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# *The AIAA and its Use of Genre*

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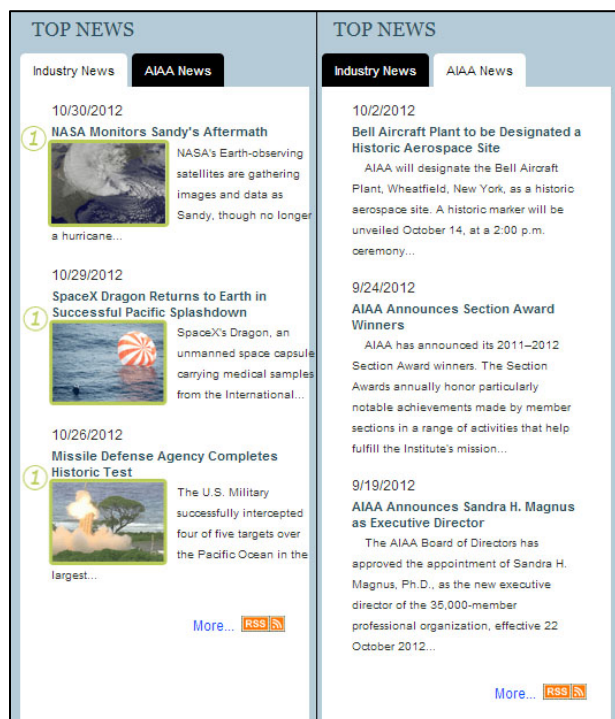
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The generation in which we live happens to be unlike any generation before us; the turn of the century has brought technology to a new level and, with new technology, comes new levels of communication. Today, our society takes part in what is widely considered the Information Age—a term that most clearly describes the major changes that the world has seen in the past few decades. Anyone raised in the Information Age has been raised with an understanding of this new technology; it is now considered the norm for individuals to wake up and reach for their smart phone, simply to jump on a social network where they will describe their morning in detail to anyone and everyone who could not care less. But it is because of the Information Age's ease of data transfer that we must learn proper ways to share and display information through the knowledgeable use of genre as guidance. Genre refers to a conventional category of discourse based in large-scale typification of rhetorical action; as action, it acquires meaning from situation and from the social context in which that situation arose. Genre emerges from the social activity that the organization wants to establish with its audience—usually the membership. Genre is a necessity to

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any organization that means to share information with its audience as, without it, the reader would simply be lost in a jumbled mess of text and/or images. Through genres, information is organized into groups where the reader can easily sift through it to find whatever they need. For example, if someone would like to hear the news on the United States' international relations with North Korea, they may search for an article in a current newspaper; however, they are not likely to head over to an encyclopedia for up-to-date news.

The American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, or the AIAA for short, is an organization that can best be described by its mission statement: "To address the professional needs and interests of the past, current, and future aerospace workforce and to advance the state of aerospace science, engineering, technology, operations, and policy to benefit our global society." The AIAA has more than 35,000 members and classifies itself as the world's largest technical society dedicated to the global aerospace profession. So the questions that the AIAA must answer are: What are the best ways to achieve our goals? How can we keep this large membership informed and inspired? The AIAA, like many other organizations, uses a number of different genres to spread information among its members. Among the AIAA's more prominent genres are RSS news feeds including both industry and AIAA-specific news, *Aerospace America* (the official magazine of the AIAA), and annual reports.



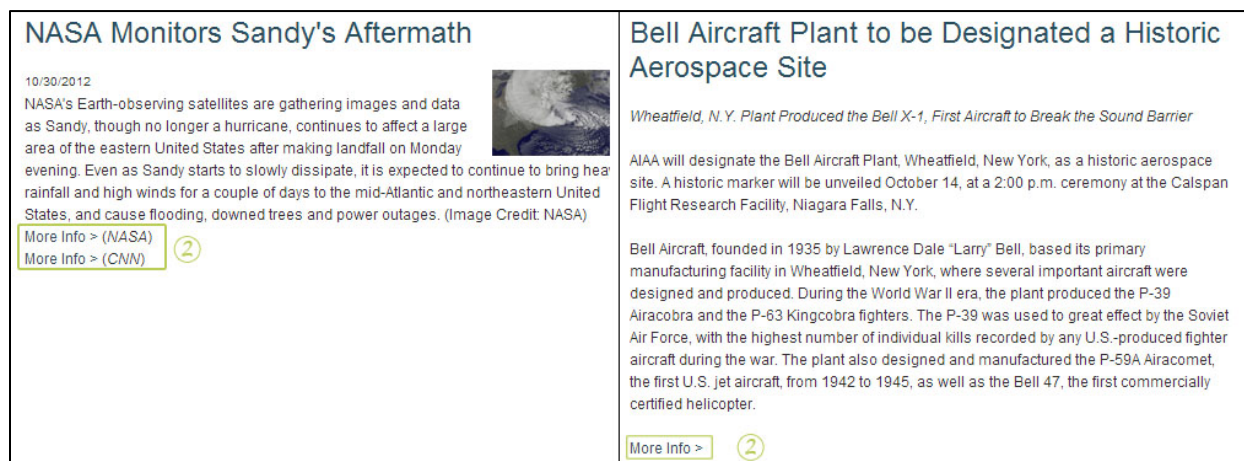
**Figure 1** The RSS news feeds

have a strong sense of academic voice. Being a simple RSS feed, each story has a link to a longer and more detailed source (refer to “2” in the figure below)—these feeds can be related to reading the summary of an article on the front page of a local newspaper and then being referred to a specific

## RSS News Feeds

The RSS news feeds are released every few days at the bottom of the home page of the AIAA's website, [www.aiaa.org](http://www.aiaa.org), and tend to be very short and to the point, each containing approximately 100 words. RSS (Rich Site Summary) is a family of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated works—such as blog entries, news headlines, audio, and video—in a standardized format. The industry-related news stories are normally one paragraph long with a small image in the upper-left-hand corner while AIAA-related news stories are generally two paragraphs with no image given (refer to “1” in the figure to the left). The industry-related news stories tend to provide external news similar to that of the Features section in *Aerospace America* while the AIAA-related news tends to relate to that of the Departments section and is based on internal information (to be further discussed in the *Aerospace America* section). The stories are

written in the third-person point of view and



**Figure 2** This shows a more detailed view of an industrial news story (left) and an AIAA news story (right). The “2” refers to the links to “longer and more detailed” sources and shows that industrial stories are supported by credited sources.

page for the full story. Sources for the industry news feed are found among many different credited sources including, but not limited to *Space.com*, *NBC News*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Times*; sources for the AIAA news feed are found solely on the AIAA's website. These feeds are accessible to the public and no attempt is made to keep any of the information from non-members. They relate to the mission statement in a way similar to that of the annual reports by keeping members and the public informed on major industry and AIAA-related news; this is also

part of the group's social action which is to transfer accurate and important information among both members and non-members in a simple yet effective way.

## Aerospace America

*Aerospace America* is a magazine created and distributed monthly by the AIAA. Its goal is to provide subscribers with current news and information on both the AIAA and the aerospace industry while its social action works to circulate information, reach out to members, and keep the AIAA's accountability high. *Aerospace America* can be found by hovering over the "Publications" link on the menu bar of the website and navigating to the magazine. The format of *Aerospace America* seems to be very minimal and plain; the template seems to be very text-heavy for a magazine but has about four to six images or charts on each page. The length of the magazines that I viewed varied from 47 to 49 to 87 pages, respective to the date published; more recent magazines contain

about double the content when compared to those of a few years ago. Each of the magazines viewed showed a similar table of contents that followed the general organization of Departments, Features, and Bulletin, in that order. Departments and Bulletin have the same type of information in each section throughout each magazine while the Features section contains two to three articles meant to not only keep members up-to-date on outside issues, but to do so in a way that captivates the reader; featured articles are meant to be entertaining yet informative. One rather entertaining piece included in each issue is a section titled "Past; Past" that focuses on important events that occurred years ago, but in the same month that the magazine was published.



Figure 3 Screenshots of specific pages of the past three June issues of *Aerospace America*

The style is very formal throughout the magazines and the editors consistently use the same sans-serif font in each article. Pictures and charts are displayed, although they are kept to only a

few per page. Headings are simple and consistent while first-person writing is rarely used unless there is a specific reason to do so (e.g. the "Conversation" heading). Punctuation is very formal—the only exclamation marks used were in advertisements and all other punctuation is used according to generally accepted writing styles. At times, it seems as though the articles were written for a research journal instead of a magazine. Each article is written by someone with given credentials in relation to what they are writing about while images and charts are used to verify claims in most articles. The *Aerospace America* magazines are meant for members only, but past issues are available at <http://www.aerospaceamerica.org/Pages/Archives.aspx> while <http://www.aerospaceamerica.org/Pages/TableOfContents.aspx> shows the table of contents for the current issue with links to view most of the articles. In terms of organization within each issue, the Features section focuses solely on external matters and the Bulletin section focuses solely on internal matters while the Departments section of the magazine focuses on both. *Aerospace America* supports the mission of the AIAA by "addressing the interests of the past, current, and future aerospace workforce." I have also noticed that throughout the many issues of *Aerospace America*, neither the type of content or style vary much; they seem to have a system that they choose to strictly abide by. A chart of screenshots has been provided on the following page to aid in the description of the similarities through past issues.

I compiled Figure 3 above to show that the AIAA does not like to change things up very much. As you can see, the front pages of each issue tend to be very similar with the exception of a different, yet fascinating picture in the background that references to a features article. In the center, toward the left-hand side as well as in the bottom right-hand side, there is a short sentence referring to the same article that aims to grasp the reader's attention. On the very bottom of the front page is the text, "A publication of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics." A quick glance shows the similarities between the table of contents and a random article's contents as well.

## Annual Reports







An annual report is just that—a report on everything that the organization has accomplished in the past year, filled up with some interesting facts, statistics, and a fancy design to make sure it is not too much of a bore to read. Its social action aims for two things: accountability and achievement. The formats of the annual reports are surprisingly much more creative than that of *Aerospace America*; each report has a blue color scheme and has a plethora of pictures, tables, and charts. The reports used to be about 16 pages, but starting with the 2010-2011 annual report, the length jumped up to about 50 pages. Another change to the annual report following the 2010-2011 report was the introduction of a table of contents to keep the information better organized; the two most recent reports, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, have identical tables of contents. The annual reports are very formal and use very professional writing. The writing is normally third-person, with the only exception being in the *President's Report* section where first-person writing is used. Punctuation also follows the guidelines of professional writing—an exclamation point is rarely used and the sentences incorporate semi-colons, em-dashes, and other pieces of punctuation in a proper manner. Though the financial report is written by the AIAA, it does attempt to provide evidence when needed. For example, on page 31, a chart has a citation to its source, and on page 44 of the 2011-2012 annual report, the reader is provided with an address that can provide the complete audited financial statements when requested. Evidence is only provided when needed as the financial reports are more of a primary

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source than secondary. Access to these reports is public and the AIAA makes them easily available to any person who may need one. They are available at the AIAA's website in the "Governance" link under the heading "About AIAA". The information in the annual reports is based off of internal matters as they document the past year of the AIAA. The annual reports are important to the AIAA because they succeed in keeping members informed as to what has been occurring within the organization, a major part of the mission statement.

**Figure 4** Screenshots from the 2011-2012 annual reports and brief descriptions

					
<p><i>Front Page</i></p> <p>The front page of the annual report displays the theme of the past year. It is decorated in a way meant to capture the reader's attention.</p>	<p><i>"A Snapshot of AIAA" and Statistics</i></p> <p>The second and third page of the annual report show the table of contents on the left-hand side and some simple statistics on membership residency and a breakdown on age, gender, and primary business.</p> <p>The page is simply meant to capture the reader's attention with some entertaining facts and statistics; it lures away from the typical boring feeling a normal annual report would give off.</p>	<p><i>Honors and Awards</i></p> <p>These pages can be found about half-way into the annual report. They aim to further the social action by proving what the AIAA has been able to accomplish in the past year and why it should be held up to the standards that it expects to be held up to.</p>	<p><i>Achievements</i></p>	<p><i>Financials</i></p> <p>This page, as well as a few pages found shortly after, can be found toward the end of the annual report. This page describes the current financial situation while the next few pages contain detailed information and numbers to show what exactly they are using membership dollars for.</p>	

## Conclusion

This organization has grasped the overall point of genre by using organization as a guideline to classify the different pieces of significant writing. The ease of the transfer of information and data in the Information Age has the potential be very messy if generally accepted guidelines are not used. The AIAA focus on having a specific, yet effective social action; more often than not, they attempt to simply transfer information, but they also attempt to prove their worth as an organization by broadcasting their achievements and accountability as well. Much goes into developing an effective social action for each genre and it appears as though the AIAA continues to focus on what they want to get across to their membership. Over time, genre evolves, but in the case of many of the genres of this organization, they tend to follow a consistent format as time goes on; although, in the case of *Aerospace America* and the annual reports, they also tend to lengthen quite a bit as well. This may occur because of the continually-expanding reach of the aerospace field in today's society and because of the growing membership-base that the AIAA is attempting to keep informed. Each of the genres that I viewed demonstrated a respectable understanding of writing, organization, style, format, and evidence, which should be expected from an organization that aims to heighten its ethos through the use of genre. Furthermore, the use of genre throughout the AIAA's website has made the process of researching their organization much smoother. Their content is organized through different types of genre and they have proven their understanding of the purpose of genre, to keep information organized in a manner that makes it simple for readers to keep informed without being overwhelmed.



## **Alec O'Connor**

Alec O'Connor is a sophomore in the Burnett Honors College. He is working on a major in Electrical Engineering as well as a minor in Entrepreneurship. He plans on pursuing a master's degree while gaining work experience before hopefully opening his own engineering consulting firm down the road. He can often be found studying at the library or in the gym working out or playing racquetball.