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.

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.

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 write from now on. How will this change in focus impact how you write and how you feel about yourself as a writer?

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.

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.

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

[4]Freedman, Aviva. "Situating 'Genre' and Situated Genres: Understanding Student Writing from a Genre Perspective." *Genre and Writing: Issues, Arguments, Alternatives*, edited by Wendy Bishop and Hans Ostrom, Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1997, pp. 179–89. Also referenced in this section: Bazerman, Charles. "The Life of Genre, the Life in the Classroom." *Genre and Writing: Issues, Arguments, Alternatives*, pp. 19–26.

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?
- *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?

[5]Foss, Sonja. *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*. 4th ed., Waveland Press, 2008, pp. 231, 255.

- *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:

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

"Knowledge of X has great importance for . . ."

[6]Swales, John M. *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings.* Cambridge UP, 1990.