Rhetoric and Genre—Excerpt from *Writing about Writing* (Wardle and Downs, 2017)

In the rest of our lives outside of school — at work, online, at church, and so on — we know that writing helps us communicate and make meaning with others, and get things done. We know this without being told because we use writing like this all the time. If you are feeling lonely, you might text three friends and see if they want to meet you at the gym later. They text you back and negotiate the activity (maybe they need to study instead, so suggest meeting at the library) and the time (they have a sorority meeting at 6, but could meet you at 8). Together you make meaning and get things done, and your ideas create the world and its activities through the writing you are doing together.

This same principle holds true for all kinds of writing that takes place within and between groups of people. At work, three or four people might be on a deadline to finish a report, and they negotiate how to write that report together; when they turn it in, they may find that their working group gets more funding next year than they had last year. In our sororities, we have written guidelines and rituals that help us know who we are and what we stand for. If we write fanfiction online in Wattpad, hundreds or thousands of people might read and comment on what we write, and we know how to write fanfiction because we have read the examples others have written on Wattpad, and have seen how readers there commented on those examples.

Writing helps people get things done, which makes writing powerful. But how and why particular writing does (or does not) work depends on who the people are, where they come from, what their goals are, what technologies they have available to them, and the kinds of texts (***genres***) they are writing.

GENRE

> *Genre* comes from the French word for "kind" or "type" and is related to the Latin word *genus*, which you might remember from the scientific classification system for animals and plants. In the field of rhetoric, genres are broadly understood as *categories of texts*. For example, the poem, the short story, the novel, and the memoir are genres of literature; memos, proposals, reports, and executive summaries are genres of business writing; hiphop, bluegrass, trance, pop, new age, and electronica are genres of music; and the romantic comedy, drama, and documentary are genres of film.
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> Genres are types of texts that are recognizable to readers and writers and that meet the needs of the **rhetorical situations** in which they function. So, for example, we recognize wedding invitations and understand them to be different from horoscopes. We know that when we are asked to write a paper for school, our teacher probably does not want us to turn in a poem instead.
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> Genres develop over time in response to recurring rhetorical needs. We have wedding invitations because people keep getting married, and we need an efficient way to let people know and to ask them to attend. Rather than making up a new rhetorical solution every time the same situation occurs, we generally turn to the genre that has developed — in this case, the genre of the wedding invitation.

> Genre theorists have suggested that the concept of *genre* actually goes well beyond texts; accordingly, some theorists use *genre* to describe *a typified but dynamic social interaction that a group of people use to conduct a given activity*. (*Typified* means it follows a pattern, and *dynamic* means that people can change the pattern to fit their circumstances as long as it still helps them do the activity.) In "Rethinking Genre," for example, David Russell says that genres are actually "shared expectations among some group(s) of people" (513).
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> For more on genre and genre theory, see Chapter 1.

There are rules for how groups of people use writing together, and these rules constrain what writers and readers can do. Sometimes those rules are spoken or written down, sometimes they aren't. But for people to use writing successfully, they have to learn these rules. Think about the example above, of texting your friends to see if they want to join you at the gym later. When you got your first phone and started texting, you didn't receive a list of rules about how to do it. You and your friends learned what worked and what didn't. You learned the shorthand texts that people would understand, and the ones they wouldn't. You learned that it can be easy to misinterpret some things in text messages, so you probably learned to be more cautious about how you write your texts. You also probably figured out that some goals can't be accomplished through texting (like applying for a job), and that some people don't respond well to texting (like your great-grandmother). Every writing situation has its own rules, and writers must learn them in order to use writing effectively to get things done. The rules might seem arbitrary to outsiders (for example, someone might read your texts and think you are being mean or sloppy, not realizing that you've written a joke acceptable in texting your friends), but those rules are rarely arbitrary. For example, when surgeons write or talk about their work, they have a very specialized vocabulary that helps them be extremely precise and accurate. There is a hierarchy regarding who can say, do, and write when in the hospital, and that hierarchy helps ensure that everyone knows what their job is, and patients are protected.

The same is true in college. As you move to different subjects, you'll find the rules are different for how and what you write, and what you can do with writing. These rules might seem arbitrary, but they aren't. The writing that historians do looks and sounds a certain way in order to help them accomplish their goals as part of an academic discipline. Their writing looks very different from the writing of biologists, whose goals and purposes for writing are quite different.

So writing helps people get things done and make meaning together. But as groups of people spend more and more time together, how and why they use writing in particular ways can be increasingly difficult for outsiders to comprehend. If you know this, and you understand what is happening, you can have an easier time as a newcomer to a situation or a particular form of writing. You'll understand that there are certain questions you need to ask, and you'll need to watch what other people do — and try to discover who does what and when.

ACTIVITY 2B | Try Thinking Differently

In Activity 2A, you reflected on a time when something you wrote didn't work. Go back to that activity and think about the rules for writing that are established when groups of people use

writing to help accomplish their goals. Were there unspoken rules that help explain what went wrong in that writing situation for you? Why or why not?

The next time you are in a class and you feel like you can't understand the language or the rules for what you are reading or writing, step back and ask some bigger questions: What is the subject ("discipline" or "field") like? What do the people who participate in that subject study? What do they value? What are they trying to do with their writing? If you don't know, who can you ask? Can understanding these things help you better understand why you're confused?

TC "Good" Writing Is Dependent on Writers, Readers, Situation, Technology, and Use

Whether or not writing is good depends on whether it gets things done, and whether it accomplishes what the writer (and readers) need the writing to accomplish. This threshold concept of writing likely conflicts with a lot of what school writing situations have led you to believe. In school, it's easy to believe that good writing is writing that doesn't have grammatical errors or that follows the directions. But just by looking at examples from your own life, you can start to test and prove that such school-based ideas about writing are not accurate.

ACTIVITY 3A | Write Reflectively

Try to remember a time when a rule or rules you were taught about writing by one authority (teacher, parent, boss) were changed or contradicted by another authority. What was the rule? Did you understand the reason for the change or contradiction at the time? Were you bothered by it? How well was the difference (and the reason for it) explained to you?

Consider what makes writing work when you are texting your friends. Do they think your texts are good if you use full sentences, correct grammar, and spell all words correctly? Probably not — and quite likely, the opposite. If you did those things, texting would take a long time, and your friends might make fun of you. Why? Because good writing is writing that is appropriate to the situation, your purpose as a writer, and the technology you use to write (in this case, typing on a phone makes it inefficient to spell out all the words and write in complete sentences).

Of course, you can't use the rules of good texting when you write job application letters, your history exam, fanfiction, or poetry in your journal. Sometimes, the rules about writing you learned in school do hold true; when you apply for a job, for example, you want to show that you have a good grasp of formal language, that you can punctuate sentences and write clearly, and that you pay attention to details and go back and edit what you've written before sharing it with someone who could choose whether or not to hire you.

But even in cases where more formal and "correct" writing is appropriate, what counts as formal and correct can differ widely across contexts. For example, scientists often write using the passive voice. (In other words, their sentences don't necessarily tell readers who did the action; for example, they may write "Tests were conducted.") One major reason is that scientists value objectivity and group discovery, so the passive voice helps focus on what was done or learned, rather than individuals who did it. But in the humanities, writers are very often discouraged from using the passive voice and told to write to emphasize the action and the person doing the acting.

For example, you might hear, "Shakespeare plays with the meaning of words" in a literature class. This is because in fields such as literature and history and philosophy and art, it really does matter who performed an action. Or, to provide another example, think of an investigative reporter with a secret source. The reporter wouldn't write, "John Jones revealed that Hillary Clinton destroyed her e-mails" if the reporter was protecting her sources. One way of concealing the source would be to use passive voice: "Hillary Clinton was accused of destroying her e-mails." So even though both passive and active sentences are grammatically correct, they may be appropriate or inappropriate depending on the situation and readers for whom you are writing.

As you might have guessed by now, the writer isn't the only person making meaning from writing. Readers make meaning, too, based on their own prior experiences, the purpose of the writing, the situation in which they are reading it, and their values and the values of the group(s) they belong to. Your history teacher might find the language you use to write a lab report so unappealing that he or she can't really make a lot of sense of it, and your great-grandmother might find your text messages offensive or incoherent. Readers of the reporter's story on Hillary Clinton might build all sorts of speculation around the passive sentence that doesn't reveal its source: They might think the reporter is dishonest and making it up, or they might conclude that a political opponent is planting an untrue story, or that the newspaper is politically biased — or something else, depending on their experiences, politics, etc. So when you write, it's important to remember not just what you want to say, but who you want to make meaning for and with.

And, of course, today your writing might circulate among many different groups of people whom you may never have thought about as a result of social media and other online platforms. Something you wrote for one purpose and audience might be really effective initially but might not work at all once it is communicated to a different audience at another time. Many a politician or business executive, for example, makes one statement privately to a narrow set of constituents, such as close staff or shareholders — as happened to Mitt Romney, who in the 2012 presidential campaign was secretly recorded calling out 47 percent of voters as people who don't take responsibility for their lives — only to have that private statement become public, and find they must explain it when it is circulated online to an unintended and unsympathetic audience.

This "***contingency***" of writing — the fact that what makes writing good depends on circumstances — can be a hard threshold concept to learn because you've been in school for so long, being taught rules that were treated as universal even though they were actually only contingent — specific to that time and place. However, if you test this threshold concept against your daily experiences writing across different contexts and technologies, you can quickly start to see how accurate it is. And if you can understand this threshold concept, it can help you start to make sense of things that may otherwise really frustrate you. Instead of being upset that your history teacher and your biology teacher want you to write differently, and being confused about "who's right," you can recognize that the differences stem from different ideas about what good writing is — and these ideas are related to what historians and biologists do with writing. They aren't trying to frustrate you; they are trying to help you write like historians or biologists, and sound credible when you do. In other words, understanding this threshold concept can really empower you to see that many kinds of writing can be good, and that you may be better at some kinds than others.

CONTINGENT

One of the claims of this book is that meaning is *contingent*; that is, it depends. In other words, meaning is conditional. For example, "good writing" depends upon the context, purpose, and audience. Ideas about meaning as being contingent and conditional are taken up most directly in Chapter 4, where authors claim that meaning depends on context and that principles for good communication depend on the specific situation and are not universal.

ACTIVITY 3B | Try Thinking Differently

Writing researchers frequently hear students say that they dislike writing for school because it seems to be mostly about following rules and structures, and being judged for failure to observe all the rules correctly. In contrast, students often report preferring self-sponsored writing outside of school (sometimes they call it "creative" writing, sometimes "personal" writing) because they are free to write whatever they like without being constrained by rule structures.

Try this thought experiment: What would your school writing look like if you could approach it as you do "home" or personal writing, and if you could expect the same kind of responses that you receive to your home and school writing? What would you do differently in your school writing? Would you spend more time on it or treat it differently? How would your writing itself change?

TC Writing Is a Process, All Writers Have More to Learn, and Writing Is Not Perfectible

In considering that "good" writing depends on a lot of different variables, you start to imagine what you are able to do with writing, and to recognize that you are able to do some things better than others. You might have a pretty easy time writing lab reports, job application letters, and texts to your friends, but a much harder time writing a paper about *Moby Dick* or writing a poem. One reason for this is the threshold concept that what you do and who you are as a writer is informed by your prior experiences. You might have had more practice with certain kinds of writing, you might be fact-oriented, you might have read a lot of nonfiction books but not many novels. There are many reasons why some kinds of writing come more easily to you than other kinds.

ACTIVITY 4A | Write Reflectively

Think of something about writing (not related to grammar or "flow") that you wish you were more confident about. (Grammar and flow are two things students commonly say they want to work on; we want to push you to consider other elements and aspects of writing.) When you've come up with the thing you'd like to work on, explain why: What makes you uncomfortable with what you know about it or how you write right now? What do you imagine you could be doing differently or better?

The good news is that this threshold concept is true for everyone: *all writers* have more to learn. And this concept will remain true for each writer's entire life: Writers *always* have more to learn. Learning is the key — and writers *can always learn to be a little better* at writing something that

is not their strong suit. You should feel a kind of freedom in this realization: If you feel like you have a lot more to learn about writing, you're not "behind" or lacking; you're normal.

Writing is a process. It takes time and practice. Writing things that are new to you, writing longer texts, and writing with new kinds of technology all take practice. And no matter how much you practice, what you write will never be perfect. This is, in large part, due to what we discussed in the previous threshold concept: Readers make meaning out of what you write, and the situation in which your writing is read makes a difference in how effective the writing is. There is no such thing as perfect writing; writing is not in the category of things that are perfectible. Rather, it can grow, change, be different, and work for better or worse for the purposes for which you are trying to use it. Still, there are strategies and habits that can help you write more easily, more quickly, more effectively — and asking for feedback is, of course, always a good way to improve.

This understanding of writing should be very liberating because it helps you recognize that good writers aren't born that way; they're made through practice and circumstance. Someone might be a good writer at one kind of thing (like writing horror novels) but not very good at another kind of thing (like writing grant proposals or poems). How you feel about yourself as a writer, and what you do as a writer, can change a lot for the better if you realize that no writers are perfect, good writing depends on the situation, all writers have more to learn, and you can learn things about writing and how to write that can help you write more effectively. If you can stop thinking of yourself as a "bad writer" or a person "who just can't write," you can be freed up to try new things with writing.

ACTIVITY 4B | Try Thinking Differently

If writing is *not perfectible*, then writing is not about "getting it right" (either the first time, or in later tries). If writing is not about "getting it right," then what *is* it about? If you're not prioritizing *perfection* in your writing, what are you prioritizing instead? Try to keep this in mind when you

Threshold Concepts That Assist Academic Reading and Writing

Many of the readings in this book are about research, and almost all of the individual pieces in this book have been published someplace else before. In most cases, they were published in scholarly journals and books — where expert writing researchers are telling each other about studies they've conducted on writing (as well as literacy, language, discourse, and technology) and what they've found.

Reading texts that are written by expert researchers for other experts is not easy even for your instructor, and such writing won't be easy or quick reading for you at first, either. So we will next introduce you to two threshold concepts that will explicitly help you work with the material in the rest of this book — and in the rest of your academic life. These threshold concepts are about ***genres*** (recurring kinds of texts) and about the kind of reading that you will do in this book. By learning some principles of genre, you'll be able to more quickly recognize patterns in what even hard-to-read texts are doing, which helps you know what they mean. And by reading *rhetorically*,

understanding the readings as people talking to one another in ongoing conversations, you'll have strategies to help you make the most sense you can out of unfamiliar material.

GENRE

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Throughout the rest of this chapter, we'll use the term ***rhetorical*** more and more. Its meaning, which is complex, will gradually become clearer to you the more we (and you) use it, both here as well as later in the book (especially Chapter 4). For now, we'll simply say that when you see the word "rhetorical" you should think *communication* — anything that has to do with the way people interact, communicate, and persuade each other (make up their minds, and change them). A ***rhetorical situation*** is any moment in which people are communicating. So why don't we just call it a "communication situation"? Because communication is the *activity* that people are engaged in, but ***rhetoric*** is the set of principles they're using (often unconsciously) to do it — to shape their communication and make decisions about it. To remind ourselves that writers and speakers are using these principles of rhetoric and doing rhetorical work, we often call them ***rhetors***. Remember

that these boldface terms all appear in the glossary at the end of this book, which you can turn to any time you need a refresher or additional clarification on how we're using a term.

RHETORICAL

Rhetorical refers to a phenomenon such as human interaction that has the qualities of being situated, motivated, interactive, epistemic, embodied, and contingent. (See the definition of **rhetoric**.) *Rhetorical study*, for example, is the investigation of human communication as situated, motivated, interactive, epistemic, embodied, and contingent. *Rhetorical reading* involves reading a text as situated, motivated, etc. *Rhetorical analysis* is a way of analyzing texts to find what choices their embodied **rhetor** (speaker or writer) made based on their purpose and motivation, their situatedness and context, and how they interact with and make new knowledge for their audience.

RHETORICAL SITUATION

Rhetorical situation is the particular circumstance of a given instance of communication or **discourse**. The rhetorical situation includes **exigence** (the *need or reason* for the communication), **context** (the *circumstances* that give rise to the *exigence*, including location in time/history and space/place/position), **rhetor** (the originator of the communication — its speaker or writer), and **audience** (the auditor, listener, or reader of the rhetor's discourse). The rhetorical situation is a moment in a larger rhetorical **ecology**, the network of relationships among rhetors in the situation.

RHETORIC

Rhetoric is the study or performance of human interaction and communication or the product(s) of that interaction and communication. Because most human interaction is *persuasive* by nature — that is, we're trying to convince each other of things, even when we say something simple like "that feels nice" — one way to think of rhetoric is as the study of persuasion. *Rhetoric* can refer to *a field of knowledge* on this subject, to systematic *explanations for* and *predictions of* how persuasion works, or to the *performance art* of human interaction and persuasion itself.

Rhetoric always has to do with these specific principles:

1. Human communication, or **discourse**, is **situated** in a *moment,* a particular time and place, which is part of a larger **ecology**. That moment and ecology are the **context** of the communication. A particular text takes it meaning in part from its context, so knowledge of the context is necessary in order to know the text's meaning. For example, "Help me!" means one thing when your mom is standing next to a van full of groceries and another when she's standing next to a van with a flat tire. Her *discourse* is *situated* in a particular context.

2. Communication is **motivated** by particular **rhetor**s' *purposes*, needs, and values. No communication is *un*motivated.

3. Communication is *interactional*, "back-and-forth" between rhetors. Readers actually *complete* the meaning of a writer's text. Successful writers therefore think carefully about who their **audience** is and what the audience values and needs.

4. Communication is **epistemic**, which means that it *creates new knowledge*. We often talk about "reporting" or "transmitting" information as if we can find information and pass it along unaltered. But we actually *can't* transmit information without altering it, so our communication makes new knowledge as it goes.

5. Communication is **embodied** and material, meaning that it exists not simply in the mental realm of ideas but *takes place via material bodies* that themselves shape the meaning of the communication.

6. Communication is shaped by *technology*. "Technology" simply refers to *use of tools*, and it is certainly possible to communicate without technology (through purely organic means such as by voice). Practically speaking, though, almost all communication in any culture in which you're reading this book is assisted and shaped by technology. Rhetoric teaches us to look for how technology influences even communication that doesn't directly use it.

7. Communication is *contingent*, meaning that what we consider *good* communication depends on the circumstances and context in which it happens. Because communication depends on context, we can't make universal rules about what makes good communication.

RHETOR

Originally (in Greek) a *public speaker, rhetor* means *one who engages in rhetorical interaction or* **discourse**. *Writer* and *speaker* are common synonyms.

TC Genres: Writing Responds to Repeating Situations through Recognizable Forms

In this book you will find types of readings and texts you may never have encountered before. These strange encounters happen to you not just in this class, of course, but throughout your life. There are many different ways to write about things, and as you encounter new situations and groups of people who use writing in different ways to accomplish their goals, you will always encounter new kinds of texts that you haven't encountered before. Sometimes this can be fun (as in the earlier example of getting your first phone and learning about texting, or finding Wattpad and learning about fanfiction), sometimes it can be frustrating (maybe reading a novel from an earlier time period), and sometimes it can seem easy but then turn out to be difficult (as with resumes and cover letters).

All of these different kinds of texts have names because they are kinds of writing that recur, happening over and over because they facilitate particular functions in life. Resumes, wedding invitations, birthday cards, parking tickets, textbooks, novels, text messages, magazine cover

stories — these are all constantly recurring kinds of writing. In other words, if a particular writing situation and resulting need for communication happens again and again, prompting writers to respond (for example, a need to apply for a job), then certain kinds of writing come into existence to respond to that recurring situation (like resumes). We call such recurring text-types *genres*, which are "typified rhetorical actions in response to recurrent situations or situation-types."[4]

ACTIVITY 5A | Write Reflectively

Take out the syllabi that you've collected from your different classes during the first week or two of school this year. Look at them all and then answer these questions:

- What *situation* calls for the syllabus to be written?
- What *content* is typically contained in a syllabus?
- What does a syllabus *look like; what shape* does a syllabus take?
- How is a syllabus *organized*?
- What *tone* is used? Is the language *formal* or *informal*?

You'll notice that although syllabi are similar, they can be very different, too. What is the *common denominator* — what do you think makes a syllabus a syllabus, even though individual syllabi differ?

Genres do a lot of work for you as a writer. Think about the situation we discussed before the activity: People have to apply for jobs all the time, and they have a pretty good idea of how to do this through resumes and cover letters because so many other people before them have done the same thing. But what if there was no agreed upon way for people to apply for jobs? What if no conventions for doing that had ever come into being? You as a job seeker would have no idea what you should do when you want a job; actually, much worse, every single option would be open to you. You could sing a song, write a haiku, send a carrier pigeon, make a painting … really, you could do anything, and you'd have no way to know what option was best. It would take a really long time to do anything. This wouldn't be efficient, and it would be very stressful for you as a rhetor.

So genres emerge because rhetors start to find ways to respond to the recurring situation that seem to work pretty well, and other rhetors keep using them and tweaking them. Because job seekers found that listing all their previous jobs on a piece of paper was helpful, and because employers found this helpful too, people kept doing it. There are a lot of ways to make a resume (check out the range of templates for resumes in your word-processing software), but there are some limitations that at least make it easier for you as a resume writer to know that you could do *this* (for example, organize by date) or *this* (for example, organize by skill) but *not that* (for example, write a haiku). In the movie *The Patriot*, Mel Gibson teaches his children to shoot, telling them, "Aim small, miss small." In a way, this is what genres help you do when you write; they give you a limited area to aim for so that you have a better chance of success.

There are a lot of reasons to think about this threshold concept that *writers over time create "typical" or expected responses to situations* that come up again and again. For one thing,

understanding this helps you look for patterns when you encounter new situations and new kinds of texts. The genre might look strange and new to you, but if it's a typical or expected response to a recurring situation, then that means you can find out what the recurring situation is and what previous responses have looked like. In other words, you aren't completely on your own in a strange world. There are maps, if you know to look for them and can figure out how to read them.

Think for a minute about this idea of genres as maps to new situations. For maps to work, you have to ask certain questions. *Where am I and where do I want to go?* If you don't know these things, you'll find yourself looking at a map of the entire world that is simply not helpful in your current situation. If you know that you are in Orlando and you want to go to Key West, then you know that there are maps for this situation. You'll want a map of Florida, particularly southeast Florida. But you also need to know what to look for on the map and what the various symbols mean. You'll need to know how to read this map. You'll need to know north from south, east from west, highways from back roads, toll roads from free roads. When you first start driving, you might end up getting lost a few times before you can make sense of the map.

The other thing to remember about maps is that they change. They change for all sorts of reasons, including technology. You might never have used a paper map before, since today's maps are on smartphones. You might never have had to look at a paper map and its key to figure out what you are seeing, because your smartphone does this for you. Maps change, and people have to figure out how to read new kinds of maps. Ask your parents or grandparents whether they find it easier to read paper maps or maps on their smartphones, and you'll see that what seems easy to you is not easy or obvious to everyone else. What's on the maps changes across time (as roads have been paved, as federal highways have been created) and for different purposes (sailors use completely different maps than vacationers, and both sailors and vacationers use maps that are completely different from those used by forest rangers).

Maps on smartphones that tell you what to do have some advantages over paper maps — they make you do less work, there is less for you to figure out, you can drive and listen to directions at the same time. But relying too much on your smartphone can have serious disadvantages as well. For example, if your phone dies or you lose service, you won't have any idea where you are. You might not know north from south, or what to do with the paper map that you have to stop and buy at the gas station in the middle of the Everglades. So relying on them without thinking for yourself can leave you stranded and lost. Genres are the same way. They are maps, but not maps that you should rely on rigidly without thinking for yourself about what to do in any writing situation.

Genres, just like maps, are extremely helpful *if* you know how to read them and remember that they change across time and for different purposes. Like maps, genres aren't rigid and formulaic. You can always do something different with writing, just like you can choose a different kind of map, or a different route on your map: "Rules of a genre do not specify precisely how a rhetorical act is to be performed. *A genre is not formulaic*; there is always another strategy that a rhetor can use to meet the requirements of the situation. *But a genre establishes bounded options for rhetors in situations.*"[5]

What questions should you ask when you encounter a new genre? Try to discern the similarities in rhetorical situations (the situations calling for the genre you are encountering) and the rhetoric constructed in response to those situations (the genre itself). According to Sonja Foss, there are four kinds of questions to ask when looking at a new or unfamiliar genre:

- *Questions about situational elements:* What conditions (situations) call for the genre? What prompts this sort of document to be written? What is the ***exigence*** — the need or reason for a given action or communication?

  EXIGENCE

  Exigence is the *need or reason* for a given action or communication. All communication exists for a reason. For example, if you say, "Please turn on the lights," we assume the *reason* you say this is that there's not enough light for your needs — in other words, the *exigence* of the situation is that you need more light.

- *Questions about substantive characteristics (content):* What sort of content (substance) is typically contained in this genre? What do these texts tend to talk about or say?
- *Questions about stylistic characteristics (form):* What form does this sort of genre take? What does it look like? How is it organized? What language does it use? What tone does it take?
- *Questions about the organizing principle:* What makes this genre what it is? What are the common denominators of the genre? What makes a resume a resume, for example? Of each characteristic that you identify in the first three questions above, you might ask, "If I took out this characteristic, would it still be recognizable as this genre?"

GENRE FEATURES OF SCHOLARLY ARTICLES: JOHN SWALES'S "CREATE A RESEARCH SPACE" (CARS) MODEL OF RESEARCH INTRODUCTIONS

Researcher John Swales, who worked on genre analysis of scholarly articles like the ones in this book, looked at thousands of examples of the articles that researchers write to see what their introductions might share in common. He found that introductions contain similar "moves" that you as a reader can look for in order to help orient yourself when you start reading. On the next few pages, we provide a summary of his research specifically to help you navigate some of the scholarly articles you will encounter.

Sometimes getting through the introduction of a research article can be the most difficult part of reading it. In his CARS model, which we have adapted from his book *Genre Analysis,*[6] Swales describes three "moves" that almost all research introductions make. We're providing a summary of Swales's model here as a kind of shorthand to help you in both reading research articles and writing them. Identifying these moves in introductions to the articles you read in this book will help you understand the authors' projects better from the outset. When you write your own papers, making the same moves yourself will help you present your own arguments clearly and convincingly. So read through the summary now, but be sure to return to it often for help in understanding the selections in the rest of this book.

Move 1: Establishing a Territory

In this move, the author sets the context for his or her research, providing necessary background on the topic. This move includes one or more of the following steps:

Step 1: Claiming Centrality

The author asks the ***discourse community*** (the audience for the paper) to accept that the research about to be reported is part of a lively, significant, or well-established research area. To claim centrality the author might write:

DISCOURSE COMMUNITY

> Scholars continue to debate the meaning of *discourse community*, as the selections in this book suggest. For the sake of simplicity, we will use John Swales's definition from his 1990 book, *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. According to Swales, a *discourse community* is made up of individuals who share common goals agreed upon by most members; further, it has "mechanisms of intercommunication among its members," "uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback," has and uses "one or more genres" that help the group achieve its shared goals, "has acquired some specific lexis," and has "a reasonable ratio" of "novices and experts" (24–27).

"Recently there has been a spate of interest in …"

"Knowledge of X has great importance for …"

This step is used widely across the academic disciplines, though less in the physical sciences than in the social sciences and the humanities.

and/or

Step 2: Making Topic Generalizations

The author makes statements about current knowledge, practices, or phenomena in the field. For example:

"The properties of X are still not completely understood."

"X is a common finding in patients with …"

and/or

Step 3: Reviewing Previous Items of Research

The author relates what has been found on the topic and who found it. For example:

"Both Johnson and Morgan claim that the biographical facts have been misrepresented."

"Several studies have suggested that … (Gordon, 2003; Ratzinger, 2009)."

"Reading to children early and often seems to have a positive long-term correlation with grades in English courses (Jones, 2002; Strong, 2009)."

In citing the research of others, the author may use *integral citation* (citing the author's name in the sentence, as in the first example above) or *nonintegral citation* (citing the author's name in parentheses only, as in the second and third examples above). The use of different types of verbs (e.g., *reporting verbs* such as "shows" or "claims") and verb tenses (past, present perfect, or present) varies across disciplines.

Move 2: Establishing a Niche

In this move, the author argues that there is an open "niche" in the existing research, a space that needs to be filled through additional research. The author can establish a niche in one of four ways:

Option 1. Counter-Claiming

The author refutes or challenges earlier research by making a counter-claim. For example:

"While Jones and Riley believe X method to be accurate, a close examination demonstrates their method to be flawed."

Option 2. Indicating a Gap

The author demonstrates that earlier research does not sufficiently address all existing questions or problems. For example:

"While existing studies have clearly established X, they have not addressed Y."

Option 3. Question-Raising

The author asks questions about previous research, suggesting that additional research needs to be done. For example:

"While Jones and Morgan have established X, these findings raise a number of questions, including …"

Option 4. Continuing a Tradition

The author presents the research as a useful extension of existing research. For example:

"Earlier studies seemed to suggest X. To verify this finding, more work is urgently needed."

Move 3: Occupying a Niche

In this move, the author turns the niche established in Move 2 into the *research space* that he or she will fill; that is, the author demonstrates how he or she will substantiate the counterclaim made, fill the gap identified, answer the question(s) asked, or continue the research tradition. The author makes this move in several steps, described below. The initial step (1A or 1B) is obligatory, though many research articles stop after that step.

Step 1A: Outlining Purposes

The author indicates the main purpose(s) of the current article. For example:

"In this article I argue …"

"The present research tries to clarify …"

or

Step 1B: Announcing Present Research

The author describes the research in the current article. For example:

"This paper describes three separate studies conducted between March 2008 and January 2009."

Step 2: Announcing Principal Findings

The author presents the main conclusions of his or her research. For example:

"The results of the study suggest …"

"When we examined X, we discovered …"

Step 3: Indicating the Structure of the Research Article

The author previews the organization of the article. For example:

"This paper is structured as follows …"

ACTIVITY 5B | Try Thinking Differently

Many students have been taught a rigid formula for how to write an essay for school. One extremely common formula is the "five paragraph essay" (intro, three body paragraphs, conclusion). Some students have also been taught a formula for what sentences each *paragraph* should contain. In a "Schaeffer" paragraph, for instance, you would have been taught to use five sentences: topic, concrete detail, commentary, commentary, and closing.

Consider whether you've been taught a specific formula for writing essays; then try actively changing the formula, moving from a (false) universal "rule" about what the essay must contain to a more genre-like sense of "mapping" where you have a guideline that can be shaped to fit specific circumstances. For example, if you were taught a rule about where the "thesis statement" must go in an essay, think about how you could *change* that rule if you knew it didn't always apply. What would happen if you put the thesis statement someplace else? What would happen if you turned the thesis statement into a focused question? What's your rule, how would you change it, and why?

Look Forward to the Rest of This Book

Try asking questions we borrowed from Sonja Foss (pp. 20–21) about genres when you approach new situations and genres, including in this class and in this book: Why were these texts written and for whom? What content do they usually seem to contain? What do they tend to look like? How do they tend to be organized? Many of the readings in this book are long and somewhat difficult because they are written for audiences such as teachers and researchers. Don't be alarmed by this. Recognize that scholarly articles are a genre, and each instance of a genre has similarities with other instances of that genre, even across apparent differences. Pick a few of the scholarly articles in this book and ask the above questions about them before you dive into reading one in depth.

TC Rhetorical Reading: Texts Are People Talking

This book asks you to read some complicated, difficult, perhaps "dry" texts — the same kinds that Swales explains with his CARS model in the previous section. He analyzes the genre-based ("generic") paths that scholarly articles follow in establishing a territory, establishing a niche, and occupying the niche in order to *contribute* to knowledge in a field. Most of the readings in this book do that. In this section, we want you to think more about *why* the CARS model exists, and works, because considering this will help you greatly in making sense of and finding value in the texts in this book. It will also introduce you to the threshold concept, broadly applicable beyond school, that *when we read texts, we are interacting with other people*. Texts are people talking.

ACTIVITY 6A | Write Reflectively

First, make a list of some kinds of texts that you easily think of as people talking to each other (example: texting). Second, make a list of some texts that you haven't thought about before as people talking (example: textbooks). Try to systematically think through all the kinds of texts you regularly encounter in your everyday life.

When you've made these two lists, try to explain why you see the texts this way. What do the texts that you see as people talking have in common? How about the texts you haven't thought of as people talking before? In particular, why do you think the texts on the nonconversation list don't seem to be about people communicating with each other?

The CARS model works because scholarly texts represent turns in an *ongoing conversation* — they are people talking back and forth to each other. At first that idea might sound obvious — *of course* texts are people talking. But stop and think about how we actually act around texts every day, and you'll see that we're much more likely to treat "school" writing — textbooks, articles, reference materials such as encyclopedias and dictionaries, anything you could be tested on — as *information* that *just exists*, rather than as *people testing new ideas out on each other*. When was the last time you read a dictionary definition — or a textbook — and thought, "Someone is trying to *talk to me* to *persuade me* of these ideas"? When was the last time you tried to picture the actual writer of a *WebMD* article, or considered the hobbies of whoever wrote the last *Wikipedia* article you read? Most of us never give these writers a second thought. Have you noticed the names of any of the authors of the textbooks in your classes this term — or did you just think of the words as coming from a book, not from people? Given how we usually interact with school texts, we think you will agree that it is not such a commonsense idea to say that scholarly texts are people speaking to each other in an ongoing conversation. But that is what is happening.

When you're in a face-to-face conversation, human instinct is to know or find out who you're talking to, and why they want to talk. But as readers we've been taught to think differently about some written texts — not to pay attention to who's talking, or why. Early schooling tends to teach us to think of facts and information as existing independent of *people* — to suggest that knowledge is independent of the people thinking about it. One of the threshold concepts we want you to encounter in your college writing class is a new way of thinking about texts: that *texts are people talking*; that rather than texts having a single fixed meaning, *readers construct a text's meaning from interaction between the words of the text, the ideas already in the reader's mind, and the context* in which the text is written and read. *People* are where the meaning in texts comes from — not from the texts themselves. As rhetors, we *construct* a meaning for each text we read. This is different from the typical assumption that meaning exists *in the text* and when we read we simply "absorb" or "pick up" that preexisting meaning.

How do we know that a fixed meaning isn't "in" writing texts? Just as is the case with writing, reading is something people not only do, but *study*. The "physics" of reading are pretty fascinating. For example, when we track readers' eyes moving across the page they're reading, we discover that fluent readers don't actually read word by word. They treat texts like parkour experts treat buildings, covering ground (encountering words) in big leaps (reading whole phrases or lines at a time) and using their momentum (fast reading) to glide over "sketchy" areas where the footing isn't good (where the meaning isn't immediately clear).

And just as with writing, we have explanations (*theories*) of reading that help us make sense of the research. One theory and term that helps us remember the actual nature of reading as constructing meaning is *rhetorical reading*. The term "rhetorical" emphasizes the way that human interaction depends on context and situation — using this term reminds us that meaning comes from *interaction* between text, context, writers, and readers with specific backgrounds in

specific situations. To better prepare you for reading the selections in this book, and how reading is rhetorical, we can start by asking, why does it matter and what does it mean that "texts are people talking"?

People Have Motives

Nonfiction texts say what they say because their writers are motivated by a variety of purposes. If you've written a resume, you already know this: Part of your choice of how to write the resume is based on your motivation for writing it (presumably, getting a job you want). So we will say the resume is a *motivated* text. If you were to click through every nonfiction text you can think of, you wouldn't be able to find a nonmotivated one. Thus, you will construct one meaning if you ignore the motivated nature of a text — what its writer's particular motives and purposes were in shaping it as they did — and you will construct another, richer and wiser, meaning if you do pay attention to motive. You'll also construct different meanings of a text if you ascribe different motivations to it. Does "It's cold in here!" mean the speaker is complaining, or asking for the heat to be turned up? Whether you think it means one, the other, or both will depend heavily on what you think motivates the statement to begin with.

Texts Are Called into Being by a Need Shared between Writers and Readers

One important concept for reading rhetorically (and one which Keith Grant-Davie's piece in Chapter 4 explains further) is ***exigence***, or whatever need for the text to exist is built into the rhetorical situation. The exigence for a *Wikipedia* article on "spaceflight" is not too complicated: (1) spaceflight is a concept in need of explaining; (2) *Wikipedia* tries to be a thorough and complete source of explanations of concepts; so (3) *Wikipedia* needs an article on spaceflight. The "situation" in which people use *Wikipedia* to gain a quick understanding of a huge range of subjects "calls" the spaceflight article into being. Exigence is not quite the same as a writer's motives, though exigence and motives can overlap. In this example, the motives of the writer of the spaceflight article might be (1) to show what they know about spaceflight, (2) to write a really nicely done article on spaceflight, and (3) to make *Wikipedia* more complete. There are interesting gaps between the way the situation calls the article into being, and the writer's motives for "answering" that call. As with motives themselves, when readers seek out the exigence for a given text — why is there a text at all, since texts don't write themselves and it is easier not to write than to write — they construct a different and fuller meaning of the text than when they don't consider exigence at all.

EXIGENCE

> *Exigence* is the *need or reason* for a given action or communication. All communication exists for a reason. For example, if you say, "Please turn on the lights," we assume the *reason* you say this is that there's not enough light for your needs — in other words, the *exigence* of the situation is that you need more light.

Readers Have Needs, Values, and Expectations of Texts

Readers of resume or *Wikipedia* genres meet those texts with at least four kinds of knowledge or ideas already formed. The first is simply the experiential background knowledge they have of the world as a whole and of how texts and reading work. Circles are round, trees grow upward, there's no air in space, etc. And again as with writing, your current practices and expectations of reading are shaped by your past reading experiences. If you are used to a particular genre being dull and loathsome, you will expect another example of that genre to keep being so … and your mind will make it so.

The other three kinds of knowledge readers bring to texts are much more specific to the interaction, or conversation, they and the text are taking part in:

- The reader has a particular *need* related to that text. They need a resume in order to help them make a hire, so they need the resume to convey a particular range of information.
- The reader has specific sets of *values* — some readers, for example, might value conciseness while others might more highly value depth of information.
- The reader has specific *expectations* for what the text will do and be, many of which are genre-based. A resume should look like a resume, a *Wikipedia* article should work like a *Wikipedia* article. Some other expectations come with a given situation and context. If you're reading a *Wikipedia* article on spaceflight in 2015, you expect it to talk about not just the 1960s NASA moonflight program, but about current private endeavors like SpaceX and SpaceShipOne.

What do readers' needs, values, and expectations mean for reading as conversation, and for reading the articles in this book? Most writers and readers who have graduated from high school have an instinctive awareness that writers shape their texts to meet their readers' expectations. When you write a resume, you spell-check it extensively. Why? Because, as you read earlier in this chapter, that writing context sees "good" writing as including extremely careful attention to detail in order to create typo-free writing. You know that readers *expect* a resume to be free of typos, that readers don't *value* the work of job applicants without this attention to detail, and that readers believe they *need* this genre to help assess whether an applicant is capable of that kind of attention to detail. So as the writer, you proofread the resume — *anticipating* the reader's needs, values, and expectations, and trying to meet them.

In turn, as a reader, part of the way you're constructing the meaning of a text is by trying to get a sense of *how* the writer has anticipated the reader. Texts carry traces of this anticipation. For example, academics are very skeptical readers and don't like overstatements or overgeneralizations. Knowing this, writers for academic readers tend to *hedge* their claims by using *qualifiers* such as "might," "may," "probably," "sometimes," "perhaps," and other words to indicate they're not claiming certainty. That's a trace of a writer anticipating a reader's values and accommodating them.

Context Shapes the Construction of a Text's Meaning

Context tells you even more about how the writer probably tried to anticipate the reader. An extended example: 2015 and 2016 saw a terrible string of police shootings of unarmed or already-arrested suspects. Increasingly, such shootings are captured on video that is released to the public before investigations of the shootings are completed. The videos, news coverage, and endless public commentary create a specific context into which official investigative reports of a shooting are later released. If readers of the report know of this context in which the report was written, they can use that context to make some educated guesses about why some aspects of the report are written the way they are — because the writers anticipate the context as well, and shape their text to meet it. If a video makes it look to the viewing public as if the shooting victim was raising his hands, and that belief has entered the context of the overall dispute, then a report finding that the victim was reaching for a weapon will anticipate the counterargument already in the context and be written to address that specific context. As a reader, when you construct the meaning of such a report, you'll construct different meanings if you look for ways the text has been written to fit its context, versus if you just assume that the text has no context at all and that the writers didn't think so either.

That example leads us to a final principle of rhetorical reading: That the meaning we construct of texts depends in part on their contexts. In the same way that the utterance "It's really cold in here" means "Please turn up the heat" in one context (a physically cold room where people have access to climate controls), "I wish we could turn up the heat" in another context (same room, but no access to climate controls), and "Wow, the people in this room really don't like each other!" in a third context (where the room is not cold at all but people are visibly "chilly" toward one another or have a public history of disliking one another), a text's context shapes the meaning we construct of the text. Put again in terms of conversation: Context shapes what the conversation means.

ACTIVITY 6B | Try Thinking Differently

Most of us, in our everyday approaches to reading, assume that meaning "lives in" the text we're reading, and that we just "absorb" or "extract" or "see" the meaning that's there. When you read, try thinking instead that you're *making* the meaning of the text, building it from the ground up. To help you see from this perspective, ask these questions of what you're reading:

- Who is the writer of this text? What are the writer's motives for writing it?
- How does this text emerge from some "need" in the situation shared between you as the reader and the text's writer?
- What needs, values, and expectations do you bring to the text you're reading?
- How is context — the situation in which the text is written and that in which it will be read, its history, and your history as a reader — shaping the meaning you build from the text?
- How can this text be understood as a "turn" in a conversation? Can you see yourself as talking with, interacting with, its writer?

Look Forward to the Rest of This Book

A number of texts in this book focus explicitly on reading or connect to it. Reading these selections and considering their ideas is one way that you will continue to stretch your thinking about how reading works. But we also want to encourage you to look for places in all the readings where authors refer to other authors in this book or elsewhere. Start making notes when you see authors directly or indirectly responding to something that another author has written. You'll start to see this happening frequently, especially (but not only) at the beginning of scholarly articles when they are making the moves that John Swales called "establishing a territory" and "establishing a niche." See if this helps you see that the articles you are reading aren't really as "dry" as you might have feared they would be. We've included author photos with each reading to make it even easier for you to imagine the words you are reading being spoken by actual people, who are talking to other actual people, some of whom you have read, and whose faces you can see. We've also included images of the book or journal covers where the readings originally appeared to give you a sense of the publication context.