



a journal of first-year writing

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From the Editor

Have you ever been faced with a writing task and not known where to start? You may be surprised to learn that this is a familiar experience shared by experienced and inexperienced writers alike. I can recall moments in my academic and professional experiences where I struggled with the expectation to write something meaningful, watching the cursor blink on an empty Microsoft Word page, feeling the pressure of time passing without any work to show for it. Sometimes getting started is the hardest part.

You've probably heard your composition instructor tell you that the best place to start is to consider the rhetorical situation of your writing. What is the need for this piece of writing and what are you trying to accomplish with it? Your teacher might have also told you that you're writing for a particular audience. This can seem confusing if you consider your teacher as your real audience, but the reason they are doing this is because they want you to recognize your role as a scholar and the implications of your work outside of the context of a writing assignment for class. It's once we begin to develop our identities as scholars that we start to understand the exigence of academic writing as creating and sharing knowledge with other scholars.

Stuart Greene takes up this idea by introducing students to scholarly inquiry in his article "Argument as Conversation: The Role of Inquiry in Writing a Researched Argument." He

provides this advice for embracing our role as writing scholars in those moments when we might have trouble getting started: “as a form of inquiry, then, writing begins with problems, conflicts, and questions that you identify as important” (28). Therefore, the first step is to think about what matters to you, brainstorming topics of interest to you and others, identifying lively conversations you can join with your own inquiry.

The pieces you are about to read in this issue of *Stylus* were crafted by students like you who identified an area of interest that they were genuinely curious about, which made the research, writing, and learning processes involved more meaningful and purposeful than just completing an assignment for class. The authors of these pieces saw their Composition I and II assignments as opportunities to learn more about something relevant to their lives, exploring the literacy practices, writing processes, and genres involved in their pastimes and future careers, high school and college classes, and even sites of social activism and criminal proceedings.

Through these projects, the writers engaged in a process of situated inquiry and meaning-making guided by their own curiosity, which resulted in the following works that contribute to scholarly conversations by providing us with interesting insights into the ways writing and rhetoric work in the world.

The first piece is “The Texts of Online Magic: Revealed” by Julian Brown. Brown applies Gee’s theory of Discourse to study an online community of novice and experienced magicians in order to understand their values, practices, and identity construction. He conducts a textual analysis of selected posts from a private Facebook group of which he is a member in order to understand how members develop their skills while also preserving the secretive nature of magic. While the topic of magic is especially interesting, students can also use this as an example of how to develop coding schemes based on recurring themes related to their research questions, identifying useful units of analysis within their data.

The next piece is Priscilla Samayoa’s “Writing Processes of Musical Theater Writers,” an investigation into the behind-the-scenes work that brings some of the most recognizable musicals to the stage. Samayoa synthesizes primary and secondary accounts of the writing processes of prominent musical theater writers such as Lin-Manuel Miranda, Stephen Sondheim, Lisa Lambert, and Jonathan Larson. She also adds an additional perspective by including an interview with a UCF theater major to gain insight into how the performers serve as part of the process in their interpretation of the musical theater writer’s final product. Through her research, she identifies four important elements that are part of these processes: invention, composition, audience, and revision. Any musical theater lover will be interested in Samayoa’s findings, but her in-depth analysis also helps students to understand the multiple and recursive processes that go into creating the finished products we see on stage.

The third article is Lauren Horde’s “Social Media’s Rhetorical Prowess, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and How Millennials Experience It.” Horde discusses the role social media has played in growing support and awareness for local and global issues by informing citizens and connecting activists. Her study explores how awareness for the Black Lives Matter movement, which began with a hashtag, has been raised for a sampling of millennials due to their avid use of social media, and the impact this might have on the rhetoric of the contemporary civil rights movement. Students can also see how to make sense of a corpus of survey data through Horde’s cross-analysis of the open-ended and definitive-ended responses she collected.

Next up is Nicole Kogut’s “A Case of Unlawful Discourse: The Steven Avery Case and Discourse Analysis on Manitowoc County.” Kogut enters the conversations of prosecutorial overzealousness and identity construction by looking into the case of Steven Avery—a case

recently documented in a popular *Netflix* series, *Making a Murderer*—and seeking to understand what might have led to his questionable conviction despite circumstantial evidence and a problematic investigation. To do this, she applies Gee’s Discourse theory in an analysis of the identity constructed for the defendant in court by the prosecution, as well as online and in the media. Her research should interest fellow student researchers and potential law students, as well as those who were intrigued by the series.

Fifth is Lisian Shehu’s “The Research Skills Learning Gap: What Is It, and How Can It Be Fixed?” In this study, Shehu takes a look at how students feel prepared for their ENC 1102 class based on their prior experiences with high school English. He compares the literate activities of high school English and UCF ENC 1102 classes, finding that students may experience a learning gap in preparedness for conducting research depending on which high school English classes they have taken and what the expectations and assignments for those classes were. By reading this piece, students can gain insight into their own experiences transitioning from high school English classes to first-year composition.

Finally, we have Clayton White’s “Essence of Technical Writing: Communication between Non-Experts and Experts in a Constrained Genre.” Driven by his future career as an engineer, White considers the challenge of communicating technical information in ways that are understandable for those who are not familiar with the lexis. His research explores the communication between teachers at a public high school and the technical support staff by analyzing the help desk forms generated through the school district-mandated management software that facilitates this communication. White’s attention to the genre conventions of the forms and the rhetorical moves made by the teachers who use them make for an interesting and well-developed analysis. Students will benefit from seeing White’s application of several different research methods for gathering and analyzing data to gain more developed insights into his research questions.

We hope that you enjoy reading through the works in this issue of *Stylus*, and that they might inspire you to find your identity as a scholar in conducting your own investigation into the roles of writing and rhetoric in your life. We also hope that you’ll consider submitting your own work for publication in the journal; at one time or another, all of the students published here were sitting in a composition class, just like you. To read about their experiences (and, sometimes, struggles) along the way from receiving an assignment to being published, be sure to take a look at the writer’s statements accompanying each piece.

If you’re interested in submitting work to *Stylus*, simply ask your Composition I or II instructor to forward the piece you’d like to submit to the journal and we’ll take care of the rest. If you have any questions about this process, please feel free to contact the *Stylus* co-editors, Matt Bryan at Matthew.Bryan@ucf.edu or me at Megan.Lambert@ucf.edu.

-Megan Lambert
Stylus Co-Editor

Work Cited

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