and a comfort in slowing down to enjoy the beautiful features of writing. There is always a certain drowsiness that surrounds students when we do writing – I figuratively (and literally) hope that they do not nod off and miss something important or enjoyable about writing.

I believe that teachers have the responsibility to make rhetoric engaging and meaningful. Sometimes that is about comedy, passion, beauty, application, or efficiency. The rhetoric needs to hold some importance for the student. Students need to be willing to devote their focus and attentiveness to these rhetorical ideas. These techniques require careful planning and revision; without a student’s commitment to properly understanding and crafting these ideas, they will certainly lose some of their potential power.

English communication is ever evolving and the changes may be speeding up rather than slowing down or stabilizing. One of the biggest challenges in modern writing is anticipating the trends that will dictate what “proper or effective” communication is. Sometimes these trends are things to battle and other times they can be things to embrace. For instance, butchering a word into something unrecognizable to the mainstream poses a problem as new slang develops; however, the rise of all caps for emphasis has created a common understanding of that stylistic function – to a point that it is an effective way to convey emphasis. I constantly tell my students that they will dictate our new words, our exceptions/revisions to the rules, and the style that is acceptable. We just have to decide what is more useful to keep and what is more useful to change.

Awakening Students

These reflections have helped guide my thinking into more intentional ways to teach writing. Hopefully, my instruction can boost the struggling writer and challenge the accelerated writer. I do not want my students to *just write* like I did, I want them to write with *purpose*: conscious of their technique – intentional with their design – passionate in their convictions. There is an education quote from Robert Frost that inspires me, “I am not a teacher, but an awakener.” I can honestly say I feel more *awake* in my writing now, and I will not let any of my students *sleep* through class.

Little Candles

I did not have a great way to express the delicacy of students’ learning and passion until I encountered a quote by Peter Filene (2005), “The epiphany that teachers hope to ignite is not the proverbial lightbulb. It is more like a candle they struggle to light – and then keep lit...” (p. 115). It is true in my experiences that inspiration does not typically burst forth in roaring flames that

can withstand any setbacks. Rather, I feel more like the captain of a sinking ship: Jonny is absent; Sally is distracted by the death of a pet; Sarah can you please catch Steve up on yesterday's notes; Alex please put the phone away; okay... now open to chapter 3. There are a million distractions in the classroom. Everything threatens the flames of my little candles. However, resources and adaptivity are a key part of finding ways to light and relight those candles. There are a myriad of different offices and other staff to help. Moreover, students can be a resource to one another. And, I have also developed an extensive library of online resources and communication using Google, Edmodo, and Canvas platforms. Although, preparing/catching students up to be in class is just half the battle. Once they are in class, then we can actually light up their little candles, but we have to capture their attention and hold it. Consequently, I have developed a repertoire of engaging and enriching materials. Pop culture references, videos, humor, and ever-updating current events. I believe in helping my students use resources to manage life and providing an enjoyable experience in class.

Big Windows

Once the little candles are lit, I know we can really accomplish great things in our courses. I believe in an old teacher adage, "Show them where to look but not what to see." I believe it is important to use our courses to provide windows to the world and new experiences for our students. However, I also believe in discovery learning and encouraging students to be involved in their own growth, and ultimately their own conclusions. However, just like the many other dangers that can blow out the flames of our students' candles, the windows we open can expose students to huge gusts that can defeat them. The world is full of complex, controversial, challenging, and many ideas contrary to the beliefs and desires of students. It can be easy for students to give up in the face of overwhelming adversity. For this reason, I prefer to train my

students in critical thinking and response skills. I believe the right tools can help them navigate these challenges, and eventually, help them discover the learning and conclusions for themselves. In class, I hope to model discussions, expose students to controversial ideas, help students manage debates and opposing perspectives, and encourage students to explore unknown space and the connections between ideas. Although some memorization and direction is needed, my goal is to move away from as much regurgitation or parroting as possible. In fact, I consider most of my best teaching to be when I am not teaching at all. When I have a class of students that can run a discussion on their own, when they generate their own ideas and share the conversation successfully, I know they are engaged in learning that keeps them active and will leave lasting impressions.

Conclusion

In all, I hope that my practices help students to find a lifelong sense of learning. I want to expose them to a myriad of ideas and challenges, but I also want to show them to resources and tools at their disposal. Eventually, I hope they can find the strategies and confidence to continue learning on their own well beyond my time with them. With these tools, I hope to help students explore difficult, open-ended questions and work with one another to discover complex answers relevant to their lives. I hope to help them find independence to the point that students do not need me anymore. If I can help them find the ways to keep their own candles lit and to look through every window with an open mind, then I will not just teach students a course of material, I will have taught them how to be successful in all their future endeavors. There is a tough world in education and society at large that can easily defeat students. Teaching has become so much more than content and classroom management to me. Students need a place to grow, a place to be believed in, and a place to believe in themselves. With inspiration and motivation, I hope to

help students do more than successfully complete a class with me – I hope to help them discover and retain a love for lifelong learning.

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Meaningful Revision:

Revise for a Day, Teach Revision for a Lifetime

Anthony Klever

Bowling Green State University

Author Note:

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Abstract

Achieving meaningful revision can be a challenge for a variety of reasons. Revision can encounter a multitude of issues such as: inconsistency, misinterpretation, mismanagement, mislead or errant focus, ignorance, obliviousness, and apathy. To avoid/alleviate these issues, the research explores meaningful revision through a multifaceted lens encompassing a variety of approaches and perspectives. Herein exists a detailed analysis of current research investigating the many dimensions of revision. This includes both the feedback instructors give and how it is ultimately put to use by students. In addition, a series of resources are suggested to assist students and teachers with revision, particularly in the realm of high school and college composition. Best practices are proposed for teaching, writing, and the teaching of writing. Personal reflection and a synthesis of ideas comment on the connections that indicate similarities and differences from these varied facets of revision and its participants. Implications for the future are suggested based on the data and anecdotes provided.

Meaningful Revision:

Revise for a Day, Teach Revision for a Lifetime

“Our job is to produce better writers, not better writing” (North, 1984, p. 438).

Meaningful revision can only be understood through a multifaceted lens encompassing a variety of approaches and perspectives. With particular attention to students in late high school years and early college years as well as their high school language arts instructors and college composition professors, we must explore the approaches and perspectives that make writing the complicated process that it is. The many aspects of writing and various participants can make the revision of writing a very complex exchange. Therefore, meaningful revision can only come from clear, efficient, and salient feedback. Such sophisticated feedback is sometimes difficult for an instructor to construct and communicate; it can also be equally difficult for a student to interpret and act upon. Verily, any misunderstanding or mismanagement of this feedback can easily shatter the delicate process of revision. An instructor may invest a lot in issuing revision, but never communicate their intended or most important goals. Likewise, a student can easily find themselves overwhelmed or unvested in feedback that does not make sense to them or does not communicate the significance for revision.

Consequently, we are forced to understand the meaning and balance behind the hierarchy, intensity, and form that revision embodies. Such an understanding can help instructors craft the kind of feedback necessary to foster growth in writers. This is a very individualized strategy. Many approaches are available and many perspectives must be considered when crafting sophisticated revision. Unfortunately, this means that our best practices and theory end up describing a range of possibilities, none of which can be set in stone as the one true way to produce meaningful feedback. Rather, we can create menus and spectrums to use as guidance –

a wealth of strategies and advice to select from for the unique revision that every unique writer deserves. Hopefully, this eclectic approach will marginalize the red ink that we traditionally consider revision, and instead refocus revision to the sophisticated, extensive, and individualized communication that it truly is. Diverse and frequent feedback from many reviewers is required to establish successful and lasting writing rituals that students can use to create clear and impactful writing. However, for revision to take place, we need students to take feedback and put it into action. So, one of our main dichotomies to keep in mind: we cannot teach to revise for just the moment, the assignment, or the instructor, rather, students need to learn to have revision tools, revision rituals, and revision motivation for all future writing. We do not wish to revise just for *today*, we seek to teach revision for a *lifetime*.

Review of Current Research

Feedback and revision success are well-researched topics. However, they are so complex that the research rarely can supply us with universal conclusions. Often, the research tends to show that people respond very differently to feedback, especially depending on the writing task or situation. Additionally, there are so many features to feedback and revision, that no study has been able to take all of the different dimensions into account simultaneously. Although, we must assume that there are some interconnectivities between the findings in the following studies that either build upon one another or somehow work synergistically to improve feedback and revision. All of the articles presented here are from within the last decade in an attempt to give the most modern sense of the challenges and successes in feedback and revision.

Practices Preceding High School and College

The outcomes of this essay are to understand the best practices for students and instructors at the late high school and college writing levels. However, we cannot forget to

establish an understanding of the writing principles that students have developed leading up to this point. Often, we do not find that we are teaching writing or revision from scratch, rather, we are building off of previous knowledge and modifying or refining current rituals for students. With this in mind, we can take away some valuable lessons from Crawford, Lloyd, & Knoth's (2008) article, "Analysis of Student Revisions on a State Writing Test". In this study, the authors looked at students across grades 3, 5, and 8 to study the different aspects of revisions present and to evaluate the success of those revisions in a multi draft essay. The study found that most 3rd graders focused on handwriting or phrase revisions that maintained meaning. 5th graders did these surface changes, but also added substantial extended information between drafts. However, 8th graders made only surface changes that did not substantially impact the meaning of the writing. It seems this is more of an indicator of the revision issue than anything else. Once students establish the fundamentals of writing, it appears that they are less invested in making substantial revisions. It is unclear why the 8th graders decreased revision quality, but it may mean that such a trend is the basis for high school or college students that do not make substantial revisions. Clearly, this is an area that deserves more research or perhaps interviews with the students.

However, Crawford, Lloyd, & Knoth (2008) report "Approximately 60% of all revisions were coded as increasing quality, and approximately 20% were coded as decreasing quality; the remaining revisions were scored as "neutral" (p. 112). This leads us to wonder how much students should revise and how they should revise. We obviously want students to invest in meaningful changes, but nearly 40% of revisions were essentially a waste of time. Of greater concern though, is the final thought from Crawford, Lloyd, & Knoth (2008), "...the majority of revisions students made on this state test were of limited quality, and the quantity of revisions they made had no relationship to the score they earned" (p. 117). This is disheartening to say the least. But, we have

established that many students enter their high school and college years with unsuccessful revision habits. Somehow, as instructors, we need to find a way to adapt to these students. We are forced to find ways to encourage revisions, ensure that changes are vital and meaningful, and ultimately, ensure that the changes have a significant effect on the final outcome of the writing – and a lasting effect with the writer.

Instructor Feedback

An obvious good place to start is feedback from instructors that can serve both as corrective and a model to students. Hopefully, this is one of the most foundational pieces to successful revision. However, this may be a concept that is taken for granted and possibly underdeveloped. Montgomery & Baker's (2007) article, "Teacher-Written Feedback: Student Perceptions, Teacher Self-Assessment, and Actual Teacher Performance", discovered that instructor perceptions about feedback are not always aligned with the actual feedback or how it affects students. In the study, there were several moments where teacher self-assessment of the feedback they provided did not match with the actual feedback on the assignments returned to students. On different occasions this may be a discrepancy in the amount of feedback or perhaps a disconnect in the style of feedback given. It is safe to say that these instructors had the best intentions, but the final result was not what they intended. Montgomery & Baker (2007) cannot ultimately conclude why this disconnect occurs, but they do call for more research. This likely should be one of our first and foremost considerations for effective feedback: aligning our feedback with consistent expectations. Instructors may feel that they provide a lot of feedback or feedback of a certain variety, but if they actually do not, perhaps meaningful revision cannot occur. It is likely that the feedback community needs some metrics by which to measure the rate and style of feedback provided. Additionally, this may cause us concerns that other evaluators or peers may suffer from the same disconnect between perceived and actual feedback, however, the study did not go into this. Such a topic could be a great expansion for further

research. It stands to reason that a dialogue full of more exchanges with students could also establish a clearer communication between student and teacher. Perhaps this could occur in conferences beyond the marked writing, but again, the study did not develop this point.

Additionally, the study “Review, Revise, and Resubmit: The Effects of Self-Critique, Peer Review, and Instructor Feedback on Student Writing” by Stellmack et al. (2012) suggests that bias can effect feedback and revision. Instructors have potential bias when grading, e.g., the study showed overall lower scores when instructors graded their students’ writing without knowing whose writing they were evaluating. Furthermore, graders who provide feedback and see multiple drafts tended to score writing higher than unknown graders who provided no feedback. It is not exactly clear if the bias here is instructor bias or if students are just more apt to satisfy one specific reviewer. What it does tell us is that objectivity in feedback and the results on revision are not streamlined. Obviously, all instructors have different styles and students will need different feedback, but we seem to have revealed there is a significant deviation between assessments of objectively “good” writing. This likely means that just one reviewer is not enough to provide the best feedback and ultimately the most fair assessment. Perhaps, some streamline standards can be developed, but it is equally likely that multiple reviewers are needed. Clearly, more research on bias needs to be undertaken.

Peer Feedback

Aside from a writing instructor, peers can be a valuable and readily available review resource. Often, we can easily see the advantage of more eyes and minds scanning and interpreting our work for clarity and accuracy. Peers also typically have added advantages like close proximity/accessibility and are likely working on the same/similar writing tasks. It is a natural and easy part of the drafting process to include anywhere from one peer one time to many

peers over many different stages of writing. However, we must recognize that peer editors are often writers with limited experience. They certainly have some help to offer, but also a specific set of strengths and weaknesses. Aside from any helpful revision suggestions, peers may also give incorrect or unclear suggestions, which could obviously be detrimental to the writer and writing product. Additionally, very inexperienced peer editors may lack the knowledge or confidence to contribute to feedback in a significant way.

In Chong's (2015) article, "How Students' Ability Levels Influence the Relevance and Accuracy of Their Feedback to Peers: A Case Study", the research measured peer reviewers' skill in content development and linguistic accuracy in comparison to their ability to offer meaningful feedback to others. As one might expect, higher ability levels in these areas increased the saliency of the feedback. Moreover, peer reviewer's skills were deemed as important a factor as the instructor's guidance and modeling for peer editing implementation. This tells us that peer feedback can be very valuable if done correctly. Obviously, teacher guidance should continue, but there should also be a conscious pairing of reviewers and reviewees. If we match students by strengths and weaknesses, we can arrange a situation that cultivates the best feedback where it is needed most. This likely means some extra planning and assessing leading up to peers editing, but the initial investment could easily maximize peer review time and end up being used repeatedly on future assignments. An added hope may be that this also helps students understand their own strengths and weaknesses, which could help students know what to offer others in peer reviews and what to seek help with.

Local Versus Global Feedback

Local versus global feedback is one of the most powerful dichotomies that any reviewer can utilize when giving feedback. Likewise, we should try to understand the effectiveness of

each when we consider actual revisions and improvements that take place. For us, local feedback is commentary that can be isolated to one specific section of writing (like a mechanical issue), while global feedback is something that deals with a more holistic idea or premise (like organization or logic). One major concern from Montgomery & Baker (2007) is that “Giving more local feedback than global feedback on early drafts may suggest to the students that local issues are more important than global issues” (p. 95). Montgomery & Baker (2007) chronicle several moments in their research where the intensity or early timing of local feedback shifted students away from global issues. Several teachers in the study were also surprised at the amount of local feedback they ended up providing to students. So, we must rightly accept the importance of mechanical features that we revise with local feedback, but we must also treat these issues as more of a polish than a foundation. The suggestion then is that global feedback needs to be a priority (perhaps even excluding local feedback) in early writing stages and even into the first drafts. Ideally, this will focus the writing on more meaningful elements like the content of ideas or logic of organization. Of course, the closer to final drafts we approach the more emphasis we should place back on local feedback, given major issues in global feedback are resolved at that point. This is another topic for further study as not much data was recorded on specifically emphasizing global then local feedback.

Criticism Versus Praise

One of the classic debates in all of education and psychology is the balance of praise and criticism. And both of these things have very meaningful places in feedback. However, it seems that a lack or overabundance of either idea could eventually affect the revisions a writer makes – that is to say, writers could be affected outside of the actual substance of the comment and more affected by the emotional implications of criticism and praise. The most notable concerns in this

area comes from the summation of research from Patchan et al.'s (2016) study, "The Nature of Feedback: How Peer Feedback Features Affect students' Implementation Rate and Quality of Revisions",

...writers were 2% more likely to implement comments per additional praise comment received. By contrast, a comment with mitigating praise was 10% less likely to be implemented than a comment without mitigating praise. Meanwhile, receiving praise comments in either form had no effect on the likelihood of improving the quality of the text (p. 1108).

The positive we can see here is that the presence of praise helps inspire motivation to revise. Unfortunately, praise as mitigation seems to undercut the seriousness of the mitigated revision. Also, sadly, praise does not seem to have a direct connection to better writing. However, we can still find some of the praise/criticism balance from this study. Clearly praise needs to be present, but it seems like praise should exist in isolation from criticism – potentially, a writer can then receive the praise benefit of motivation and the seriousness of any criticisms. And although praise cannot be directly connected to a stronger final product, we can connect praise to the likelihood of implementation for comments; consequently, praise can help the revision process, although it may be an auxiliary feature. We can consider praise the impetus for which revision occurs, but criticism as the actual essence of change.

In my own experience as an educator (and as I am certain any educator would also attest), learning is about *so* much more than the lesson. People come to us from all walks of life and with many challenges every day. Sometimes our conversations with students are the most anyone cares about them or talks to them in a given day – and that includes the feedback we write to them. This study did show that praise has a connection to motivation, but we must

consider that this motivation is probably measured in greater terms than “percentage likely to implement a revision.” Rather, praise can be valuable enough to a student that they actually write the next draft of their essay, choose to come to class the next day, or to finally stop feeling like “I’m a bad writer.” This research survey does not address the implications of much deeper social, educational, or psychological effects that praise may have; however, we can be certain that it is worthwhile to investigate how much more a little piece of revision like praise can mean than just a few more corrections in an essay. In many ways, praise is near the heart of taking a momentary piece of learning and turning into lifelong learning instead.

Direct Versus Reflective Feedback

In addition to receiving initial feedback, growing writers often need further clarification, guidance, and reflection. One direct feedback moment may lead to correcting writing, whereas, feedback encouraging reflective revision seems to make a more lasting impact in students actually retaining feedback for future use, thus becoming better writers. In Diab’s (2014) article, “Effectiveness of Written Corrective Feedback: Does Type of Error and Type of Correction Matter?”, the study concluded that students benefitted most from receiving both direct and metalinguistic (reflective) feedback. Direct feedback includes an actual correction of the error, whereas, metalinguistic feedback is a more Socratic and student reflective experience. The study did not offer a suggestion on the balance between these two ideas (which is likely variable for each student and task anyway); however, the study did find that both direct and metalinguistic feedback had the best results on the delayed post tests, which suggest both forms of feedback (or at least the presence of metalinguistic feedback) offers the most lasting learning. In contrast, writers who only had self-correction or direct feedback did not perform well on delayed post tests. The study, did not measure delivering only metalinguistic feedback. So, at

the moment, we must accept that direct feedback seems to be partially necessary unless further research can prove otherwise. Additionally, the combination of feedback styles does seem to be an intuitive approach. It offers a diverse way to address different concerns, and provides both scaffolding style learning with thoughtful independent learning.

Conclusions from Current Research

All of the reviewed articles in this section are from the last decade, but realistically, we should consider that this research needs to continuously be updated. As with most research, societal changes greatly impact its relevance, and over time our research typically wears thin. However, communication has seen rapid evolutions in recent history and shows no signs of slowing down. Often, it is hard to keep up with our technology. Specifically, we have added many new features in electronic writing construction. Many articles have only brief conclusions and often call for further investigation. As we investigate further, we should consider the effect technology has on our writing; it seems to be the one issue not directly addressed in the articles, but there is no doubt it is a meaningful part of the conversation. The biggest concern comes from studies like Oppenheimer et al. (2017). In this article, “Improvement of Writing Skills During College: A Multi-Year Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Study of Undergraduate Writing Performance”, the researchers found results that ultimately showed “...half of the students in our sample showed improvement, a third showed no changes, and nearly 20% showed declines in performance” (p. 22). This is extra concerning because the researchers also mention that these figures corroborate the findings of previous studies. Sadly, this means many of the aforementioned issues are affecting students growing into better writers. Clearly, we need some tools and strategies to start changing/improving the paradigms that are currently in use for feedback and revision.

Resources for Students and Teachers to Assist Revision

Our tools to revise, like most craftsmen, are of the utmost importance. And like any art, revision requires excellent tools, knowledge of their use, and ultimately a refined touch. The following resources are intended to serve as tools to advise and inspire writers. It may be that not all of these resources are necessarily used for each writer (as each revision experience is quite unique), but the possibility for use still exists. In addition, some of these tools can be used at different levels, perhaps they are best left in the hands of an instructor to guide writing or maybe they are best placed directly into the hands of the writer. Again, the following best serve as a library to be used as needed, as much as needed, by whoever needs it.

White Paper on Writing Assessment in Colleges and Universities

This resource, which is accessible entirely online, is one of the most thorough and in-depth tools for use by teachers and students alike. Although the philosophy designed by the National Council of Teachers of English and the Council of Writing Program Administrators will directly benefit the design of instruction (and therefore instructors) more than students, seeing the goals an instructor has is often an excellent way to create transparency for students. When students can see the meaning behind revising work to meet these goals, revision becomes more than red ink, rather it becomes a mission to achieve the ideas and standards students are expected to meet. For instance, an idea like "...student performance should indicate the completion of course goals and objectives and readiness to write for the next course or courses in the curriculum" (NCTE & WPA, 2014, p. 3) is obviously excellent for teachers, but can do wonders for a student's motivation to improve. Consider, a student who understands a goal like this can now interpret revision differently. Revision is not spell check. Revision is not a D-. Revision is your future. I would expand this idea to not just future courses, but all future things, such as

careers and impact on society. Meaning assuredly gives way to motivated revision and elevated thinking.

Writing Across the College

Writing Across the College is a more student-centered web resource. Hopefully, many universities have a website like this. It would be wonderful to see high schools incorporate a resource like this as well. “Writing Across the College” (SLCC, 2016) is very accessible. It has very succinct “student speak.” The setup is easy to navigate and the ideas create a language that can commonly be used between instructors and pupils. “Writing Across the College” (SLCC, 2016) is an open door to accessing powerful writing skills. This can be very handy for instructors to direct students to for independent growth. We hope that we can guide student revision, but the self-editing phase should not be ignored. This resource provides a great way for students to change their perception on revision. There are many philosophical catalysts to help students evolve their writing for audience and purpose, as well as a list of resources for self-improvement in regard to the mechanical side of writing.

Machines for Mechanics

Have we left mechanics by the wayside? The focus on content for revision may lead us to believe so, but we cannot forget mechanics, even if they are a secondary concern. Because mechanics are not the focus of instructors, it falls more to students to monitor, perhaps seeking an instructor’s advice only when independent revision cannot be done. There are several resources, *machines*, that can assist students with independent revision. Although, instructors should not abandon students to be churned and ground by the cogs of these machines. One of our greatest modern writing challenges is the misuse of technology in writing. These resources should be demonstrated in good use before being turned over to students. The Purdue Owl

(Purdue University, 2016) is somewhat of an “old school” reference tool. It is essentially a codex of mechanics and format. It is by far one of the most comprehensive resources, but often requires encouragement to use, as it can be vast and daunting to search and understand. However, there are other resources that can be quicker (but not too quick). Grammarly (Grammarly, 2016) can be used as a web source or downloaded as an add-on to many browsers and programs to assist in the editing process. It is similar to a spell/grammar check (which we could also suggest students use), but it has some additional features that let students build profiles and look at the rules as they fix their errors. Additionally, Paper Rater (Paper Rater, 2016) is an excellent online source that functions like Grammarly, but Paper Rater creates a report to assess writing. It will do typical things like spelling, grammar, and plagiarism, but it will also look at advanced writing features like style and vocabulary. It can also be tailored to assess writing by topic and grade level.

Finally, there are a few tools for instructors to monitor and assist students with independent writing. Google Docs (Google, 2016) is an excellent program for sharing online documents and turning them into working drafts where an instructor can leave comments and students can respond with corrections live or at their own pace. There is also a handy extension called Draftback (Somers, 2016) that instructors can use. It creates a movie that chronicles the changes made to a Google Doc. This can be helpful to see every aspect of revision, especially, what was revised, how it was revised, how many times it was revised, and when it was revised. This could produce a lot of meaningful points for discussion with a student later, or the instructor and student could even watch/breakdown the Draftback movie together.

Student Motivated Support

As much as we may hope and attempt to help students find their best writing and editing style in class and through our feedback comments, some learning will always have to be undertaken by students independently. But, just because they are independent, does not mean we have to leave them on their own. Providing extra resources can help students focus on revising their writing on their own time, at their own, pace, and more consistently than just based off of one assignment or one piece of feedback. Ideally, this could be the impetus for lasting changes. Students can do more than “correct an error”, instead, they can learn a new technique. Two resources that teachers can use to help students outside of class are the Khan Academy and No Red Ink. Both of these websites focus on grammar and style, but they also provide a plethora of resources. Khan Academy has video lessons and No Red Ink has great step by step graphic tutorials. Both websites offer the ability to make online classes and provide quizzes/lessons based on specific grammar and style lessons. This could be used for a grade, or it could simply be made available for students to practice. Either way, students can find plenty of extra help and teachers can personalize the available lessons.

In addition, it is useful to have resources available to help students study concepts with explanations, examples, and philosophy about writing style. Two books that are useful to have available are *The Elements of Style* and the *Brief Wadsworth Handbook*. Both books discuss techniques beyond grammar. The greater focus on style in these resources can help students who need extra support with organization, detail, explanations, clarity, and syntax. These advanced strategies are often difficult to convey in a short class or a short comment, so the chapters in these books make it easy for a student to view extended explanations and examples. Between the two books, almost every style decision is covered, so students should feel comfortable knowing they have a stable resource to help them with further learning.

Ultimately, our feedback can be meaningful, but we should also make sure to secure the follow up necessary for students to continue development. These resources can be used inside our feedback, e.g., directing students to lessons or chapters, or these resources can simply be available for students to seek out when in need. In either case, the feedback will be overall meaningful because students will be able to practice in a new idea into their writing ritual rather than just correct an error once and forget the lesson.

Assess Student Writing

The final resource may be very useful to both new and veteran teachers of writing. The article “Assess Student Writing” by Hessler, Konrad, & Alber-Morgan (2009) is a short look at different strategies to address progress and competency in student writers. The nicest feature of this article is that it is a short, 20 item list of assessments that could be used in its entirety or individually. With our many diverse teaching and learning situations, this resource can be useful on multiple different occasions, for different classes or different students. Likewise, a new teacher could build an entire philosophy from these practices or a veteran teacher could pick up a small feature or two to add to their repertoire. Additionally, the different items on this list offer a variety of levels for undertaking. A major project could be something like adding a portfolio to a writing class while a smaller addition could be something like giving credit for the number of ideas presented in prewriting. Consequently, this resource can be used for big overhauls or just minor additions to any writing class. However, the advantage of conciseness is also a minor downfall. This resource is more of an idea generator. The implementation may require the teacher to use their existing lessons, creative thinking, or delve into a bit more research. Hopefully, “Assess Student Writing” can at least focus any additional time a teacher spends planning and researching.

Reflection and Implications for the Future

Fortunately, individualizing a writing experience is very possible in a world of vast approaches – and we live in just that world. Revision is best treated as an individual experience; therefore, we may again find these strategies are appropriate to different people, at different times, to different degrees. We can clearly see that students want a lot of feedback, but we have improvements to make in the value of feedback. It also seems as though inspiration and training are needed to help our students devote the time they should invest in revision to produce their best writing and grow from that experience. Ultimately, a much more in-depth look at students is needed. However, we can find solidarity that both high school and university instructors are impassioned about the ideas in writing and the meaning those ideas hold. We can continue to tailor our instruction to help students see that writing makes an impact on an audience, and the creativity and ingenuity of students' ideas will take their writing to new great heights. Although mechanics ride sidecar to the meaning behind writing, we have plenty of resources, when properly taught and used, that can assist students with the format, style, and mechanics, which students ultimately need to perfect in their writing. Verily, writing is an art and a science. It is mechanics and emotions. It takes dedication to build, and even more dedication to tear down and rebuild. Hopefully, our diligent work as students and instructors can help us all find the right way to express our ideas; a way that truly can be described as our own voice. Something meaningful. Something passionate. Something majestic. Only then have we not just produced better writing, but a better writer. Only then have we ceased revising for just this sentence, just this paragraph, just this assignment, just this day. We have revised for a lifetime. It becomes a revision that is not about writing anymore, it is about thinking, feeling, and connecting.

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Anthony Klever

Dr. Coates

ENG 6090

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The Illusions of Illiteracy: Can We Learn to Read All Literature?

What should teachers do in the classroom in times of crisis, disaster, tragedy, sorrow, and panic? Does teaching literature, rather than economics or physics, demand that we rise to these occasions, and if so, how?" (Showalter 131). Literature is special, but this concept should be inclusive rather than exclusive. Although everything may not act or feel like traditional literature, anything *could* be literature. Sciences – like economics, mathematics, and physics – may not seem like literature, and popular culture – like TV, comics, and video games – is often thought of as “less than” literature. However, any of these subjects may count as literature. Sadly, we may not consider the literature potential available to us. We may be under the illusion that we cannot read some media as literature – a kind of self-imposed illiteracy. The Cambridge journal *Scrutiny* may not have realized that it captured literature best when it is described

literature as “...less an academic subject than a spiritual exploration coterminous with the fate of civilization itself” (Eagleton 56). Verily, anything that can help us look at our

civilization or humanity should be revered as special – as literature. Literature can help take humanity to great heights and overcome tremendous challenges; it is truly a special form of media. Literature can be anywhere and compel us to greatness; we should open our eyes and arms to the many forms of special media that help us rise to the occasions of our times. Any media that can better the individual or society should be considered literature. We may be missing a special power to heal, reflect, or connect that literature can offer because we do not

appreciate the power that nontraditional literature can have. With an open mind, we can consume more media as literature and reap the benefits it has to offer us and society. With this expanded mindset, we can enjoy more media as literature, which will allow us to seriously teach, study, and consume stories across fields and genres. When we open our minds to more media as literature, we open literature to more people.

The purpose of literature is not always exactly the same to everyone in every situation, but a common thread is that literature should be able to impart a special meaning – this is a sense of purpose or fulfillment. Showalter’s “Theories of Teaching Literature” asserts that “... teaching literature is a way of making people better human beings and better citizens... it is a ‘repository of moral and spiritual values,’ bestowing a sense too of national culture and heritage” (22). Humans often wonder about their place in the world or the motivation for their pursuits in life. What may distinguish literature from non-literature is the sense of purpose and fulfillment gained from studying media.

Moreover, these meaningful feelings from this media can serve a very functional purpose in understanding ourselves and the world. Perhaps, literature can even give us guidance and motivation for thinking and acting in our lives. However, this is not a guarantee. Showalter’s “Teaching Literature in Dark Times” suggests that teaching literature does not always offer the “solace and wisdom” we may seek in tragic situations. At other times, Showalter asserts, that literature can provide a “depth of tragic understanding [students and teachers] had never anticipated” (22). Altogether, this means some media can help us to understand tragedy and offer the ability to work through dark times. Although, not everything seems to have the “special” quality of *meaning* and *purpose* that we expect of literature – or at least the way we traditionally think of literature. But, that may be because we have limited our literature. If we

open our definitions of literature, there could be media to teach, study, and embrace for every situation and every person.

Openness and adaptability in teaching offer us the ability to recognize the special circumstances of our time and the special media by which we may find our guidance and purpose. Filene's "Understanding Yourself as a Teacher" suggests, "Never type your lectures: you and your students will both be their slaves... Be the kind of teacher who is nourished by the back and forth of discussion" (9). Filene argues that these teachers will make lifelong impressions on their students. This is likely because these teachers abandon rigid definitions. The media, the topics, and the questions that contribute the most meaning to class will offer the most rewarding experience. This is possibly what we think of as "classic" literature, but Filene's definition also opens us to other forms of knowledge and wisdom. Showalter asks if we should prefer literature to economics and physics in moments where we seek meaning and purpose (131); but, why make a diametric opposition or a hierarchy of disciplines? Is it literature vs economics and physics? Is it literature over economics and physics? Or, should we ask if we are simply illiterate to economic literature and physics literature? We know literature is meaningful and helpful, but we may be under the illusion that literature is exclusive rather than inclusive.

In regard to the sciences, we can consider many disciplines like economics, physics, and math to be literature. For instance, we already regard an essay like Karl Marx Friedrich Engels' *Communist Manifesto* to be a staple of literary theory. But, we should recognize that its major principles are grounded in the fundamentals of economics and class systems. The text even ends with a call to purpose "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workingmen of all countries, unite" ("The Communist Manifesto: Work by Marx and Engels"). And so, we see that economics can lend us powerful ideas and call us to action just

like any fictional “classic” literature. Moreover, a discipline like physics can accomplish the same powerful contribution. The science behind the first moonwalk is an incredible testament to the thorough and calculated rationality of humankind. The transcript of NASA’s Houston-Apollo 11 moon landing is largely precise and scientific and interspersed with jargon, static, and beeps. However, about eight minutes into the public transcript, Neil Armstrong provides one of the most inspirational quotes in humanity that has since echoed throughout time and may continue to do so throughout the remainder of our civilization: “That’s one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind” (“One Small Step”). Although largely scientific, this transcript could offer the meaning and purpose we seek for ourselves – especially in the shadow of tremendous challenges and triumphs.

Finally, we may look even to mathematics for substantial contribution to our search for purpose and motivation. An incredible amount of science went into NASA’s Mars Opportunity Rover: The golf cart-sized robot landed on Mars in 2004, plugged along for 15 years (exceeding its minimum 90-day life expectancy 60-fold) and, in its long and productive life, traveled across more than 28 miles of the Martian landscape, returned more than 217,000 images and established the now-accepted scientific truth... (Kluger). An inspirational little robot story to be sure, but the most important part may be Opportunity’s final message – a mathematical digitized code that was transmitted across space back to Earth: “...the digital equivalent of ‘My battery is low and it’s getting dark’” (Kluger). Perhaps we could compare such tragic and compelling words to classic literature like “Good night, sweet prince, / And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest (Shakespeare 5.2.396-397). Both lines tug at our heartstrings and teach us about tragedy. Somedays, we may need classic literature’s cautionary tragedy of *Hamlet*; at other times, we may need the science’s inspirational tragedy of Opportunity. Literature takes many forms of media.

We should not be illiterate to the non-classic or non-traditional meaning in the media from other disciplines outside of English. All of this media can help us find the meaning and purpose we may seek in challenging times.

Furthermore, we can expand our literacy of literature to popular culture that has been traditionally been deemed non-canonical or non-classical literature. For instance, TV shows, comic books, and videogames may be written off as “less than” literature or junk media – something incapable of the special meaning we attach to literature. But, again, if we are to let literature supply special meaning, we cannot live in an illusion where we exclude media that could give us a way to better ourselves and society. For instance, we should celebrate that the science fiction of *Star-Trek*, a show that showed us what humanity could be, displayed the first on-screen interracial kiss between Captain Kirk and Lieutenant Uhuru. This social flashpoint came only a year after the US Supreme Court declared interracial marriage legal (Associated Press). A TV show helped a nation wrestle with its demons and accomplished it in a special way that only a science fiction TV show may have been able to do. Additionally, the popular Comic *Batman* has adapted to many iterations through time since its first release in 1939. But, one feature has stayed true. Fearful that early iterations were too violent and would affect the impressionable children in the comic’s audience, the publisher quickly redesigned an initially brutal batman to never use guns or kill his enemies (“Batman: Fictional Character”). These picture book tales of the caped crusader have looked after our youth by giving them a true vigilant guardian: a role model that values justice *and* mercy. Finally, even very modern forms of media like videogames can supply us with special meaning. *Final Fantasy VII* was released in 1997 and was on the forefront of environmental issues. The game positions the player as a hero battling an evil corporation that harvests energy from the planet for profit (“Final Fantasy

VII...”). A touch ahead of its time, the game was a valuable precursor for the young people of 1997 to become the environmental activists of today. Again, have we complacently been illiterate to this popular media? If literature can help us find meaning, purpose, and determination in dark times, should we not celebrate all of the special media with this power? Our ability to be inclusive will greatly expand the literature we can teach and, hopefully, the power that literature has to nurture and guide us.

Unfortunately, there are viewpoints that seek to limit our concept of literature. Harold Bloom’s “Elegiac Conclusion” admonishes any literature considerations that are errant from the classic canonical ideology. Bloom suggests that “The strongest poetry is cognitively and imaginatively too difficult to be read deeply by more than a relative few of any social class, gender, race, or ethnic origin.” Bloom continues his criticism by lamenting that classic literature has lost time and space in the classroom to other media. He mourns that the pleasures of difficulty are abandoned to universally accessible pleasures (227). Although some of the classic texts that Bloom reveres may help a few people find purpose, they, unfortunately... only help a *few* people find purpose. Bloom’s exclusionary approach would have us believe only some media is literature and literature is only for some people. However, a more inclusive approach is provided by Eagleton’s “The Rise of English”, which suggests “...literature should convey *timeless* truths, thus distracting the masses from their immediate commitments, nurturing in them a spirit of tolerance and generosity...” (51). This approach actually accounts for all of society. If we hope that literature is special enough to provide meaning and purpose, then we have to allow more media and more people to have access to each other. Truly, we cannot hope for literature to achieve lofty goals like the care and shepherding of humanity and civilization if most people are locked out of the meaning and purpose that literature can provide.

All in all, we should reimagine Showalter's question: "Does teaching literature, rather than economics or physics, demand that we rise to these occasions, and if so, how?" (131). We do not need to accept the illusion that literature is oppositional and exclusive. Rather we can expand our literacy to appreciate all media as literature. This adaptability will allow both teachers and students to study and explore the media that brings them the most meaning and purpose. Accordingly, we allow ourselves access to a toolkit with both larger size and variety than classic literature. In a world of complex problems and dark times, we should not allow things to become darker by ignoring any media that offers illumination. Consequently, the question should be reimaged thus: "How can we find literature in everything – and when we do, how can we be sure to use this media to find meaning, purpose, and to overcome adversity?" This does not mean everything has to be literature or studied so. However, it does mean we have the potential to see anything as literature. Perhaps, as individuals or society, we are bettered today because a book consoles us, perhaps tomorrow a TV show inspires us, and the next day, we find inspiration in a technical report. If a media can help people find solace, motivation, inspiration, etc. it should be addressed as literature. Consequently, it should have a certain reverence in our society, our classrooms, and our daily conversations. Ultimately, we need to keep our classic literature *and* add more of the "other" media at our disposal – and truthfully, we can open the door for any media to be literature if it helps better individuals and society. The first paddle strokes down the Mississippi river in Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* should be juxtaposed with the first steps on the moon, and Hamlet's vengeance should be tempered by Batman's mercy. Literature is special, but it should include all of our media. Only after we drop our illusions and expand our literacy can we truly hope to use literature to inspire humanity and sculpt society.

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