

WORKING KNOWLEDGE: COMPOSITION AND
THE TEACHING OF PROFESSIONAL WRITING

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2008

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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The curricular and research project called professional writing in the academy is currently held at some remove from the institution. This dissertation argues for a reconsideration of professional writing as advanced composition, a move that can invigorate both composition studies and the teaching of professional writing.

I argue that professional writing, an area of instruction that developed alongside composition in the 19th and 20th centuries, can benefit from an infusion of the theory that shapes some of the notable trends in composition studies today. Doing so makes possible a professional writing pedagogy that is centered on students and student writing, that offers a rich understanding of the writing process and the ways that writing works, that explores intertextuality, and that allows student writers to connect with what can be at stake for professional writers. In return, the teaching of professional writing offers space to think through some of the current tensions in composition, such as the continuing resistance to teaching what some see as service courses. The teaching of professional writing—as advanced composition rather than as a course that is only connected with preparation for the workforce—is one path toward defining and enacting the relevance of composition studies and can allow the field of composition studies to carve out an interesting and rich area of work and inquiry at the undergraduate level.

By offering a study of the textual presence of 19th and 20th century business and technical writing textbooks in the U.S., this dissertation documents the remarkable stability of some moves in the teaching of professional writing. I argue that textbooks are significant artifacts that both represent and shape ways of approaching the teaching of professional writing. This study also discusses persistent tensions in composition studies that tend to marginalize professional writing and explores the ways in which some prominent features of current composition theory and practice can productively inform the teaching of professional writing. Finally, the dissertation explores the implications of the preceding chapters for defining a pedagogy of professional writing and for creating and administering a professional writing program.

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PREFACE

I could not have written this dissertation without the help of many people. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank those who most directly contributed to this work.

My committee was generous with their time under tight deadlines and sometimes difficult circumstances. I am very grateful for their support, insight, and attention. Jean Ferguson Carr has been an advocate, editor, teacher, colleague, and friend. She is a brilliant and generous reader and a skillful editor. Dave Bartholomae and Paul Kameen have been influential teachers and voices in my life for a long time; they have also been important colleagues. Dave Bartholomae's support as Chair of the English Department has been as important to me as his work as a composition scholar. Paul Kameen is everything I hope to eventually be in my work as a scholar, writer, and teacher. Noreen Garman came on board and offered well-timed questions that were very helpful.

Juli Parrish read almost all of these pages (some several times), offered precise and powerful writing advice, and was a dedicated cheerleader. Her questions, interest, postcards, and encouragement kept me going, and I am so grateful for her friendship and the extensive time she gave me.

I'd like to thank Amy Murray for reading this dissertation (and its antecedent projects) and offering support and editorial advice. She is an attentive and careful reader without whose help I could not have started this project.

Geeta Kothari made sure I didn't get too lonely, offered advice, and brought food. I would never have survived the process of writing a dissertation while working full time without her help and friendship.

Angie Farkas offered perspective, made me laugh, and did some emergency reading for me at the very end.

Beth Newborg was always supportive and kind and taught my classes for me during a critical week of writing, for which I am hugely grateful. She also read for me at both the beginning and end of the process.

Bianca Falbo has been a supportive and encouraging friend for a long time. She also read for me as I was finishing the dissertation.

Thanks to my dissertation group: Tara Lockhart, Brenda Glascott, Maggie Rehm. Because of life circumstances, the group only met a few times, but the members' kindness, interest, and brilliance continue to inspire me.

Pam O'Brien has been a wonderful friend. My thanks to her for keeping the Public and Professional Writing program humming along while I was in the thick of writing.

Jeri Spann invited me to work with her in her business, Spann Communications, about 15 years ago, thus making it possible the writing I do for foundations and nonprofits. Jeri is also a wonderful teacher and editor. She has taught me a lot about writing and about teaching the kind of writing we do at SC.

Evelyn Pierce created opportunities for me to learn about and teach business communication to students invested in business. I'm very grateful for her friendship and help for all of these years.

My former students and current friends, Derek Askey, Brittany Colatrella, and Tom Campbell helped me think through many classroom issues and allowed me to quote them in chapter one. It's a privilege to have been able to work with them.

Nancy Koerbel worked with me and Jean Ferguson Carr to imagine and propose the Public and Professional Writing program. I'm grateful for Nancy's continuing friendship and insight. A bit later Jim Sietz, Kathryn Flannery, Brenda Glascott, and Chris Warnick joined the team to craft the actual proposal. I am also indebted to them for their work, language, and energy.

Nick Coles has been a friend for a long time. In the context of courses for underprepared readers and writers, he and Tony Petrosky taught me a lot about pedagogy and contributed significantly to my ideas about what it means to teach writing. Nick has also been a wonderfully supportive director of composition. I so value his insights and ways of talking about students.

Bill Coles taught me about the kinds of work we ask of students in the teaching of writing. He was often on my mind as I studied the teaching materials of business, technical, and professional writing.

Most of all, many thanks to my family: their support has never wavered.

1. WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT PROFESSIONAL WRITING

Communication occurs in many forms. You can pick up the phone and have a conversation with your supervisor or leave her a voice-mail message if she's unavailable. You can choose, instead, to write her a memo and send it by e-mail. In turn, she can respond to your message in the form of her choice. Your supervisor may decide to forward your message to other employees or managers, and they may communicate it to customers and other outsiders. The process is fluid; the form in which a message is communicated changes constantly. Communication can be internal or external, formal or informal, spoken or written. In fact, it can even be a simple smile. (Bové, Thill, Schatzman 6)

The specific actions you take to write business messages will vary with each situation, audience, and purpose. However, following a process of generalized steps will help you write more effective messages. As Figure 4.1 shows, this writing process may be viewed as comprising three simple steps: (1) planning, (2) writing, and (3) completing your business messages. (80)

Well-organized messages are efficient. They contain only relevant ideas, and they are brief. Moreover, all the information in a well-organized message is in a logical place. Audience members receive only the information they need, and because that information is presented as accessibly and succinctly as possible, audience members can follow the thought pattern without a struggle. (109)

1.1. Introduction

These three passages are drawn from one textbook, the seventh edition of *Business Communication Today*, the authors of which can boast millions of student readers in the book's history of more than two decades and nine editions (xix). They can also claim at least one award

(in 2000) from the Textbook and Academic Authors Association, which honors “outstanding books and learning materials that enhance the quality of what is available to students and scholars for teaching, education, and research. The text received the highest ranking for being interesting, informative, well organized, well prepared, up to date, appealing, and teachable” (xix). The publisher, Prentice Hall, also markets several similar repackaged iterations by the authors, including *Business Communication Essentials*, *Excellence in Business Communication*, and others.

Clearly, a lot of college and university teachers find this book authoritative and compelling, a good bet for their students. In fact, the publishers point out in their promotional materials that the text “covers all the basic principles and goals as recommended by the Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs and the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business, the International Association for Management Education.” These are accrediting agencies that also provide member benefits for business schools.¹

The textbook, which is 606 pages long (not counting the numerous appendices) sells for \$130 and has been the occasion for the creation of an entire fleet of teacher support products, including a teacher’s manual, telephone test preparation, PowerPoint presentations, study guides, a video series and guide, newsletter, author’s e-mail hotline, website, transparencies, test item file of 1,500 questions (“The first step in the writing process includes writing a draft. True or false?”), and so on.

I’d like to return now to the opening passages and look at them in the light of the textbook’s authority and widespread adoption. Teachers who are familiar with contemporary

¹ I contacted representatives of these organizations to find out what these “basic principles and goals” would be, but they weren’t able to help me. They offer standards for schools and for professors (they should be involved teaching, publication, research, and consulting, for example), but they don’t have standards for what students should learn about business communication or writing.

composition scholarship may be struck by the ways the text offers a limited and limiting vision of students, the work of writing, and what it means to teach writing. For example, what assumptions are textbook writers making about students when they feel the need to say that “Communication occurs in many forms”? How do those assumptions shape the conversation? How does it help a writer to be taught “three easy-to-follow steps”? Do those steps guarantee an effective piece of writing? Or is there something more to it all beyond completing the steps? How does a writer put into practice a statement like this: “All the information in a well-organized message is in a logical place”? Do people actually learn from such observations?

In order to highlight how different the writing about writing is in textbooks coming out of composition-based approaches, I turn now to three more passages addressed to students who are learning about writing:

To see something through—that is, by means of—writing is to have a chance of seeing whatever is looked at better as a result of one’s engagement with the writing process. But to see through writing in another sense is to have a chance also to see beyond a particular piece of writing to what makes writing worth bothering with in the first place. (Coles *Seeing* ix)

Readers learn to put things together by writing. It is not something you can do, at least not to any degree, while you are reading. It requires that you work on what you have read, and that work best takes shape when you sit down to write. We will have more to say about this kind of thinking in a later section of the introduction, but for now let us say that writing gives you a way of going to work on the text you have read. (Bartholomae and Petrosky 4)

Often without consciously realizing it, accomplished writers routinely rely on a stock of established moves that are crucial for communicating sophisticated ideas.

What makes writers masters of their trade is not only their ability to express interesting thoughts, but their mastery of an inventory of basic moves that they probably picked up by reading a wide range of other accomplished writers. Less experienced writers, by contrast, are often unfamiliar with these basic moves, and unsure of how to make them in their own writing. This book is intended as a short, user-friendly guide to the basic moves of academic writing. (Graff and Birkenstein 1)

These passages are addressing writing as well. Not the narrower subset of professional writing, but writing all the same. Interestingly, all of these texts tend to use a more dynamic style at the sentence level. Instead of the nominalizations and being verbs that dominate the tone of *Business Communication Today*, these sentences hinge on actors performing actions. These writers all make use of distinct and powerful metaphors for the writing process, and those metaphors suggest active roles for the writer—as actor, crafter, someone who can learn moves and use them. The student is imagined as someone who is capable of and ready to engage with challenging intellectual work. These passages also offer a more nuanced understanding of writing, suggesting that writing is more complicated—and more powerful—than just following a set of steps. It is a recursive process that connects with reading and that requires intellectual engagement. It's not just that these three books do a better job of representing writing and students; they are stronger examples of effective writing in themselves since they show a better awareness of their audience, find terms that can actually allow students to grasp both methods and the goals at stake, and are more engaging.

When these passages are placed next to those at the beginning of this chapter, the passages from the biz comm textbook appear limited. Bovée, Thill, and Schatzman offer a model of writing that appears—on the surface—to be accessible to less experienced writers, but they do it by making writing static and simplistic. Since writing is neither, students aren't well served by approaches like this.

When I started teaching professional writing in the English Department at the University of Pittsburgh, the Department only offered one course in the subject: Written Professional Communication (WPC). The director of composition assigned me to teach that class because of my experience as a writer for nonprofits and as a teacher of professional writing in the business school at another university. At that school, I was introduced to three biz comm textbooks: Bovée and Thill's *Business Communication Today*, Kitty O. Locker's *Business and Administrative Communication*, and Scot Ober's *Contemporary Business Communication*. During the first couple of terms of my teaching WPC, I alternated among those three texts, choosing whichever one was closest at hand or in a new edition. (Other teachers of WPC at the University of Pittsburgh were using a Thill and Bovée text, a Kitty Locker text, John Lannon's technical writing textbook, or a course pack of excerpts and handouts.)

These biz comm textbooks seemed remarkably similar. They usually had a section on process, from brainstorming and clustering to writing a draft, revising, and editing. They also had chapters on good news messages, bad news messages, persuasive messages, an entire section on reports, a section on career materials, and advice about presentations, intercultural communication, and a few other topics. I was impressed by the degree to which the textbooks were in agreement with each other about the appropriate focus of the class. But I also felt that all

of the books were out of synch with the teaching of composition as I knew it. In my composition classes, I was used to discussing student writing, seeing students' work in relation to what we were reading, talking about writing as a way to create knowledge, finding ways for students to carry out the work of the class, engaging with them as someone who was also very interested in the issues we were discussing. The earliest classes I taught in professional writing were largely driven by the textbook, since I had had relatively little experience in the business sector. I found the biz comm approach irresistible (because if it offers all the answers to students learning to write, it does the same for teachers learning to teach the class). But my teaching felt barren, unengaging, and trivial. The experience made me want to understand why. And it made me want to see how the teaching of professional writing could be informed by my experience of the teaching of composition.

Several years later, the central questions of my work in this dissertation—and the most immediate ones for me as a writing program administrator—have focused on creating a larger context for such a professional writing course. No program can be created in a vacuum. What does it mean to design a course of study in public and professional writing within a composition program that has an established and coherent set of pedagogical practices? How do questions of disciplinarity and professionalism inform the process? What would success look like? And what would this work then reveal about the theory and practice of composition?

In *Working Knowledge: Composition and the Teaching of Professional Writing*, I argue that professional writing, an area of instruction that developed alongside composition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, can benefit from an infusion of the theory that shapes some of the notable trends in composition studies today. Doing so makes possible a professional writing pedagogy that is centered on student writing, that offers a rich understanding of the writing

process and the ways that writing works, that explores intertextuality, and that allows student writers to connect with what can be at stake for professional writers. In return, the teaching of professional writing offers a different perspective and perhaps some space to think through some of the current tensions in composition, such as the continuing resistance to teaching what some see as service courses and ongoing issues of staffing courses with part-time faculty. These issues are intertwined, with some compositionists arguing that the professionalization of composition studies in itself is a way for scholars to distance themselves from the service course aspect of first-year composition and stake an intellectual claim that has more status in an incredibly competitive academic workplace. I argue that re-thinking the place of professional writing in composition offers the opportunity to tap the transformative potential of those tensions.

As I will discuss in chapter three, in the 21st century, composition scholars are turning their attention to the ways that the teaching of writing can connect with what is going on in the world. Kurt Spellmeyer proposes a re-tooling of the entire humanities, Sharon Crowley explores the ways that rhetorical intervention can mediate the clash between liberalism and fundamentalism in America, and Richard Miller describes the incongruity of being invested in formal correctness in the face of imminent loss and human pain. Maybe this kind of work comes in the wake of 9/11, the tsunami, and Katrina—all of which had an impact on those within range of a television, and all of which highlighted enormous unmet needs in our culture. Or maybe this is a logical turn in the field, which is still young: now that there is a diverse and professionalized field, it makes sense that scholars start to push outside the box of first-year composition to think about the shape of advanced composition. I am arguing that the study of professional writing—as advanced composition, not as it is taught in classrooms that echo Bovée, Thill, and Schatzman—opens up ways of thinking about the work of composition.

The program that I am focusing on in this dissertation and the approach to professional writing are rooted in a particular constellation of theory and practice emerging from the University of Pittsburgh's composition program.

There are many ways of telling the stories of ideas. The tendency in composition studies is to imagine the threads that shape the field as the work of individuals or as a series of affiliations with discrete ideas (expressivism, social constructionism, process, etc.). Such approaches tend to be reductive and often seem to efface nearly as much as they reveal. It is richer and more engaging to see how scholars have together created an ongoing, recursive relationship between theory and practice that constitutes a theoretical approach to the teaching of writing.

The composition program at Pitt is institutionally coherent and administratively communicable for graduate students who are teaching. The practices that shape the “voice” of work at Pitt can be traced to the scholarship, administrative work, and teaching in the department, drawing from, for example, William E. Coles’s work on sequencing assignments and on student work being at the center of the classroom, David Bartholomae's work on inviting students to engage with intellectual work and on the ways that reading and writing are inextricably linked, Jean Ferguson Carr's work on the complexity and richness of teaching materials and on the preparation of new teachers of composition, Mariolina Salvatori’s work on difficulty, Paul Kameen's work on reading as a critical act and on the ways in which teachers and students are complex individuals in an ongoing negotiation of power and authority, Nicholas Coles’s work on teaching less experienced readers and writers and on responding to student writing. Naming individual compositionists, however, misses the conversational nature of what

it means to be in a department, working with colleagues who are engaged intellectually in a range of work both inside and outside English studies, who influence each other, who work with and sometimes against each other, who write staff sequences collaboratively, who administer programs together, and who explain each other's choices to graduate students. The set of practices that emerge from this kind of work creates a context that graduate students work within and either continue or resist as they launch their own careers.

This is not to say that I have limited the scholarship of my dissertation to work associated with Pitt, but rather that I want to acknowledge the fact that my work—as a scholar, teacher, and administrator—is situated in this particular conversation, these practices, these concerns.

As a way of framing the work of my dissertation, in the rest of this chapter, I focus on some central issues that provide context for the approach I am taking. What are we talking about when we talk about professional writing? How does the work get named? What is at stake in a professional writing course for students, teachers, and institutions? What theories shape the field?

1.2. The Complications of Naming: Aliases or Different Courses?

The terms that get used to refer to professional writing are complicated and are rooted in the development of the teaching of writing meant to support writing in various workplaces. Many courses and textbooks imagine a business office as the primary site of professional writing, but there are several that draw examples from nonprofit workplaces and sites where writers may be expected to mostly write technical documentation. Part of the complication is that at the current moment, a range of terms—professional writing, technical writing, business writing, workplace communication, nonacademic writing—are used to refer to narrowly defined areas of writing at the same time they are used interchangeably to refer to writing done as part of

professional life in many fields. For example, people sometimes use a specific designation like “technical writing” to refer to actual technical writing like user documentation and instructions, while others will use the term to refer to general workplace writing. Similarly, “business writing” can actually refer to the writing that supports for-profit companies, or it can refer to any workplace writing. “Professional writing” has emerged as a term that is useful for textbook writers, teachers, and administrators who want to be inclusive of a broad range of writing, but others tend to use whatever term they are used to. An internet or Amazon search of “professional writing” will mostly bring up academic sites or textbooks; if you want nonacademic sources, you’ll need to use a different search term. A brief (and necessarily fast) history can suggest a genealogy for the term “professional writing.”

“Business” was the first way of designating the writing that was used in workplaces. The very earliest instructional materials focused on letters and simply offered models of letters (addressing increasingly specific rhetorical contexts) for writers to copy. In a culture where letters carried both business and social interests forward, permitted the transfer of money and property, and even secured a soul mate, the earliest instructional materials focused on this same diversity of writing needs. The Nietz Old Textbook Collection at the University of Pittsburgh houses copies of books like *Chesterfield's Letter-Writing Simplified* (1857) and *Business and Social Correspondence: A Text-book for Use in All Schools in Which the Subject is Taught* (1894).

“Business English” is referred to in the titles of late 1800s textbooks and named as the subject of courses of study in various venues ranging from high schools, correspondence schools, vocational schools, and emerging professional schools. Examples include *How To Do Business*

by Letter and Training Course in Business English Composition (1908) and *Business English: A Practice Book* (1914).

A second important historical thread emerges in nearly the same period. “Technical writing” emerged as a field and set of concerns in the very late 19th and 20th centuries, as technology itself grew into a powerful economic sector of American life. In *A History of Professional Writing Instruction in American Colleges*, Katherine H. Adams explains that the earliest technical schools included a large percentage of humanities courses, as, for example, Michigan Agricultural College (now Michigan State), which opened in 1857 and required that students take English literature, rhetoric, inductive logic, history, mental philosophy, and political economy (27). This trend lasted until about the 1870s, when vocational educators started eliminating humanities study in favor of technical research. By the turn of the century, leaders in engineering were complaining loudly about the poor writing and thinking skills of engineering school graduates, a complaint that has persisted through today (see Connors “Rise of Technical Writing Instruction”).

A final important influence for both the naming of the work and for the theory that supports some strands of it is the emergence of Communication as a field in the 1940s and 50s. The field of Communication—concerned with writing, reading, speaking, and listening—soon became connected with the issues relating to communicating with large numbers of people through various media, such as television. In business communication textbooks starting in the 1940s, the technology of mass media begins to crop up as a metaphor for the writing process. Communication in those earliest days was linked with composition, and in fact, was incorporated into the name of the new Conference on College Composition and Communication in 1949. Diana George and John Trimbur offer an evocative metaphor for the relationship between

composition and communication as scholarly areas: “In retrospect, the connection between composition and communication. . . looks like a vestige of the late 1940s and 1950s—a brief affair, characterized by mutual attractions and misgivings, that proved unable to imagine a future for itself” (682). The image of an affair that has ended is powerful: it captures the sense of some shared interests between composition and communication, some shared history, but also the irreversible recognition that all of that is not enough to overcome the differences in interests, investments, and ways of being.

As communication departments emerged in colleges in the 20th century, both “business communication” and “technical communication” became terms that referred to areas of work and instruction. Now the communication approach shapes the content of many, if not most, professional writing textbooks. It has also become a very common way of referring to courses. Someone who uses the term “business communication” may just be referring to writing or may in fact want the term “communication” to be more inclusive of other types of communication, including presentations, websites, interpersonal management communication, conflict resolution, meeting facilitation, and so on.

“Professional writing” as a term to refer to a general type of writing and a course of study is a fairly recent innovation. As the twentieth century was winding down, “professional writing” increasingly appeared as an inclusive term that encompasses both business and technical writing and sometimes more.² This has become the designation of choice when people don’t want to choose between business and technical writing. But there is more to it: many of the articles that use it and that discuss it as term also discuss the marginalized position of professional writing in English departments, suggesting that “professional writing” is also a term that has a special

² Sullivan and Porter identify a very early instance of the term in Herman Estrin’s *Technical and Professional Writing*, published in 1963 (401).

utility and resonance for scholars who are working on the edges of English departments (rather than in, say, communication departments or schools of business).

Kate Ronald's 1987 article, "The Politics of Teaching Professional Writing," originally published in the *Journal of Advanced Composition* is an example of the term used in this way. Ronald writes about being torn between the competing demands of the professional writing course as she taught an upper-level course in professional writing in an English department. For Ronald, the course presents a dilemma: should she teach her students what employers want them to know? Or should she teach them to think more critically about the rhetoric they are using? There is a strong sense that the students Ronald is focusing on in this article are "other"—they represent outside interests, are in a way being forced on English because of the demands of writing across the curriculum. She very modestly proposes that such courses can teach students "how to analyze the rhetoric of other fields." She ends her essay on a somewhat plaintive note: "Perhaps my worries and my proposals are too idealistic: like modern composition studies, I, too, am a child of the 60's. But I do believe that we have more to bring to professions outside the academy than training students in the textual etiquette of certain disciplines" (188). Ronald's dilemma is not unusual, as I will discuss at some length in chapter 3.

In the edited collection *Writing in the Business Professions* (1989), Myra Kogen uses several terms interchangeably: "This book on writing in the business professions is part of a general wave of interest in an exciting new discipline usually called professional writing or business communication" (ix). In the next few paragraphs, however Kogen undoes many of the easy claims of this sentence, demonstrating the complexity of naming this field of work. The undoing begins in the very next sentence: "Actually, this discipline is not new; it has been around since early in the century." And later, this passage appears: "Because the subject matter

of communication in the world of work is traditionally shared by a number of fields there have been doubts about whether a bona fide discipline of business communication actually exists” (xii). After spelling out the many variations in course names and focuses, Kogen goes on to say, “As to whether all these various courses and programs make up one discipline or several disciplines, or, in fact, no discipline at all there has been no final agreement” (xiii).

Kathryn Rentz’s article “A Flare from The Margins: The Place of Professional Writing in English Departments” was published in 2001 (significantly in *Pedagogy* rather than one of the business and technical communication journals). Rentz asks this question, among others: “Is professional writing a nasty little secret of English departments, one representing an embarrassing compromise with capitalism and the technostate about which we’d rather not speak?” (186). At the end of her article, Rentz calls for further work to address the dissonance between the fact of professional writing’s presence in English departments and its lack of presence in discussions by English and composition scholars:

Professional writing is here in English departments. What do we bring to the table, and why are we allowed to sit at it? As the pages of our journals attest, we in professional writing have been trying ever since becoming an academic presence to figure out on what bases we exist, but we could use some help from those intellects who purport to analyze and theorize English studies as a whole. Figuring out the relationship of professional writing to English would provide guidance to those shaping undergraduate and graduate curricula, and it would help us help our students to integrate their learning experiences in courses that now seem implicitly at odds in many ways. (188)

Rentz speaks specifically about the lack of any discussion of such professional writing courses in scholarly books that focus on the field of English studies, such as *Textual Power*, *Professing Literature*, *The Future of Doctoral Studies in English*, *What is English?*, *The Employment of English*, *The Rise and Fall of English*, and more. But if Rentz's project were extended to survey the representation of professional writing in the narrower scholarship of composition studies, the results would not be strikingly different.

In "Professional Identities: What is Professional about Professional Writing," Brenton Faber finds that the term "professional writing" is used as a "politically neutral, catchall term" and argues that students would benefit from pressuring the term "professional" in order to "better understand that professionalism is a social movement predicated on knowledge control, social elitism, and economic power." While Faber's idea seems like a potentially productive one, the aspect of professionalism as a social movement is rarely addressed in teaching materials related to professional writing. Instead, "the professional" is much more likely to appear as a transparent and neutral category. Textbook writers tend to assume that students want what professionalism can get them and that there are no drawbacks to the process. There is also no room for any discussion of what is and is not a profession. In essence, it is assumed that everyone in college will be a professional, even though there is still some discussion in certain fields about the professional status of some workers. Nurses, for example, are seen in some circles as nonprofessional because their work is in some ways directed by physicians rather than being based on their own judgment.³

³ This point is not just an academic distinction: recently, a nurse caring for a family member expressed his frustration with the nonprofessional status of nurses while we were talking about how badly a physician had bandaged a wound. There is a history stretching back a good 130 years of American workers demanding professional status, some successfully and some not. There are many documentary traces of engineers claiming professional status at the beginning of the 20th century (interesting since professional writing instruction was often

Currently, in a 2007 retrospective article, Porter and Sullivan argue that they were taking a risk by using the designation “professional writing” in 1993 because the very concept of “professional writing” as including both business and technical writing was not accepted at the time (15). While regretting the still marginalized status of professional writing in English departments, Porter and Sullivan see the term “professional writing” as now established. In a related article, Thomas Kent also finds that the field is established, though marginalized: “Although in our time we no longer recognize contemporary professional writing as an emerging curricular and research field, little doubt exists that the now-established field still suffers from indignity and neglect within many institutions” (“Remapping” 12).

I would argue that the term is still fairly fluid, as witnessed, for example, by textbook publisher’s title lists that force users to choose between technical and business writing when browsing categories. The fluidity also becomes evident in the titles of textbooks, which may be fairly broadly conceived in their concept but narrowly named (Mike Markel’s *Technical Communication*, for example, which is very similar to a business communication textbook) or narrowly conceived and broadly named (like Muriel Harris’s *Prentice Hall Guide to Professional Writing*, which is essentially a standard handbook with a small insert covering some material that is specific to a handful of technically-oriented jobs).

Of course, the sites in which professional writing is taught are hardly less varied. Professional writing—in both its broadest and most narrowly defined forms—is taught in many other sites in American universities: schools of business, engineering, the sciences, policy studies, and so on. For example, at the University of Pittsburgh, the Geology Department offers a course called Communication for Environmental Professionals, the Neuroscience Department

linked to those efforts). Burton J. Bledstein offers examples of funeral directors and plumbers making similar claims in the 1800s.

offers a required class called Neuroscience Writing, the College of Business Administration offers a course called Fundamentals of Business Communication, and the Engineering Program offers both a three-credit honors course in technical writing along with an add-on writing emphasis for the freshman engineering program.⁴

Some technical schools have developed interesting courses to teach writing. For example, in Rensselaer's department of Language, Literature, and Communication, students take courses that integrate instruction in writing with instruction in technical interfaces that readers and writers use. Here are a few of their course titles: Advanced Content Development for the World Wide Web, Advanced Topics in Human Computer Interaction, Advanced Typography, Communication Design for the World Wide Web, Computer-Mediated Communication, Creating Electronic Portfolios, and Digital Rhetoric.

Professional writing is also taught in workplaces: in organized classes and workshops, in tutorials arranged by employers to address employees' weak spots, and one-on-one by more experienced writers in the workplace. Joseph Williams, whose work on style I discuss in chapter four, originally developed his pedagogy and materials in workshops for attorneys and physicians. He continued this line of consulting after his retirement from the University of Chicago through a company called Clearlines, eventually spending much of his time teaching corporate employees how to write effective PowerPoint presentations.

Many consultants are willing to go in to workplaces to teach employees how to write. Here's a quotation from the web site of one such business (the emphasis is theirs):

Do you have high-value employees whose professional advancement has outpaced their **business writing skills**? Could their job performance benefit from

⁴ Interestingly, teachers who developed their writing pedagogy in the graduate programs of the English department currently teach both the geology and engineering courses.

in-depth help directed at improving how they write—so they can meet the requirements of their current, and future, positions in your organization? If your answer is yes, *One-on-One Writer Coaching* from TD Consulting Group may solve your problem. *One-on-One* takes a discreet, personal approach to the goal of **better writing** by exploring each individual's unique writing issues.

This particular consultancy, TD Consulting Group, boasts testimonials from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Donna Karan, and the Fashion Institute of Technology.

Professional writing instruction also takes place in self-directed study books available at book stores for employees who want to improve their skills or marketability or who need help with a particular type of document (resume, business plan, grant proposal, email, and so on). There are many, many examples. Here are just a few representative titles: *Effective Business Writing: A Guide For Those Who Write On the Job* by Maryann V. Piotrowski, *Get to the Point! Painless Advice for Writing Memos, Letters and E-mails Your Colleagues and Clients Will Understand* by Elizabeth Danziger, *Business Plans For Dummies* by Paul Tiffany and Steven D. Peterson.

This dissertation focuses primarily on the teaching of professional writing that is done in English departments. Even in English departments—perhaps especially in English departments—the teaching of professional writing is extremely variable. For me, and I think for others, the term “professional writing” functions as a way of distinguishing between a traditional business or technical communication course and the kind of course that an English department might responsibly offer in keeping with its disciplinary investments.

1.3. What Is In, What Is Out

I'd like to turn now to the types of writing often encompassed—and excluded—by the term “professional writing.” Someone looking just at the most popular professional writing textbooks or at the description of the course or courses offered by a university may imagine that the term covers only career materials such as resumes, memos, letters, and reports. Most of the contexts that are discussed are for-profit businesses.

Here, for example, are the tables of contents of two very popular business communication textbooks. You will notice the similarities. They both use building metaphors (“foundation” and “building blocks”). “Success” is a key operating term in the first chapter of each textbook. Both offer a three-phase writing process. They both cover routine (or informative) and positive messages, negative messages, persuasive messages, reports, and “employment messages.” They cover intercultural communication and working and writing in groups. Both also discuss document design and document formats. The authors of these textbooks make different choices about what to highlight in their chapter and section titles, but the canon of business writing is present in both texts. In chapter two, I'll talk more about where that canon comes from.

<i>Business Communication Today</i> (2007) By Court Bovee and John V. Thill	<i>Business and Administrative Communication</i> (2006) By Kitty O. Locker
Prologue: Planning For Career Success	I. The Building Blocks of Effective Messages Chapter
Part 1: Understanding the Foundations of Business Communication	1. Business Communication, Management, and Success
Chapter 1: Achieving Success Through Effective Business Communication	Chapter 2. Building Goodwill
Chapter 2: Communicating in Teams and Mastering Listening and Nonverbal Communication Skills	Chapter 3. Adapting Your Message to Your Audience
Chapter 3: Communicating Interculturally	Chapter 4. Making Your Writing Easy to Read
Part 2: Applying the Three-Step Writing Process	Chapter 5. Planning, Composing, and Revising
Chapter 4: Planning Business Messages	Chapter 6. Designing Documents and Screens
Chapter 5: Writing Business Messages	II. Letters and Memos
Chapter 6: Completing Business Messages	Chapter 7. Informative and Positive Messages
Part 3: Crafting Brief Messages	Chapter 8. Negative Messages
Chapter 7: Crafting Messages for Electronic Media	Chapter 9. Persuasive Messages
Chapter 8: Writing Routine and Positive Messages	Chapter 10. Sales, Fund-Raising, and Promotional Messages

<p>Chapter 9: Writing Negative Messages Chapter 10: Writing Persuasive Messages</p> <p>Part 4: Supporting Messages with Quality Information Chapter 11: Finding, Evaluating, and Processing Information Chapter 12: Understanding and Designing for Visual Communication</p> <p>Part 5: Planning, Writing, and Completing Reports and Proposals Chapter 13: Planning Reports and Proposals Chapter 14: Writing Reports and Proposals Chapter 15: Completing Reports and Proposals</p> <p>Part 6: Designing and Delivering Oral Presentations Chapter 16: Creating and Delivering Oral and Online Presentations Chapter 17: Enhancing Presentations with Slides and Other Visuals</p> <p>Part 7: Writing Employment Messages and Interviewing for Jobs Chapter 18: Building Careers and Writing Résumés Chapter 19: Applying and Interviewing for Employment</p> <p>Appendix A: Format and Layout of Business Documents Appendix B: Documentation of Report Sources Appendix C: Correction Symbols</p>	<p>III. Interpersonal Communication Chapter 11. Communicating Across Cultures Chapter 12. Working and Writing in Groups</p> <p>IV. Reports Chapter 13. Planning, Proposing, and Researching Reports Chapter 14. Analyzing Information and Writing Reports Chapter 15. Using Graphs and Other Visuals Chapter 16. Making Oral Presentations</p> <p>V. Job Hunting Chapter 17. Resumes Chapter 18. Job Application Letters Chapter 19. Job Interviews, Follow-Up Letters and Calls, and Job Offers</p> <p>Appendixes A. Formats for Letters, Memos and E-Mail Messages B. Writing Correctly C. Making and Communicating Meaning D. Crafting Logical Arguments</p>
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Figure 1. Tables of contents from two popular business communication textbooks show similarities in the content of courses.

Most professional writing textbooks take a comprehensive approach, trying to create as much text as they can and including as many specific examples as they can. For example, the inside fly leaf of Oliu, Brusaw, and Alred’s *Writing That Works* (2001) lists 250 model documents, with a promise of more on the publisher’s website. As an example of the specificity of the model documents, here are just a few of the models offered in chapter seven, “Instructions and Other Writing Strategies”:

Informal Employee-to-Employee Instructions (Email)

Informal Employee-to-Employee Instructions (Memo)

Instructions Without An Illustration

Instructions With An Illustration

Introduction That Provides the Purpose of the Instructions

Introduction That Provides a Theory of Operation

Illustration of Required Tools and Equipment

A Warning in a Set of Instructions

A Caution in a Set of Instructions

Illustrating Each Step in a Set of Instructions

Step-by-Step Instructions with Illustration

As I will explain in chapter two, both the models and the comprehensiveness of types of specific models are one of the oldest strategies in the teaching of business and technical writing. This pedagogical strategy stands in stark contrast to progressive practices in composition studies, where models of writing are widely considered to be of limited use. A first-year composition class that relied on this many examples of specific types of essays that students would be expected to “learn” would be considered a throwback by many teachers invested in composition studies. Yet in the context of professional writing, the strategy of teaching by model is still widely accepted.

The inadequacy of this common approach to the teaching of professional writing becomes apparent when the range of professional writing contexts is made visible. American professional life takes place in three economic sectors⁵: the private sector, the governmental

⁵ These designations are generally thought to refer to the distribution pattern of capital, with private sector profits distributed to shareholders; nonprofits, by definition, not distributing profits to shareholders; and the public funded by taxes. Of course, these sectors are entangled with and dependent on each other. For example, state, local, and federal governments regularly contract with both profit and nonprofit companies to provide services and meet needs, and private companies partner with nonprofits via cause-related marketing to both benefit the nonprofits and serve the profit-making goals of the companies.

sector, and the nonprofit sector. Professional writing happens in a variety of settings within these sectors, and while memos, letters, and reports may have roles to play in most of them, there are writing challenges that do not get much exploration in college classrooms, which is a loss both to students and to the various professional settings.

More seriously, the challenges of writing professionally are often presented in a simplistic way, as if the writer will just be sitting at a desk and responding to a prompt from an employer like, “write a memo that contains informal employee-to-employee instruction.” The reality is often far more complex, requiring that writers juggle a huge amount of information and draw on their knowledge of varied readers. The work may require collaboration that all but erases the unitary writer with an individual set of needs and interests, replacing him or her with a complex arrangement of desires, needs, assumptions, and investments that have to be negotiated carefully.

For example, in a recent project I worked on for a large foundation, my job was to explain the best practices of a number of special units in hospitals across the country. The challenge was to cover the innovations of each hospital in a one-page document that would serve as a brief for the United States senators of the hospital’s state. The purpose was to rally the support of senators for such innovations more broadly applied and supported throughout the country. The work required that I interview leaders at each hospital, present the innovations and their implications in ways that connect with the interests of the senators (reducing costs while improving safety, for example), incorporate feedback from the foundation funding the work to make sure that their interests were also represented, make sure that all of the one-pagers were roughly equivalent so that no hospital leaders felt that their hospital received unequal treatment,

and keep the language simple enough and the text short enough that it could be absorbed by someone who would be reading very quickly.

While this was a very particular writing context, the challenges it presented are not that unusual for professional writers: representing multiple sets of interests, serving multiple audiences, working primarily from reporting rather than published information, being responsible for a message and yet having no author function in relation to it, and so on. Yet this complexity is not very well represented in current textbooks and classes, and this way of writing can't be taught by simply offering students a look at a finished example document. As I will argue in chapter four, there are uses for example documents in the teaching of professional writing, but rather than treating them as exemplars, they may serve more usefully as artifacts of writers' choices (some of which may have gone wrong, some of which may not hold up to scrutiny, and some of which may simply be unavailable to readers of the text).

1.4. Motivations: The Weight of Practicality

The professional writing course is driven by the complex motivations of different stakeholders.

Students are invested in seeing professional writing courses as directly relevant to their futures in ways that many of their other general education courses are not. I have mixed feelings when students tell me that my class was helpful in ways that their other classes weren't. Although I am glad to hear that they had a good experience in the course, at the same time, I want to know what they mean by "helpful"; I want to argue with them about the point of a college education; I want to have a bigger conversation. Yet I know that undergraduate students can have sophisticated ways of accounting for their decisions. They see professional writing

classes as practical, as providing experiences, knowledge, and credentials that will be helpful for them in a variety of dimensions.

For the University of Pittsburgh's Public and Professional Writing program, students submit a letter of intent saying why they want to complete an 18-credit undergraduate certificate. Here is what one student said:

English majors tend to carry with them a stigma of not knowing what exactly they want to do with their degrees. In my first few years at the University of Pittsburgh, I can admit that this wasn't far from the truth. But the courses I've taken and the people I've met have helped me realize that, for me at least, this major isn't a stopgap or a placeholder. Writing isn't something to pass the time. It's something that I take extremely seriously and want to spend my life doing. With that said, graduating with a degree in English isn't always the first thing employers are looking for.

The way that I've interpreted the Public and Professional Writing certificate is that it's a combination of passion and marketability. It can allow me to do what I love to do, and at the same time make me attractive to prospective employers. . . . I want to graduate with something to show for all the hard work I've done. I want my transcript to be just one of the many things that I have to show. I want to enter the workforce being confident that my education was a worthwhile investment. I feel that the Certificate grants me all of these things and helps me to make a living off of doing something I truly love to do. (Askey)

I think some people might be surprised to hear how this student articulates his multifaceted motives for pursuing the PPW certificate. He plans to use the certificate as a way to

forge connections between his education, his investment in his writing, and his work life after college. This student sees the study of professional writing as worth engaging in because it is writing—not completely different in its value or significance from the fiction that he reads and writes as an English writing major. The certificate is also a way of representing his ability and investment as a writer to prospective employers.

Not all of the students who join the certificate program are devoted writers looking to find a way to support their passion for writing. Here's an anthropology major writing about why she wants to complete the certificate:

The life sciences—anthropology, psychology history, and environmental studies—all help chart where we have been and what the future may hold for us. We are repeatedly bombarded with news stories of suffering we seem to bring on ourselves—people battling with poverty, terrorism, crime, discrimination, and overpopulation. But, as the cliché says, hope springs eternal and, optimistically, we also witness human benevolence and cooperation serving the greater good. It is the history, the documentation, the contemplation, and the insight into the conflict of human anguish and triumphs that motivate me to apply for the certificate in Public and Professional Writing. . . . I hope that my role in life is one that will help people to relate to one another, to communicate knowledge and emotions and, ultimately, advance people's understanding and acceptance.

(Colatrella)

This student's motivations are quite different from the first student's, but still starkly different from stereotypical ideas about what draws students to professional writing classes. For this student, writing has power that she wants to learn how to wield. Her interest in writing is

rooted in its possibility to teach readers, to change minds, to create change. In a world that she sees as beset by enormous problems, she is especially interested in eventually writing documentaries, which she sees as having the potential to provide history, documentation, contemplation, and insight.

I'd like to quote one more letter, because I feel that it represents another distinct set of motivations for pursuing this course of study:

I feel that this certificate will be a great complement to my communications major, as I will learn how to speak to and address the masses and the media through my communications classes while learning how to professionally write for the same tasks in the certificate classes. I hope to learn all the skills that I will need to succeed in my chosen field while completing the required classes. I also am confident that these classes will help to serve as a creative outlet for me, because I often get bored in classes that do not allow me to express myself. I often express myself best through writing. . . . I plan to use these classes and the experience that comes with them to the fullest extent in my quest for a job that I do not dread going to day in and day out. (Campbell)

This student gets closest to the rhetoric of the typical professional writing textbook (it's no accident that he is also a communication major): skills are mentioned, and in particular the "skills that I will need to succeed in my chosen field," which sounds like it came straight out of, say, *Business Communication Today*. But the student also articulates both a desire for creativity and a determination to make the classes serve his purposes that seems different from the audience that Bovée, Thill, and Schatzman are imagining when they wrote their textbook. This student doesn't need to be told that communication takes many forms.

These letters represent some of the diverse motivations that bring students to a program in public and professional writing. All of these students find that studying professional writing is a practical choice for them, but “practical” is more complicated here than just padding a resume or collecting a certain kind of experience to claim on a job search. The course of study they want to pursue connects with who they want to be in the world, what they want for their futures, and what paths they don’t want to go down. A professional writing course that taps into that set of interests or that actually engages with students who see writing as having this kind of power is very different from the courses that most business communication textbooks set out to create.

English departments have a stake in the course, too. They may offer a professional writing class in response to student or administrative demand, but, as many have argued, the course often remains at the edges of departments’ interests and investments. While professional writing programs are growing among community colleges, regional campuses, and less research-oriented institutions, in my exploration of the 62 Association of American Universities member institutions, I found that only 28 offer classes in professional writing in their English departments and, of those, only 10 offer a major, certificate, or minor in some kind of professional writing (see Appendix A for details). A few more offer sustained study of professional writing in stand-alone writing programs divorced from English departments. All of this suggests that many English departments in research universities do not see the value of teaching professional writing or do not see it as part of their charge.

In institutions that offer courses or programs, it would be interesting to know whether such classes tend to be taught, not by tenured faculty, but by part-time faculty and graduate students. While this makes sense in some ways—teachers who are actually writing as part of their working life can teach part-time but can’t pursue the life of a full-time academic—there is

also a way in which this labor force further marks professional writing as marginalized territory. This has implications for everything from resources, programs, faculty development, and participation in decisions in departments and in the broader university structure, to stability, research, publication, professional recognition, and advancement along a career path. I argue in this dissertation that the entanglement of professional writing in the politics of hiring and advancement is not a trivial factor in developing courses and programs.

The very practicality of professional writing courses may in fact be another factor in professional writing's position in English departments. Scholars in English departments who are also invested in professional writing feel that the courses are marginalized and unwanted *because* they are practical, because they connect with the outside interests of the working world.

In their study of 19th century literary textbook traditions, Carr, Carr, and Schultz argue that “the practical” in the 19th century has some associations that may be surprising to today's compositionists. In response to teaching that required students to engage only in rote learning like memorizing and reciting passages or parsing sentences, a focus on the “practical” meant “promoting knowledge and skills that would assist students in their lives and work” (9). Thus, the shift from “the abstract and formal to the concrete and practical” was an innovation, and one that was rooted in reasoning that echoes the reasoning that a modern English teacher, versed in current composition theory, would use to explain why a “drills and skills” approach isn't the best way to teach students how to write. “Practical” in this sense meant that students got to engage with the actual application of what they were learning; they got to dig in and learn while doing it rather than going through months and years of artificial “preparation” for the work that wouldn't actually teach them much. There are associations here that can be leveraged to provide a revised

understanding of why students take professional writing classes, why English departments should offer them, and how composition studies figures in this practical enterprise.

If professional writing is the version offered up by the average business communication textbook, the distaste of English departments for it is understandable. But it doesn't have to be taught that way.

1.5. Scholarship in the Field of Professional Writing

As with first-year composition or writing center work, it is entirely possible for someone to teach professional writing without being in touch with the scholarly work in the related field. It happens all the time. People—outside and inside the academy—tend to think that anyone can teach in these sites: all that's needed is a little brushing up on genres of writing and a handful of writing tips. And as I'll discuss at length in chapter 2, there is a lot of received “common sense” knowledge that has been passed down through generations of business and technical writing textbooks and classes.

But professional writing in both its narrowly and broadly defined senses has been the focus of interest and research by scholars in business schools and those working in communications for several decades. Since in this dissertation I want to draw on insights that emerge from a particular kind of theory in composition studies, it makes sense here to explain the other types of theory and scholarship that inform the field and why I perceive a gap that I want to address.

Articles on professional writing are published in these specialty journals: *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, *Technical Communication Quarterly*, and *Journal of Business Communication*. Less often,

relevant articles are published in the journals central to “English” and composition studies: *JAC*, *College English*, and *College Composition and Communication*. Most of the articles published in the tech/business communication journals take as their focus writing published in particular workplaces or the teaching of particular genres to students. Here, for example, are some of the articles published in the 2007 issues of the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*: “Seeing and Listening: A Visual and Social Analysis of Optometric Record-Keeping Practices,” “Comments on Lab Reports by Mechanical Engineering Teaching Assistants: Typical Practices and Effects of Using a Grading Rubric,” “Business Communication Needs: A Multicultural Perspective,” “Boundary Objects as Rhetorical Exigence: Knowledge Mapping and Interdisciplinary Cooperation at the Los Alamos National Laboratory,” “Imaging the Organization: Language Use in Organizational Identity Claims,” “The Rhetorical Minefield of Risk Communication,” and “Approaches/Practices: Surviving the Design and Implementation of a Content-Management System: Do the Benefits Offset the Challenges?”

It would be wrong to say that this scholarship draws on a completely different kind of theory and that it is participating in a wholly different conversation than most leading scholarship in composition. But the bodies of knowledge and conversations among texts and scholars, and the set of texts that is familiar to the teaching community in composition does not neatly overlay the sets that these journals draw upon. There is some overlap, but often in unexpected areas. The work tends to be empirical and quantitative, but isn’t necessarily so. Scholars draw from theoretical perspectives as varied as cognitive linguistics, literacy, communications, psychology, sociology, rhetoric, ethnography, composition, and more. While I don’t buy into all of the assumptions that underlie some of the articles, there is a lot of interesting work being published

in these journals, much of it not on the radar for compositionists, even those teaching professional writing.

In one recent article, “Comments on Lab Reports by Mechanical Engineering Teaching Assistants: Typical Practices and Effects of Using a Grading Rubric,” Summer Smith Taylor argues that too many engineering students are taught writing in ways that hobble them: the teaching they experience in lab-based courses is “heavily focused on local technical details and almost entirely devoid of advice about broader issues of rhetoric, composition, or design. This response will have shaped the students’ views of effective writing, as well as their views of the appropriate roles of writers and responders” (423). Here is a moment when composition theory and practice could offer a great deal to the teaching of these students. The problem tends to be one of expertise: teachers who know about engineering, for example, tend not to know about the teaching of writing and vice versa. While this is a big gap, some compositionists have spent substantial time and energy thinking about how first-year college students can be taught about writing in ways that will allow them to engage with academic discourse as they will encounter it in a variety of fields. Surely the field can offer some insights to the teaching of professional writing as it plays out in a range of contexts. It is also useful to explore how those invested in the field of composition can allow their work to intersect with the research published in these journals.

1.6. Re-figuring Professional Writing as Composition Studies

To define an approach to teaching professional writing that is informed by work in composition studies, this dissertation explores a number of teaching traditions and draws on scholarship and pedagogical materials from professional and technical writing, from particular

strains of composition studies, and from the Public and Professional Writing program that has been developed at the University of Pittsburgh during the past several years.

Chapter two, “Persistence and Change: The Roots of Business and Technical Writing Pedagogy in Early Textbooks,” documents the remarkable stability of some moves in the teaching of professional writing by drawing on textbooks published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and comparing them to those published recently. In this chapter, I argue that textbooks are significant artifacts that both represent and shape ways of approaching the teaching of professional writing. What common moves in the teaching of professional writing should persist and why? What does it mean that some writing strategies are taught in precisely the same ways they were a hundred years ago? Which moves need reconsideration and revision?

Chapter three, “The Anxieties of Service: Professionalized Composition and the Teaching of Professional Writing in the 21st Century,” points out some persistent tensions in composition studies that tend to keep professional writing on the margins of the field. This chapter also explores the ways in which some prominent features of current composition theory and practice can productively inform the teaching of professional writing. In this chapter, I argue that the teaching of professional writing is actually a good fit with contemporary composition practice as it gets articulated in some of the leading theory in the field. And I will suggest that the institutionalization of professional writing as a course can suggest some ways of re-working current tensions in the field around composition as service.

And finally, chapter four, “A Pedagogy for Professional Writing,” explores the implications of the preceding chapters for defining a pedagogy of professional writing and for creating a professional writing program.

2. PERSISTENCE AND CHANGE: THE ROOTS OF BUSINESS AND TECHNICAL WRITING PEDAGOGY IN EARLY TEXTBOOKS

The “you” attitude.—Consider...that the reader is absorbed in his own problems. He reads your letter in the light of his profits and his personal or business needs. Unless your letter gives adequate consideration to his problems, you cannot hope for a favorable reaction. Therefore, the “we” attitude has been replaced in modern correspondence by the “you” attitude which simply means that the writer asks the point of view of the reader; he puts himself in the reader's place. The writer assembles his material with an individual in mind—a housewife, a banker, a farmer, as the occasion demands. Thus the acquisition of information concerning the reader constitutes the first essential step in the writing of the letter. (Babenroth and McNamara 62)

You are already becoming familiar with the audience-centered approach, trying to see a subject through your audience's eyes. Now you want to project this approach in your messages by adopting a “you” attitude—that is, by speaking and writing in terms of your audience's wishes, interests, hopes, and preferences. When you talk about the other person, you're talking about the thing that most interests him or her. . . .Too many business messages have an “I” or “we” attitude, which sounds selfish and uninterested in the audience. . . .The “you” attitude isn't just a matter of using one pronoun rather than another; it's a matter of genuine empathy. (Bové, Thill, Schatzman 92-93)

2.1. You Attitude: One Example of Persistence

These two passages were published 74 years apart. The first passage is from A. Charles Babenroth and Edward J. McNamara's *English in Modern Business*, published in 1929. The second passage is from *Business Communication Today*, published in 2003. The remarkable similarity of these passages highlights the ways that language, representations, and assumptions about students, the work of professional writing, and the teaching of writing have persisted throughout a period of remarkable social, economic, political, and technological change.

These two passages introduce students to the concept of “you attitude”: the idea that business writing is more effective when it is written from the perspective of the reader. For example, when a writer is working on a cover letter for a job, rather than talking about what she hopes to get from the job, she should focus on what she can offer the company. If a corporate writer is asking a customer to pay a bill, the textbooks would say, the letter has a better chance of success if it focuses on the reader’s perspective and benefits rather than those of the company. Rather than “We sold you a product and we need to be paid for it,” a writer would be encouraged to say, “If you pay now, you can protect your credit rating.”

When I first started teaching business writing to graduate students, my study of the available professional writing textbooks turned up “you attitude” as a key concept that students needed to understand. Since all of the textbooks I consulted were billed as being rooted in cutting edge research, I was very surprised to find that the concept of “you attitude” was expressed in exactly that phrase as far back as 1914 (in Rose Buhlig’s *Business English: A Practice Book*⁶).

The concept of you attitude is typically taught by using pairs of sentences, one that lacks you attitude and one that is filled with it. The teaching relies on the student being able to imagine how it would feel to receive a letter with the original sentence, recognize that it would likely create a set of feelings that are not conducive to a good business relationship, and then revise to create a better relationship. For example, in *Technical Communication* (Markel 2007), “thoughtless” sentences are paired with “an improved version that exhibits the you attitude.” The original sentences are marked “accusing,” “sarcastic,” and “belligerent.” Here is the “accusing” pair: “You must have dropped the engine. The housing is badly cracked,” and “The badly

⁶ Buhlig’s 1914 book was the earliest use of the term “you attitude” I found, but she uses the term as if it were describing an established concept.

cracked housing suggests that your engine must have fallen onto a hard surface from some height” (341). Notably, the revised sentence doesn’t rely on “you” but on indirect syntax that reduces a sense of agency, making the statement more tolerable because it distances the reader from responsibility while still stating the facts. A writer could not necessarily get to that sentence from the original sentence with just the invocation of you attitude. It would be more direct to approach the problems of the original sentence through teaching writers about style.

Here is the “sarcastic” pair of sentences: “You’ll need two months to deliver these parts? Who do you think you are, the post office?” and “Surely you would find a two-month delay for the delivery of parts unacceptable in your business. That’s how I feel, too.” In this case, lack of you attitude is not the best way to describe the problems of the original sentence, and the “improved” sentence is not necessarily better. Both sentences violate the code of professionalism, in that they articulate personal responses or feelings. The “professional” in professional writing indicates that the scope of concern is not the individual but the broader “profession,” which typically reproduces middle-class proscriptions against the expression of excessive feeling and overt personal attacks. Particularly in business-to-business communication, the individuals involved would be seen as irrelevant. This is an easy set of ideas to talk about in a course on professional writing, and it has implications not just for writing direct communication like letters and memos but also for a broad range of written products.

Rather than saying that writers need to have you attitude when they write letters or memos, it is a more teachable approach for students of professional writing to teach them about “professionalism” and what it means as a code, to point out that writers need to take readers into account, to help the student understand how style choices have an impact on readers’ responses.

This chapter explores some of the concepts about writing, teaching writing, and students that current business and technical communication textbooks have inherited from the past. Focusing on what led to the configuration of professional writing pedagogy that operates in most business and technical writing textbooks can make visible what is at stake for students and for teachers. Teachers and students see professional writing as a key part of becoming a professional and functioning as one. In this sense, professional writing crystallizes the hopes and anxieties of those who are looking to get a job that matches (or even exceeds) their sense of themselves in the world. And professional writing itself, what students are supposedly learning to do in these classes, keeps America ticking: it shapes ads and ad campaigns, explains laws, misleads people, tells them how not to be misled, tells them their rights, intimidates them into compliance, subjugates them, and ushers their voices into the presence of power. In the teaching of professional writing, a hundred years ago and now, the tendency is to erase all of those tensions and teach students to write as if writing could be transparent and neutral, a set of formats to pour a message into, a set of checklists to work your way down: write a good news memo, a bad news memo, ask someone for something in a letter, write a report using manuscript format, make a resume, write a cover letter.

2.2. Textbooks as Artifacts and Templates

Both first-year composition and professional writing classes are similar when it comes to the end users of textbooks. In both cases, there are likely to be more sections to be taught than there are teachers who are interested in teaching the courses for their own sakes. Both types of classes may be taught by graduate students or adjunct faculty with little interest, capacity, or resources to develop an entire course of study from scratch; these teachers may be invested in

other fields (such as literature or creative writing, for example), and they may not even have the power to decide what a course will focus on or how it will unfold. In both classes, the teachers ordering the textbooks may have little formal training in pedagogy or in a specific coherent field with distinct practices, assumptions, and bodies of knowledge. The textbook itself may be assigned by the institution for a variety of reasons that don't have much to do with whether the textbook will allow teachers and students to responsibly investigate the writing that is ostensibly the focus of the course. In a context where there is little supporting structure for the course, a textbook takes on special importance as it may be the only core material that unites a course across sections at a university and may be the only information that an instructor has about the field. The textbook, in such cases, offers the language, concepts, broad categories or segments of the course. It can shape the teachers' understanding of the field as well as the students', and it can shape pedagogy.

A number of scholars in the past 15 or 20 years have focused on composition textbooks. For example, Gerald Alred and Erik Thelen (1993) have thoughtfully argued for the ways in which textbooks do and do not represent scholarship and for the ways that they shape perceptions of classrooms and programs. They also document longstanding complaints in composition that some textbooks don't seem to reflect awareness of developments in the last decade or two of the field. They point out the ways that the textbook industry, in its zeal for an ever expanding title list, may offer textbooks that are written by freelance consultants who don't know much about the field.

While scholars have pointed out the limitations of textbooks, their importance for classrooms and programs is clear. For example, in "Are Textbooks Contributions to

Scholarship,” Alred and Thelen explain the ways that textbooks, for better or worse, represent programs:

Most writing program administrators understand that the selection of a standard text at any level may be the single most influential decision in enacting the philosophy of a program. Long after the orientation sessions are finished and after the policy memos are dutifully filed, the textbook will accompany the instructor through the course. Beyond the local scene the textbook will help construct the image of the program. When someone asks at a conference, “What text are using for that course at your school?” the answer often *defines* the course, the program philosophy, and perhaps even the institution in the mind of the questioner. (470)

My sense of this issue articulated by Alred and Thelan—that textbooks enact and represent the philosophy of a program—is part of the impulse that guided my work on this chapter: most of the sections of Written Professional Communication in the program at the University of Pittsburgh still rely on biz comm or technical communication textbooks. Even in cases where teachers, particularly graduate students, have wanted to resist the traditional moves of business and technical communication pedagogy, they have found themselves falling back on them, almost against their will, they say.

In fact, the current teaching of professional writing is dominated by the business communication textbook. The biz comm course has a presence in the American educational landscape that is hard to ignore. I have taught in a range of academic settings—MBA programs, a graduate school of public policy, an undergraduate business program, and an English department—and in all of those settings, the business communication textbook constituted the

standard materials and methods of teaching professional writing. Because the power of the biz comm textbook is hard for teachers to resist, it is important to understand the sources of that power, what is pedagogically useful in it for the teaching of professional writing, and what is better left behind. What do the earliest textbooks allow us to see when they are put next to current ones?

To explore this question, I studied American letter writing guides and pedagogical materials from the Nietz Old Textbook Collection (a collection at the University of Pittsburgh of over 16,000 school texts and books on education), from Early American Imprints (Readex Digital Collections) and U.S. textbooks in the general holdings at Hillman Library at the University of Pittsburgh. Where I found gaps in the collections, I also bought old textbooks, using Biblio.com and eBay. The books I worked with ranged from late 18th century and early 19th century letter-writing guides, to late 19th century and early 20th century business-writing texts, to the business communication texts of the post-World War II 1950s and 60s, to late 20th century and early 21st century textbooks.⁷ The early books I identified through a keyword search of titles with “business” or “technical” in them. I identified later books through searches for keywords “business” and “technical” and “writing” or “communication” in the title. The most recent textbook sample was largely drawn from best-selling textbooks, many of which I knew well as a teacher of professional writing.

I should note here that I am not offering the following sections of this chapter as a history of the teaching of business, technical, and professional writing. In other words, I don’t focus on which schools and programs adopted particular textbooks, relationships among textbook writers and programs, and developments between editions. That type of project was launched in a

⁷ For a chronological list of these texts, consult Appendix B.

cursory way by Gerald Alred, Diana Reep, and Mohan Limaye in *Business and Technical Writing: An Annotated Bibliography of Books, 1880-1980*. The historical project was undertaken with more care and development specifically in the field of technical writing by Robert Connors in his article “The Rise of Technical Writing Instruction in America.” And it was explored more broadly in Katherine Adams’s book, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction in American Colleges*. While such historical work is interesting, the existing takes are frustrating to me because they give textbooks such scant attention: while they may devote three or four sentences to a description of what various textbooks do, they rarely go into any detail. What interests me in these textbooks is their textual presence: what is talked about, how it is talked about, what work is trying to be accomplished, what assumptions are made about students, and what the pages look like. I have been particularly interested in when features come into and leave textbooks. When, for example, did textbook writers start using the term “you attitude”? When do books start offering instruction in constructing memos?

The first books designed to be used as textbooks in classes or for self-study at home appeared in the late 1800s for business-oriented writing and in the early 1900s for technical writing. The remaining pages of this chapter will focus on a comparison of historical and current textbooks to see how those textbooks represent the teaching of professional writing, the work of students, and the work of professional writers.

2.3. The Emergence of Business and Technical Writing Textbooks

Letter-writing guides and compendiums offering help with business letters were published in the 18th century. It is important to note that the writers of such guides see business as just one of aspect of life in which a literate person might have occasion to write a letter. Such

guides also offer advice on writing love letters or social letters. They do not break off “business” as a separate field of concern. This is significant, because it focuses instruction in writing on helping the writer to maintain classed behaviors.

The American Instructor or Young Man’s Best Companion is a useful representation of the general interest book with business among its interests. Published in its 12th edition in New York in 1760, it offers instruction in spelling, reading, writing, and arithmetic, and “how to qualify any person for business, without the help of a Master.” Readers will find instruction on how to write letters for business or friendship, forms of indentures, bonds, bills of sale, receipts, wills, leases, and so on. It also offers guidelines for bookkeeping, a concise account of the American colonies, “an historical table of the most remarkable events that have happened in the world,” and an abstract of England’s history. The book provides practical details to facilitate skilled tradeswork: offering the “Carpenter’s plain and exact Rule; shewing how to measure Carpenters Joiners, Sawyers, Bricklayers, Plasterers, Plumbers, Masons, Glasiers, and Painter’s work. How to undertake each Work and at what Price; the rates of each commodity, and the common Wages of Journeymen” (title page). The *Companion* also offers instruction on using gauges, dials, dyes, medicines, and on making pickles preserves and wines. And finally it offers “prudent advice to young tradesmen and dealers.”

The *Companion* is a comprehensive book that offers a literate young man resources enough to launch adult life. For the author of the book, George Fisher, a man’s ability to do business is rooted in his ability to use English, to “write a good, fair, free, and commendable Hand,” and to write a good letter (iii). To this end the *Companion* offers letters in a familiar style and “on Sundry Subjects and Occasions: With directions how to subscribe or conclude a

letter, and also to superscribe or direct Letters, according to the different Ranks and Qualities of the Persons to whom directed.”

The model letters tend to be short and are arranged in a seemingly random way in the book (see figure 2). Here a letter from one businessman to another is sandwiched between a letter from a young woman to her mother and a letter of congratulation to an unspecified (but fortunate) person.

The Young Man's Best Companion. 51

or one much better; it is Mr. *A. B. of C.* You know both him and his Character, *viz.* one sober, diligent and good humour'd; but however I shall submit to your good Pleasure and Guidance in an Affair of such momentuous Concern, and remain,

*Honoured Mother,
Your dutiful Daughter,
and very humble Servant,
Mary Modesty.*

To a Country Chapman.

Mr. Francis Fairdealer, London, 9th May, 1758.

YOU and I have formerly had Trading together, and it is not my Fault that we do not continue so to do; for assure yourself, I have a great Value and Respect for you, and on that Account none shall be more ready to oblige you in what I may; and pray let us once more re-assume our Dealings together; and you shall find, that for any Goods you have Occasion for in my Way, none shall use you more kindly than,

*Sir,
Your real Friend, and humble Servant,
Titus Tradewell.*

A Letter of Congratulation.

S I R,

IF you were but sensible how much I am affected with the good and most acceptable News that I hear of your good Fortune, you would conclude that the Joy that surprizes me for the same, is equal to yours that enjoy so happy a Turn of Providence: I could express myself further on this Theme, and enlarge exceedingly on so pleasing a Subject; but let this at present suffice, till I have a more favourable Opportunity of expressing my Joy to you personally: In the Interim, I am truly,

*Sir,
Your sincere Friend,
and very humble Servant,
Ralph Real.*

A

Figure 2. A mix of social and business model letters are offered in *The American Instructor or Young Man's Best Companion* (1760).

The amount of overt discussion of writing increases in *A New Academy of Compliments or the Lover's Secretary*, published in 1795. That is not to say that the volume is strictly focused on letter writing: it also includes advice on writing bills of exchange, receipts, and other official documents; “a treatise on moles on all parts of the body, and what their signification, with relation to good or bad fortune”; help with interpreting dreams; money weights and measures; “a collection of the newest and choicest songs”; and instructions for dancing.

“Business” in this volume refers to personal business: “Letters of business are those that treat of things that concern us; and they are of several kinds; as letters of advice, counsel, command, intreaty, recommendation, offering of assistance, complaint, and the like” (28). The writing that needs to happen, from the perspective of this guide, is in service of looking after one’s own interests. This makes the connection between courtship and business clearer, since marriage and family were just one aspect of a man’s interests.

In *Chesterfield's Letter-Writing Simplified*, published in 1857, there is much lengthier discussion of writing in general. This book is a hybrid text that unites material written in the mid-1800s with excerpts from Chesterfield's letters to his son (published initially in the 1760s) and an appended etiquette guide. The book begins like this:

Good letter-writing is one of the mainsprings of business, and one of the strongest connecting links of common life. To write a business letter, and to write a familiar one, require as different qualifications as to enter a drawing-room and to knock at one's own street-door. Let us try to point out what these qualifications are. *Tact* is equally necessary in both, but tact of a different character. In writing to a man of business, brevity becomes literally “the soul of wit,” and true tact will teach us three things; first, never to waste time in more compliments than are

demanded by the common courtesy due from one man to another; secondly, never to say anything that has nothing to do with the subject: and thirdly, always to say all that the subject requires, and to say that clearly. . . . Tact in familiar writing, and in some half-business-half-familiar correspondence (which enters constantly into our every-day life) consists in a clear and ready interpretation of our thoughts and wishes, as well as a prompt and graceful understanding of those of another.”

(3)

You will notice in this passage that letter writing is seen as an intensely social activity. There isn't a big separation between business and private life; in fact, the writer points out that many letters will straddle realms. Although much of the book focuses on business, romantic letters are mentioned several times, particularly in relation to clerical errors that will certainly make women reject suitors, at least for the pedagogical purposes of the book.

There is a sense here that what shows up on the page reveals the essence of the writer. For example, here is a passage that rejects books of model letters (often called “complete letter writers”) on the grounds that such books lead writers down the bad path of simply copying:

The fact is, a complete letter writer is a complete sham, an absurdity. People want to write letters “out of their own heads,” and it is impossible to give them “ready made” letters, which, like ready made shirts, shall fit every subject that may require clothing. We know a case of a gentleman—at least, a person—who offered his hand to a lady with the help of a letter writer. The letter began, “Reverend Miss;” how it finished the reader need not be told, but, of course the lover was rejected, and his “billy dux” went into the lady's museum of curious autographs. Perhaps he should have copied it “Revered Miss,” but he should not

have copied at all. Had he written what he really felt, in the best language he could command, he might have gained a hearing, and perhaps, a bride; but he went to a dead sepulchre of words instead of speaking from his living heart, and deserved the snubbing for his pains. The first step, then, towards attaining the art of letter-writing is, to tear up the “Complete Letter Writer” into pipe lights, or curl papers; at all events, it must be got out of sight, and you must begin de novo, that is out of your own head. (8)

It should be noted that the strength of the author's opinion on this point does not prevent him from offering many example letters.

In this passage, the author is urging the reader toward a particular kind of behavior in relation to writing: the negative example misses the boat; the writer would have had a better life if he had “written what he really felt, in the best language he could command.” Writers should speak from their living hearts. This is a kind of insider admonition; that is, it is focused on reminding someone of what should be done, what ones’s best behavior might be. There are shared values between reader and author, it is assumed. Later in the century, authors of instructional books will engage in subtle and not-so-subtle instruction in class-appropriate behavior.

This component of *Chesterfield's Letter-Writing Simplified* is written for the person who feels unequal to the task of writing, to the person who is puzzled about how to begin. Something like what would now be called brainstorming is offered as a method to get started:

When you sit down to write a letter, think of your subject—of the circumstances you wish to state. On a spare piece of paper put down your loose ideas, your various points promiscuously as they occur. For instance, I will suppose that you

have a dozen different heads, more or less, on which you desire to expatiate. Put them all down, (leaving a little margin on the left hand side of your paper,) no matter in what order, one after another, as they occur; a single word in most cases will suffice to lead your memory. Having proceeded so far, consider in what manner, in what order, the different heads of your letter may be arranged so as to produce a harmonious and effective whole, and number them in the margin accordingly, 1, 2, 3, &c.

The author goes on to explain the different ways the topics could be arranged: from most important to least, from least to most, and—for very complex matters—with an ascending order arrangement of subpoints nestled within a descending order of main points. The discussion of process in this book stands out because it honors the complexity of writing and it addresses an audience that is unsure of how to engage with the process. While earlier books were designed for middle-class people, there was a sense in them that the readers would know how to make the best use of the books. The assumptions about readers are different here.⁸

Up until the mid-1800s, there are also examples of books that offer modes of specific types of legal documents, so that the user can simply copy out the language and insert the relevant names and details. For example, in a section on articles of agreement, *The Merchant's Assistant* (1824) offers quotations from several legal sources, a general form, and specialized template documents, including articles for the sale of an estate, articles with a penal clause, articles for performance of covenants, articles for the building or rebuilding of mills, and so on. The book also offers United States laws on naturalization, details about bonds and subpoenas, a detailed list of tariffs on imports, and laws relating to the duties of coroners in Maine. It is an

⁸ *Chesterfield's Art of Letter-Writing Simplified* is a refashioning of an older book to serve a broader, popular audience. According to Jean Ferguson Carr (in a personal conversation), the publishers, Dick and Fitzgerald, specialized in translating works typical of British gentlemen's libraries into inexpensive books for the masses.

example of a fairly broad resource text, meant to address a number of needs. But unlike the earlier texts, this one does not venture into the personal at all. By the end of the century, the division between personal and business will be strictly observed in textbooks on business writing (though books for the home library offering advice about both will still be available). “Business” will more likely mean the business that you work for, not your own personal business that you are carrying out.

Also in the mid-1800s, new business instruction schools focused on teaching students bookkeeping and other special skills. Accounting instruction books might also have something to say about keeping records as a part of the work of business and about writing in service to this function.

Another thread in the surviving instructional materials focuses on the technology used to create documents. “Business writing” could also refer to handwriting from the mid-1800s through the early 20th century. Books like *The Champion Method of Business Writing* and the *Palmer Method of Business Writing* offered instruction and practice in writing a clear and consistent hand for business purposes.⁹ While several versions of the typewriter were invented and used in the 19th century, textbooks show handwritten sample letters well into the 20th century.

By the end of the 19th century, as Bledstein points out, there were enormous changes in who went to college and why. Colleges shifted from being chaotic sites of socialization and networking for elite men to the university model familiar to us now. The number of institutions grew from 25 in 1800 to more than 700 in 1900 (Adams 1). As Katherine H. Adams points out, in 1800, college students generally spent four years learning and using principles of rhetoric in a

⁹ These books currently enjoy a second life as PDFs on the Internet. They are collected by people who are interested in calligraphy.

fairly uniform curriculum. A hundred years later, the university experience was significantly different: students generally took two years of liberal arts classes followed by two years of classes in a particular track that related in some way to what they wanted to do when they graduated (11). The proliferation of possible courses to take corresponded to the proliferation of types of professional writing and their importance in the social and economic landscape of the United States. In the early days of the modern university, the professional writing that students studied included journalism and writing for the newly burgeoning fields of science (especially engineering) and business (including advertising as a special concern).

As the 20th century was beginning, instruction in writing as a professional increasingly took on disciplining aspects: revealing what bits of language are coarse or vulgar, explaining precise rules of etiquette, and so on. This might be expected in a culture where education was expanding to accommodate more people (and more diverse people). At the same time, the types of work done in the textbooks were changing. Instead of simply copying out texts and filling in specifics, students were increasingly asked to read something like a lecture and to complete tasks that approximated an actual writing task. During this period, business writing textbooks started to crystallize into a recognizable form.

While the textbooks did not simply offer dozens of letters any longer, at the beginning of the 20th century, the business letter was still the primary focus of instruction. Letters were crucial to carrying out business, though many textbooks also offer some instruction in telegrams, filing, keeping records, and so on. Sherwin Cody's 1908 *How To Do Business by Letter* (bound with *Training Course in Business English Composition*) is an early example (See Figure 3 for a page from the opening of the book). The pattern is a brief introduction, followed by sample letters, followed by instructional notes that point out features, flaws, strengths, and potential

pitfalls. On the page shown in Figure 3, for example, Cody points out that the method of representing a date by using numerals and slashes is appropriate only for informal notes. Cody's book begins by explaining the rationale for the book: "The study of business letter writing should. . . be the study of business in a nutshell."

How to Do Business By Letter

CHAPTER I

Using Words So as to Make People Do Things

Business letter writing is not a study of forms and usages. It is rather a study of human nature and "how to use words so as to make people do things."

If the student catches the idea that letters are talks on paper which must actually do business, and must be just as simple, direct, and clear as a business talk, instinct will help greatly to make the mastery of forms and usages easy.

Every young man or woman who goes into business must do business, for himself or for his employer, and much of this business (to save time and travel) must be done on paper. The study of business letter writing should therefore be the study of business in a nutshell.

But skill comes only by beginning with the simple things—and most of the letters in this book will be found to be merely simple, easy, and natural. The letter writer who can be "simple, easy, and natural" on paper is already well on the high road to success.

Familiar Notes.

1

3/4/04.

Mr. Jones:

Will you notify the clerks in your department that on and after Monday next, July 11, this store will close at 5.30 p. m. instead of at 5.45, as in the past, and only three quarters of an hour will be allowed at noon—from 12 to 12.45, or from 12.45 to 1.30.

A. W. Thorne, Mgr. (58 words)

This short method of writing a date is very appropriate in a note like this, but should never be used in a regular letter.

7

Figure 3. Sherwin Cody introduces his textbook and offers an annotated note in *How To Do Business by Letter* (1908).

For Cody, the letter stands in for the person doing business—it is a conversation on paper in which the writer anticipates the reader's responses and addresses them. As such, business

letter writing is “a study in human nature and ‘how to use words so as to make people do things’” (7). While Cody specifically says that business letter writing is not just a study of forms and usage, a substantial portion of his textbook is devoted to instruction in forms and usage, including general business letters, application letters, letters to ladies, and more.

In the next few years, the introductory material in textbooks will grow from a few paragraphs to several pages, and there will be instructional material surrounding the sample letters. By the time Hotchkiss and Drew’s *New Business English* was published in 1932, the textbook writers are presenting much more original, developed pedagogical material to hold together the model letters, instruction in style and grammar, and exercises. *New Business English* begins by trying to dramatize the importance of deliberate business writing that represents the company well through every letter. Hotchkiss and Drew open with a story about the new president of the fictitious Achilles Shoe Company closing his first week by reviewing a pile of carbons that represent the letters sent by the company that week. “From this pile of correspondence he was obtaining a bird’s eye view—or, more literally, a customer’s-eye view—of the company. Apparently the view was not wholly pleasing, for the furrow between his eyebrows became deeper and deeper” (1).

The textbook authors then insert into this narrative a letter from a Mrs. Towner, asking about a type of kid slipper manufactured by Achilles that she used to buy from a store, paired with a response letter written by an Achilles employee—Mr. Brown—who brusquely informs Mrs. Towner that Achilles does not sell directly to customers and that they haven’t made that type of slipper for years (see figure 4). The president confronts Brown about the letter, and spends some time teaching him why the letter he wrote was unacceptable. He asks Brown if he would have talked to Mrs. Towner in the same way if she had come to the company in person.

Brown, who is a willing if somewhat slow student, recognizes that his language was more elevated in writing than it would be in person, but isn't writing different from conversation? "By no means," answers the president:

You and some of our other correspondents have the idea that when you are writing you need to be "literary" and use language you would never use in conversation. This is a mistake. A letter is the next best thing to a personal talk and it ought to have something of the flavor of personal conversation. Good business English is not simply words on paper; it is designed to convey a message to another person. The test of its value is not how well it expresses the writer, but how effectively it impresses the reader. (4)

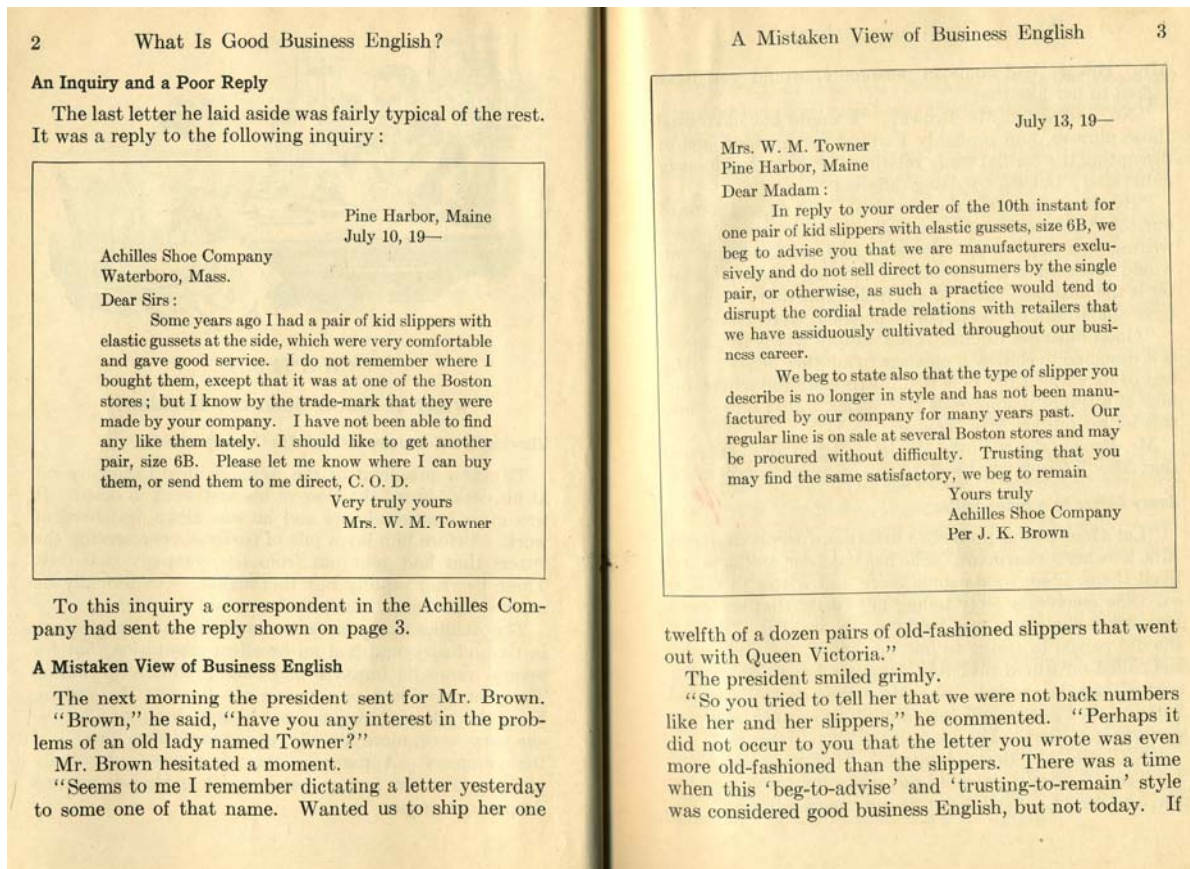


Figure 4. A customer letter and unsatisfactory response are framed by a pedagogical narrative, from Hotchkiss and Drew's *New Business English* (1932).

The president goes on to explain that every letter that comes from a company is in effect a sales letter, and he asks Brown to revise the letter. The president finds that Brown's new draft is much improved, though it lacks cordiality and relies too much on words that have negative connotations. The president himself takes a crack at the letter, writing a version that everyone agrees is splendid (see Figure 5). After some discussion of the choices the president made in his letter, the textbook authors explain what readers are meant to make of this lengthy introduction to the topic of business writing:

The views of the president of the Achilles Show Company are representative of those held by all progressive business executives today. They realize that good business English (written and spoken) is a powerful factor in the success of all types of business enterprise. Many of them have installed special training courses to develop their employees in the art of using it.

Such training would be less necessary if the usual courses in English composition in schools dealt more with business problems and situations. But the chief difficulty is that students frequently think only of expressing their ideas; rarely do they think of impressing a message on a reader.

Like Sherwin Cody at the beginning of the 20th century, Drew and Hotchkiss here articulate a key difference between business writing and other kinds of writing: business writing is all about getting a reader to do something. It's not about expression for the sake of expression.

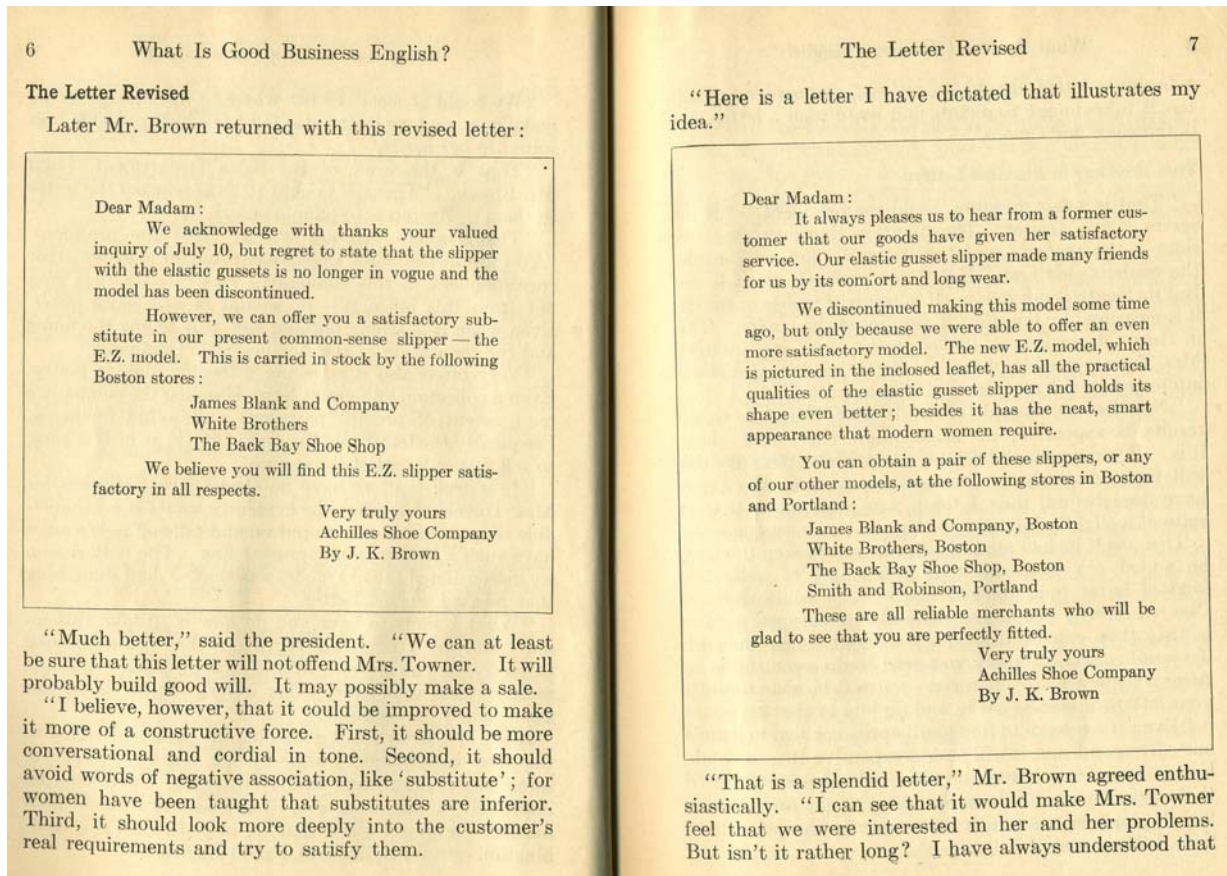


Figure 5. A revised letter is paired with an even more cordial and positive version, from Hotchkiss and Drew's *New Business English* (1932).

This textbook represents an emerging trend in the way textbooks are configured: it begins with a lengthy introduction to help readers understand what is at stake in business writing; it introduces key principles for writers to keep in mind while they are writing; it frames each chapter with introductory language at the beginning and exercises at the end. Earlier in the 20th century, textbooks seemed more like collections of advice—some instruction on form, some instruction on grammar, and some thoughts on larger issues that writers may take into consideration, presented in varying order, but without much structure holding it all together. For example, in *Business Letters: How to Write Them*, Thrift, Campbell, and Vass open with the parts of the letter, move to the composition of the letter (unity of sentences, clearness, how to

begin, how to close), punctuation, typing the letter, examples of letters ordering goods, recommending people, introducing, applying for jobs, selling, and other types of letters. It is not until the section on sales letters that the textbook authors start talking about larger issues of appealing to specific readers in order to persuade them to take a particular action.

Although *New Business English* seems more like a current textbook in its overall design than the textbooks published earlier, the book does devote a lot of space early in the book to mechanics, clarity, punctuation, commonly misused words, and so on. In this sense, it is typical of the textbooks published in the 1920s and 30s, such as J. Walter Ross's *Business English* and Babenroth and McNamara's *English in Modern Business*, in its first edition in 1931. The structure also has much in common with mainstream composition textbooks of the time. As the 20th century moves on, business writing textbook authors will push this material to the back of the book, where it can still be found today.

In the decade of the 1930s, business writing textbooks evolved dramatically. The textbooks of the 40s look more familiar to anyone who has used a current business writing textbook. The story-telling of Hotchkiss and Drew—which could be read as condescending to the students using the textbook—and the seemingly random collection of tips, explanations of mechanics, and advice about style are replaced by deliberate and systematic instruction that has a more professional-to-professional tone. Example textbooks include Z.E. Green's *Writing in Business: A Text in Business English* (1941) and Cecil B. Williams's *Effective Business Writing* (1947).

Writing in Business: A Text in Business English is an interesting book to look at because it, in some ways, is more engaging in its pedagogical approach than professional writing books published now. The opening move of the book is to ask students to prepare a bibliography,

drawing in part on the three-page bibliography offered by Green, of books on the branches of business writing that interest the student and of the magazines and journals for which the student would like to write articles. The first chapter tries to carve out an appropriate register for business writing, positioning the business writing of the 1800s as too servile (and quoting and footnoting two specific examples) and the business writing of 1941 as being potentially offensive for being overly promotional, “back slapping,” and full of “genteelisms.” “The goal in business communication,” says Green, “should be good English, economically phrased, without affectation, past or present. This does not mean barren English, but simple language which can be made to do whatever its user wishes in oral or written communication” (5). Next, Green provides 21 pages of exercises in the book (with space for the student to write in answers). Many of these exercises, instead of providing a fictional scenario for the student to write within, ask the student to look for, analyze, and sometimes revise actual examples of business writing. For example, in the first chapter, the exercises focus on “economy of language,” and students are asked to analyze help wanted ads, rental ads, telegrams, newspaper headlines, product slogans, sales talks, lawyers’ speeches, and so on.

In one exercise (see Figure 6), students are asked to collect ads from the rentals section of the newspaper, “grade them on the basis of economy of language and vividness,” and rewrite them to make them more appealing without making the ad longer: “Simply substitute 7 or 8 colorful words for the same number of drab words.” Because students are asked to collect some real examples written by a specific purpose by an average person, this exercise seems more engaging and useful than many of the exercises from earlier textbooks. But the direction to students seems inadequate, since effective revision will likely require more than simple substitution and since asking students to use more “colorful” words will not necessarily result in

effective copy. This is a moment where students could actually be taught about what kind of language could be more effective in this type of rhetorical context and why, but the opportunity slips away in a request for what could amount to busy work.

ECONOMY OF LANGUAGE — RENTALS

Clip 8 advertisements from the *Rentals* section of your local newspaper and grade them on the basis of economy of language and vividness. Copy at the right the words or phrases which make the house or apartment sound inviting. Rewrite the advertisements which you have graded *D* or *F* and try to make them more appealing, without using additional words. Simply substitute 7 or 8 colorful words for the same number of drab words.

Place the advertisements in the squares	Grade	Comments, revisions, etc.

(Use the back of this sheet.)

9

Figure 6. Students are given a revision exercise in Green's *Writing in Business: A Text in Business English* (1947).

It is also interesting that the work that students are asked to do in this exercise doesn't connect with the overt teaching of the chapter, which focuses on directness of language and the need to avoid both 19th century servile expressions and contemporary jargon. Colorful and drab language are not mentioned anywhere in this chapter but in this exercise, so Green is relying on students' ability to know what he means by these two terms. Also notable in the textbook is the

lack of any further work with what students are supposed to have learned by doing this and the other 12 exercises in this chapter. On the whole, there is little coherence between what students are taught about business writing and the work they are asked to do in exercises.

Green's book is organized in chapters that combine instruction in the topic of the chapter, annotated example letters (both bad examples and improved versions), and exercises: "The Ways of Words in Business," "The Mechanical Make-up of the Business Letter," "Problems in the Production of Business Letters," "Letters of Order and Acknowledgement, Printed Forms, Etc.," "Letters of Inquiry and Reply," "Other Letters Which Seek and Grant Cooperation," "Good-Will Letters," "Sales Letters—Basic Technique of Selling by Mail," "Sales Letters—Typical Problems," "The Sales Letter Series: Follow-Up Letters," "Sales Letter Enclosures," "Employment Letters," "Credit Letters," "Collection Letters," "Complaints and Adjustments," "House Communications," "Business Reports," "Business Articles," "Writing for Radio Business." The content of this textbook is getting much closer to the standard business communication textbook of the 21st century.

The big leap in the coherence of business writing textbooks came at a time when the field of professional writers was larger, business writing was growing as a subject to be taught, books about business writing were proliferating, and another, related field was establishing a body of textbooks that were informed by a strong interest in infusing the thinking of the humanities into the teaching of technical writing. It may be that the presence of the technical writing textbooks in the marketplace had an influence on the development of textbooks designed to support business writing.

During the first 30 years of the 20th century, instruction in technical writing was growing and textbooks that focus particularly on technical writing started to be published. Engineers had,

of course, been around for a long time, but industrial developments hugely increased the demand for engineers, and over the next century, the field rapidly grew to meet demands for specialization (mechanical engineers, electrical engineers, chemical engineers, bioengineers, and so on). Very early on, English teachers were already trying to teach soon-to-be professional engineers how to write more effectively. In the early 20th century, the tensions between engineering and writing were starting to become visible in ways that have become iconic of the relationship: even today, many engineering students tend to see themselves as poor writers and they tend to see English teachers as feminine and impractical, while English teachers may tend to see engineering students as overly literal and uninterested in writing. Robert Connors put this in slightly different terms: “English teachers saw engineers as soulless technicians while engineers saw English teachers as dreaming aesthetes, promoting ‘refinement and culture’ to the exclusion of reality” (6). Thus, at the root of technical writing as a field, we find tension with the goals and sensibilities of English faculty.

It is important to note that early technical writing textbooks were ambitious, in keeping with the ways in which engineering as a field was establishing its professional credibility and distancing itself from versions of its identity that focused on service and utility. When Frank Aydelotte was president of Swarthmore, he wrote *English and Engineering: A Volume of Essays for English Classes in Engineering Schools*,¹⁰ which claims as its purpose

(1) To teach the student to write not by telling him how, not by doing his thinking for him, but by stimulating him to think for himself about his own problems, about his work and its place in the world.

¹⁰ The first edition of *English and Engineering* was published in 1917; the second edition, quoted here, was published in 1923.

(2) To lead the engineering student to think of the occupation for which he is preparing himself not as a trade but as one of the liberal professions.

(3) To lead him to see how his work of designing material conveniences for men is bound up with the spiritual advancement of the race—with the world of science, of literature, and of moral ideals. (v)

The book is essentially a reader arranged into several sections: Writing and Thinking, The Engineering Profession, Aims of Engineering Education, Pure Science and Applied, Science and Culture, Literature and Life. Among the authors are John Ruskin, Robert Louis Stevenson, John Stuart Mill, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Wordsworth, and Thomas Carlyle. The selections include essays such as “A Proposed Code of Ethics for All Engineers,” “Poetry and Science,” “The Question of Style,” “Books Which Have Influenced Me,” and “The Mystery of Life and Its Arts.”

Aydelotte doesn't include assignments for students or attempt to direct the work that they do with the essays beyond what he says in the introduction:

This volume is planned for reading in connection with constant discussion and writing. The different essays should be considered as supplying questions and topics for thought. Following the preliminary discussion in class of what any single essay is trying to say, comes the question, What do you think about it? At first the undergraduate will probably have few ideas. But the skillful teacher will find that if he follows question with question on this side and that, points of view will soon begin to develop in the class-room. If he preserves an atmosphere in which thought is free and if he encourages each tentative opinion, differences will appear and trains of thought will be started which will demand careful statement

in writing to do them justice. Here it is that the instructor will find material for oral and written composition in which the student's reading will furnish stimulus and suggestion but not the rule or limit for his thought. Themes should never be mere analyses or summaries but rather the expression of individual points of view or the expansion and illustration of single points in the essay under discussion, with direct reference to the life of the student and the problems of his own education. (xviii-xix)

The teaching project that Aydelotte is setting up here contrasts sharply with the more utilitarian aims of the business writing textbooks of the same time. Aydelotte insists on the instructor's role as facilitator of free thought and expression of student's individual point of view; these are not typically articulated as goals for students of business writing. This passage also conveys a sense of writing as a way of developing—not simply expressing—thought: “trains of thought will be started which will demand careful statement in writing to do them justice.”

When I looked at this book I was struck by the ways in which many English department faculty would be interested in the project Aydelotte was facilitating in this text. It is different from what is in most current technical communication textbooks, which tend to echo current business communication textbooks in their content and teaching strategies.

The earliest technical/engineering writing textbooks I looked at were more methodical than the business writing textbooks of the same era, though the technical writing textbooks were clearly indebted to the business writing textbooks for the discussions of letters, you attitude, and other material. Still, the technical writing textbooks put letter writing in a larger context of writing for the profession, so that Earle's *Theory and Practice of Technical Writing* (1911), which Connors names as the first real technical writing textbook, actually presents a set of

principles for writing rather than simply offering a series of documents (with or without comments). And Sypherd's *Handbook of English for Engineers* (1913), while working with sample documents, covers not just letters, but also reports (including reports on lab experiments, inspections, progress, and surveys) and articles (including editorials, abstracts, book reviews, and explanations of new inventions).

Whether developments in the teaching of technical writing contributed to the shape and content of business writing textbooks or the two areas developed in a parallel way, remarkable changes in technology and society were coming.

During World War II, as bombs, guns, transport, and communications systems became more sophisticated, there was greater demand for writers who could communicate in the development process, as well as in the building and use of the resulting equipment. The years that followed World War II were prosperous years for the American economy. In the face of such affluence, gender roles were defined in sharp contrast, with the stay-at-home mom becoming an ideal (in popular culture, if not in reality), with race issues surfacing and changing America, the GI Bill allowing many to gain access to professional education, the growth of white-collar employment, and the field of communications growing along with the technology that supported it. Politically, the decade was characterized by the new Cold War: the diverging and antagonistic paths different nations took after the trauma of two world wars. America came to define itself against Communism and generated a great deal of energy from its efforts to be other than the Soviet Union, East Germany, and Cuba.

There was now demand for writers of advertising and public relations. The demand exerted pressure on schools, leading to new classes, new departments, and the rise of the field of communication. Rooted in classical rhetoric, but also some of the basic communication

principles established by teachers of business and technical writing up until that point, communication became the site for much of the instruction at the college level. In 1950s business communication textbooks, such as Robert L. Shurter's *Written Communication in Business* (1957), the technology of mass communication is used as a metaphor to explain the relationship between reader, writer, and text (see figure 4), a development of a trend that started in the 1940s with radio technology.

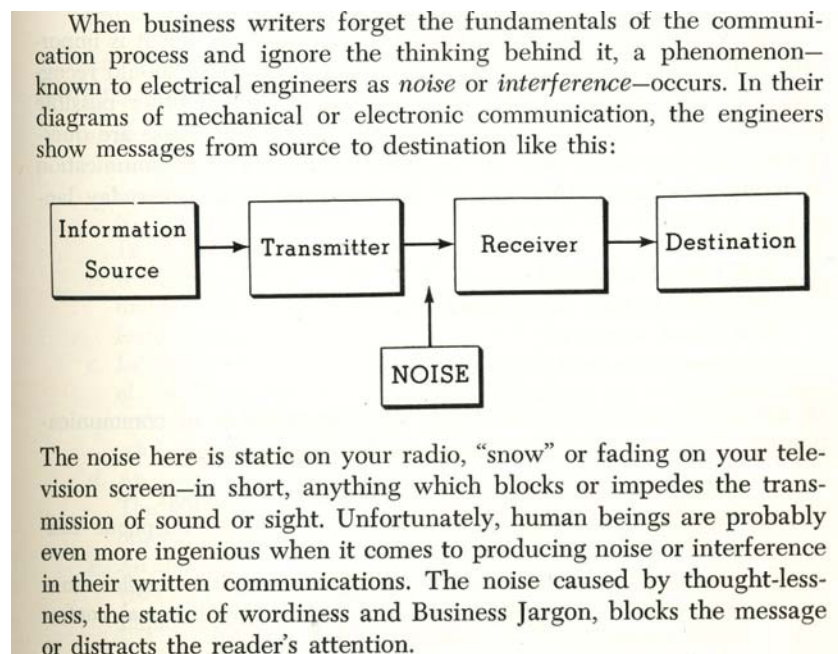


Figure 7. Mass communication technology serves as a metaphor for writing in Shurter's *Written Communication in Business* (1957).

In this mass communications model of writing, the goal of the writer is to eliminate “noise”—the equivalent of static—in the transmission: “The noise caused by thoughtlessness, the static of wordiness and Business Jargon, blocks the message or distracts the reader’s attention.” This notion of writing, which seems similar in many ways to the popular “windowpane” metaphor for writing, is very common in the teaching of professional writing to this day. In both of these metaphors, it is possible for writing to be pure and unmistakable. The writer’s job is to

put words together in such a way as to convey perfect meaning to the reader. Certainly, some scholars rooted in composition studies have pointed to the empiricist underpinnings of business and technical communication as part of what makes the courses a bad fit for English departments.

Shurter's textbook offers early examples of lists designed to help students think through a writing task and presents as individual, boldfaced small paragraphs what he sees as key aspects of business writing process (this type of formatting will later be called "bulleting"). In an early chapter, Shurter also identifies ten key principles that writers can use to ensure that their writing is easy to read, and then spends the rest of the chapter spelling out the ways that writers can be sure that their writing accomplishes these standards (see figure 8).

In his discussion of the first technique for making documents easy to read, Shurter draws on the work of Rudolf Flesch who worked during the 1940s to develop readability tests for prose (now known as the Flesch/Flesch-Kincaid Readability Tests) that are still used.¹¹ Significantly, Robert Gunning was doing similar work in the 1950's, developing the Gunning Fog Index, which is, again, still taught in professional writing textbooks. Viewed through one set of assumptions about writing and about the world, this move toward readability tests could be seen as using science to unlock the mysteries of writing; viewed through another set of assumptions, it could be seen as reducing writing to scientific formulas in order to make it manageable or controllable. Either way, it seems understandable in the context of everything else that was happening in the culture at the same time.

¹¹ Flesch also wrote *Why Johnny Can't Read* (1955), which has become iconic in American culture: when anyone wants to critique the educational system, an allusion to the title of Flesch's book is likely to appear in some form. The construction generally pits a wrong-headed educational system against the needs of kids.

readable. By applying them when you write, you can make considerable progress in eliminating the four major faults in business communication; for if we could poll all readers in business, we would get nearly unanimous agreement that too much business writing is: (1) wordy, (2) impersonal, (3) trite, and (4) hard to understand. On the constructive side, they could sum up their preference in one word—they want their writing to be *readable*. The mark of readable writing is its transparency: it does not interfere, it does not call attention to itself, but it does put your mind and your reader's in direct contact with no curtain of language between.

Business writers have found the following 10 techniques useful for making their reports and letters and memorandums easy to read:

1. Keep your sentences short.
2. Put your qualifying ideas in separate sentences.
3. Use paragraphs to break your text into readable units.
4. Use the active voice of verbs wherever possible.
5. Make your verbs carry their share.
6. Prefer the short word and the specific expression.
7. See if *which* and *that* clauses can be expressed more concisely.
8. Rearrange your sentences to make them more direct.
9. Show the relative importance of ideas within the sentence.
10. Avoid Business Jargon.

Keep Your Sentences Short

How short is "short"? No simple answer will suffice; Dr. Rudolph Flesch, who wrote *The Art of Plain Talk*, believes that an *average* sentence length of 17 words makes high readability. Writers in business should aim at variety in both the length and pattern of their sentences. They should occasionally check the average length of sentences in their letters and reports to see that it falls somewhere between 15 and 20 words. If not, they should employ a very useful device—the period—more frequently; most long sentences lend themselves logically to this chopping-up process.

I should greatly appreciate your letting me know what your decision is so that I can send the report to Mr. Jones in our Memphis office with a request for more information which we will need to make our plans for the coming year and to encourage him to make any suggestions he may want to incorporate. (*One sentence, 57 words*)

I should greatly appreciate your letting me know your decision. I can then send the report to Mr. Jones in our Memphis office requesting more information. We will need his suggestions for next year's plans. (*Three sentences, 35 words*)

Figure 8. Shurter identifies ten strategies to make writing more readable in *Written Communication in Business* (1957).

There are ways in which business writing textbooks of the late 1950s pull together what I see as the key components of today's business communication textbooks: both the teaching strategies and the scope of the course are established at this point. While I looked at later textbooks, I found that the 1960s were a natural stopping place for the work I am doing in this chapter, since so many key aspects of the business communication "canon" were established by this time.

It is worth noting that while the material presence of books teaching college students about business and technical writing shifted between 1900 and 1960, few of the types of books disappear entirely from American culture. If you go to Amazon.com today, you can find specialized spellers for professional fields (especially for medical professions), entire books of model letters, and books that offer advice about social and business correspondence as well as etiquette. During this time, the primacy and homogeneity of certain moves in the college-level business/technical writing textbook, however, have become striking.

Throughout the period during which the professional writing course was emerging, the economic and educational landscapes were changing radically as people tried to survive and capitalize on changes to the economy and social relationships, the nature of work, and new potential for communicating with large numbers of people. In this period can be found the birth of the current global economy. It is startling to see how much did not change in the teaching of professional writing throughout this period of dramatic change.

2.4. Consensus About the Material to Be Taught in a Textbook

Physically, the books from the late 1800s and early 1900s are small and relatively short: they are typically less than 8 inches from top to bottom and usually range between 150 and 350

pages (as compared to the 2003 *Business Communication Today*, which is nearly 11 inches tall and over 700 pages long). While modern textbooks are likely to feature some kind of visual element on every page, the early textbooks have fewer illustrations; but even the early ones show the format of letters, directions on folding letters and addressing envelopes, what typical office machines look like, and how to set up filing schemes for correspondence. As printing technology becomes more sophisticated in the late 20th century, the page design begins to rely on bulleted lists, sidebars, and photos, all of which contribute to the look of the modern business communication textbook.

By the late 1960s, even the design of business communication textbooks looks like the most popular textbooks today: The pages make use of more sophisticated design and graphic elements, and the teaching materials rely on checklists, realistic mini-cases, and profiles of actual businesses.

The physical differences between these generations of textbooks should not suggest that the early textbooks on business writing are radically different from current textbooks: the content, the attitudes, and the methods have much more in common with current textbooks than teachers using the materials might expect. A recognizable core of the current business communication or professional writing textbook comes from these original, older texts.

2.4.1. Form

For many new teachers of professional writing, form comes to mind as the center of what needs to be taught: letters, memos, resumes, and reports. While the specific forms of these documents as they are used now did not gel until later in the 20th century, instruction in form is prominent in early textbooks.

Clearly, letters are the oldest form taught in the textbooks. Textbooks old and new show students the specifics of formatting a letter. Figure 9 shows facing pages from an old textbook, offering the bare format and an example letter in that format. This is a typical example.

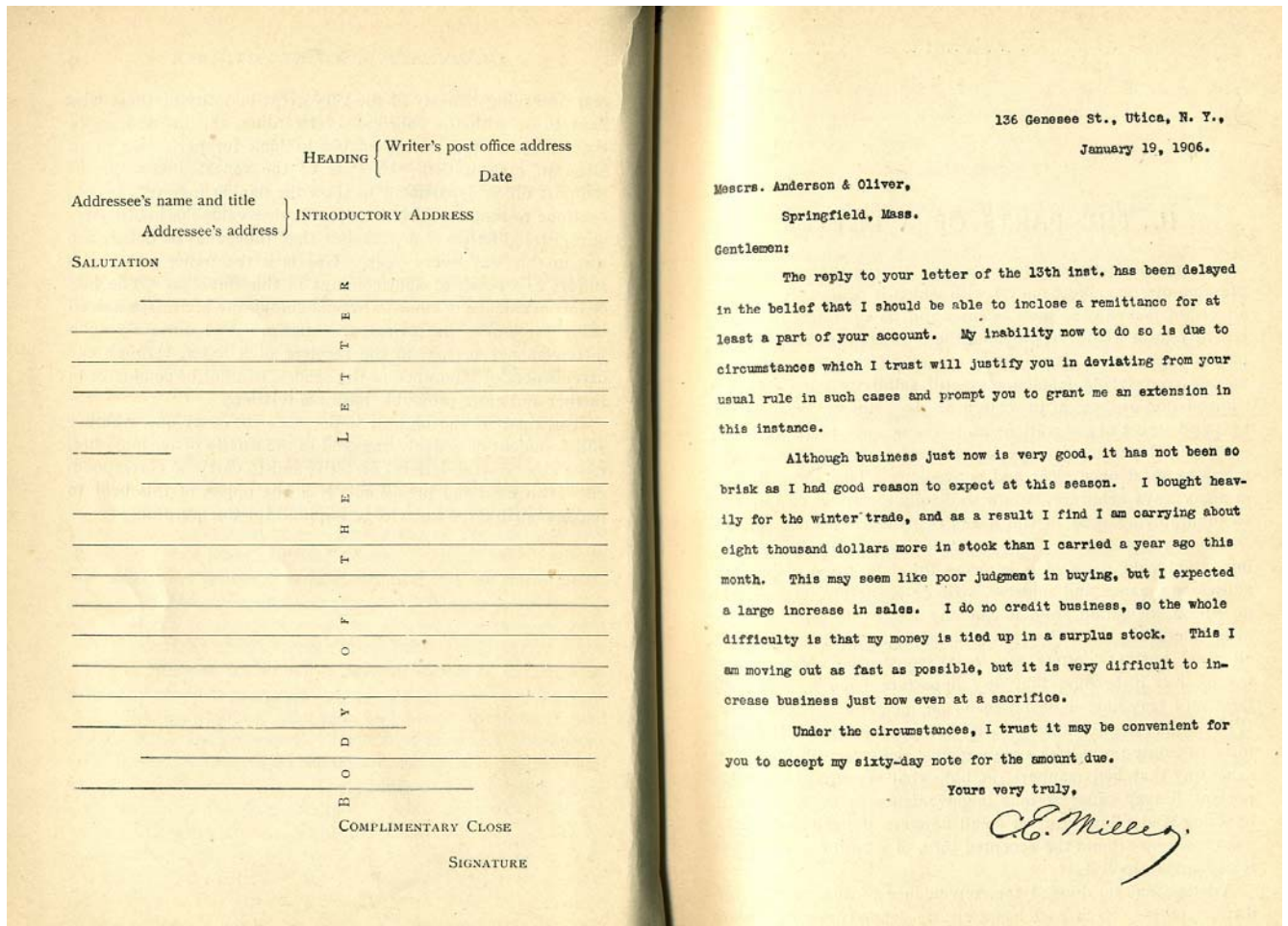


Figure 9. An early textbook offers instruction in letter format and an example letter, from Belding's *Commercial Correspondence* (1905).

Species of letters did much of the work that would later be done by other forms, so, for example, in the late 1800s, a short, informal letter might be written within a business to carry an internal message, with the specific form of the memorandum that is used now not becoming common until the 20th century, and not showing up in business writing textbooks until a couple

of decades into the century.¹² And an application letter is talked about in early 20th century technical writing textbooks, spelling out the writer's experiences, with the resume not showing up until the 1950s, and even then it wasn't called a resume, but an information sheet. According to the *OED*, the term *resume* was used in 1961, but became popular in the 1970s. Formal business reports as a genre of business writing separate from letters are described in the 1932 *New Business English*.

Interestingly, the teaching of form extends to content and tone in the case of the "collection series"—a set of letters sent to people who owe money and haven't paid. This series is taught in nearly all of books I studied from the early 20th century until now. The collection series begins with a friendly tone, reminding the reader about the bill. It eventually progresses to letter 4, in which the writer spells out legal steps that will be taken to collect the money owed. In *Business Letters: How to Write Them* (1916), the collection series is presented in great detail, and except for minor word choice issues that date the letters, the content and shift in tone (from friendly to very direct) is essentially the same as in current textbooks.

The intense focus on form seems understandable, since the conventional appearance of certain kinds of documents does a significant amount of work for readers. But many less experienced teachers of professional writing get the idea that form is the principal material that they should be teaching in the class. Memo and letter formats allow us to know quickly who is communicating with us and provide other important contextual clues to the content of the document. But professional writing in current contexts is also very likely to use unconventional design for many situations, and professional writers have many more design options available to them now than they did in the early 20th century. Letter and memo design can be taught very

¹² The term *memorandum* is much older. According to the *OED*, it was used in legal records and notations as early as the 15th century. The use of the term to refer to internal communication dates back to 1899, becoming increasingly common deeper into the 20th century.

quickly as a starting point for larger discussions about how the visual design of documents can rely on convention or can confound expectation. Students can productively discuss when and where to conform to or challenge conventional forms.

2.4.2. Know Your Reader and Get Your Reader to Do Something

The injunction to know your reader goes back as far as the late 1700s, where letter-writing guides advise those who want to write to take into account the station and the personality of letter recipient in order to avoid giving offense. In the early business writing textbooks, the instruction in this area takes the form of teaching students about your attitude: student writers are encouraged to think through their readers' position in order to make choices as writers. By the 1930s, discussions are much more developed, and students learn various forms of audience analysis to help them figure out what readers need and want.

Both business and technical writing are rooted in the idea that the writer's job is to manipulate the reader into taking action: for good or ill, professional writers are trying to get someone to do something, know something, or be something. Cody's chapter title from 1908 is a very direct example of this kind of thinking: "Using Words So As to Make People Do Things" (7). In current textbooks, the mnemonic device AIDA is often used to help students remember that as writers, they need to get the reader's attention, maintain reader interest, help fuel the readers' desire, and get readers to take action. While the earliest textbook I found that mentioned the formula (1916) didn't use the acronym, it certainly used the words and in that order. In both *Business Letters: How to Write Them* (1916) and *Business Communication Today* (2003), several pages are devoted to this strategy and annotated letters show the method at work (see figures 10 and 11).

<p><i>Opening secures attention by an interesting question</i></p>	<p>Dear Sir:</p> <p>Have you thought that because your house was not wired for electricity you must forever continue doing without the convenience of electric lights?</p>
<p><i>Description of the proposition arouses interest</i></p>	<p>If that's the way you look at it, you will be surprised when we say that we will put our service into your kitchen, install a sixty candle-power Mazda lamp just where you want it and give you an electric flatiron for \$12.</p> <p>This, without a doubt, is a tremendous lot for the money, but we want to make sure you are given the opportunity of enjoying the great convenience and wonderful benefits of electricity.</p>
<p><i>Argument and persuasion create desire</i></p>	<p>And you needn't fear that in having this service installed you will have to put up with a lot of trouble and muss. Your house will not be disturbed or mutilated. The electricians will spend only a few minutes in your kitchen putting in the necessary wires. These will be entirely concealed within the wall and ceiling. Only the neat fixtures will show. The workmen will clean up any small evidence of their work as they go.</p> <p>Doesn't this proposition interest you--a complete kitchen service for \$12 and twelve months to pay for it--just a dollar each month?</p>
<p><i>Close induces action</i></p>	<p>We believe it does, so we are enclosing a card to make it convenient for you to request a call from our Mr. Smith. He will be glad to explain everything that has not been made clear--with no obligation to you.</p> <p>Sign and drop the card into the handiest mail box--that's all.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Yours very truly,</p>


Here is a letter used by an electric company to secure the introduction of electricity into the homes of nonusers. It contains all the elements of salesmanship that have been outlined. From the opening, which touches upon a vital point in the mind of house owners, through the description of the proposition, the logical arguments in its favor, the persuasive answer to the fear of "muss and trouble," the reader is lead irresistibly to the close and the inducement to take action—to ask "Mr. Smith" to call.

Figure 10. An annotated letter shows the AIDA method of constructing a sales letter, from Thrift, Campbell, and Vass's *Business Letters: How to Write Them* (1916).

But beyond the AIDA formula, students who use these textbooks are told from the beginning that they are trying to get the reader to take a particular action. This applies today and a hundred years ago, as students learn to write letters, memos, and reports in which they propose

changes to operations, order items, make requests, ask for a situation to be fixed, sell ideas and products, ask employees to behave differently, and so on.

In-Depth Critique: Persuasive Letter Using the AIDA Plan



INTERNAL MEMORANDUM

TO: Eleanor Tran, Comptroller
FROM: Randy Thumwolt, Purchasing Director
DATE: May 7, 2002
SUBJECT: Cost Cutting in Plastics

In spite of our recent switch to purchasing plastic product containers in bulk, our costs for these containers are exorbitant. In my January 5 memo, I included all the figures showing that

- We purchase five tons of plastic product containers each year
- The price of the polyethylene terephthalate (PET) tends to rise and fall as petroleum costs fluctuate

In January I suggested that we purchase plastic containers in bulk during winter months, when petroleum prices tend to be lower. Because you approved that suggestion, we should realize a 10 percent saving this year. However, our costs are still out of line, around \$2 million a year.

In addition to the cost in dollars of these plastic containers is the cost in image. We have recently been receiving an increasing number of consumer letters complaining about our lack of a recycling program for PET plastic containers, both on the airplanes and in the airport restaurants.

After conducting some preliminary research, I have come up with the following ideas:

- Provide recycling containers at all Host Marriott airport restaurants
- Offer financial incentives for the airlines to collect and separate PET containers
- Set up a specially designated dumpster at each airport for recycling plastics
- Contract with A-Batt Waste Management for collection

I've attached a detailed report of the costs involved. As you can see, our net savings the first year should run about \$500,000. I've spoken to Ted Macy in marketing. If we adopt the recycling plan, he wants to build a PR campaign around it.

The PET recycling plan will help build our public image while improving our bottom line. If you agree, let's meet with Ted next week to get things started.

Grabs attention by clearly stating an ongoing problem and briefly providing background information that includes specific numbers

Makes suggestions in an easy-to-read list, providing detailed support in an attachment

Urges action within a specific time frame

Reminds reader of important facts that have already been established by breaking them out into a list

Builds interest by introducing an additional problem with the plastic product containers

Creates desire by providing another reader benefit

Figure 11. An annotated memo shows the AIDA method at work, from Bovée, Thill, and Schatzman's *Business Communication Today* (2003).

Certainly, all writing is written for readers, but professional writing does make that transaction more evident: for students, the stakes seem different and more obvious than in first-year composition. Those students have some sense that readers of their resume and cover letter, for example, aren't obliged to read them in the way their composition teachers have. They have

a sense that a press release that is badly written will fail in its intended project—it won't do what it is supposed to do. This is all worth focusing on in the classroom. The AIDA method may work for some imaginative and experienced writers, but there is a way in which it seems like whistling in the dark to me. This is true of more sophisticated audience analysis methods as well. Writers need to talk to readers, get feedback about projects, test approaches. Otherwise, they are too bound by their own ideas and previous experiences. This is where a class needs to be rooted in discussion of the class members' writing. Unfortunately, current business and technical writing textbooks are so packed with example documents and cases to discuss, that there doesn't seem like there is much room for discussion of what students are writing during the term.

2.4.3. Style

As is the case with other perennial complaints about the quality of writing produced by a non-expert group (students, employees, the public), textbook writers tend to lament the influence of the past generations—in this case, past business writers—but they do this without being conscious of their participation in a recurring strategy that articulates current values by defining the present against a past that may or may not be rooted in what actually went on. In professional writing, there is enormous cachet in being up-to-date and cutting edge, so we might expect that this desire would be articulated in a rejection of the past. For example, here are two excerpts from books published at opposite ends of the 20th century: From *Business Communication Today*, 2003: “Business language used to be much more formal than it is today, and some out-of-date phrases still remain. You can avoid using such language if you ask yourself, ‘Would I say this if I were talking to someone face-to-face?’ Similarly, avoid using big words, trite expressions, and overly complicated sentences to impress others. Such pompous language sounds puffed up and roundabout” (119).

And from *Business Letters: How to Write Them* (1916): “Too many business letters...follow the stilted, stereotyped style of twenty years ago. Instead of being natural, they are filled with such meaningless, tiresome, overworked expressions as *contents noted, esteemed favor, beg to advise*, etc. The business letter to be effective must be vigorous, clear, and convincing.” (33).

All of the textbooks offer students advice about style, and there is a high degree of agreement over time about what constitutes effective style for business writing. This advice from *The American Letter-Writer* (1793) would fit nicely in any business writing textbook in any generation: “With regard to letters of business, they should be plain, concise, and to the purpose, but at the same time, full and sufficient to express your meaning” (5). To achieve the preferred style, the student must be friendly, but not overly familiar; concise but not terse; and conversational while also precise about the matters at hand.

While style gets talked about a lot, the teaching of it tends to be confined to bad examples paired with good examples, with students expected to learn how to write in a good style by simply witnessing both. While students can agree that one is better than another, the steps a writer would take to get from one to another aren't so clear.

2.4.4. Identity of Genre

Here is a passage from the opening chapter of a recent textbook on professional writing that offers a surprising way of dividing the work of writing:

Your previous writing courses may have dealt with personal or literary writing.

You will find workplace writing considerably different. Read a few lines of John Donne's “The Bait”:

Come live with me, and be my love
And we will some new pleasures prove,
Of golden sands, and crystal brooks,
With silken lines, and silver hooks.

Donne is making a personal artistic statement with a skill and beauty quite beyond most of us.

Look now at the piece of workplace writing in Figure 1.1. The writer who wrote these two short paragraphs was making an impersonal statement to convey a piece of information. The style is not particularly artistic, but it is competent. The paragraphs are easily understandable by their intended readers. To make sure the information would be understood, the writer also included a visual (a bar chart in this instance). The passage represents a style and a method within the grasp of most of us.

Workplace writing is a craft, not an art form. As a craft, workplace communication is a rational process that can be learned. (Cunningham, Smith, Pearsall, 3)

This is a peculiar opening gesture to make. In defining the work that students are meant to do, this textbook rules out art entirely. Why choose Donne? And why this Donne? It is as though the textbook authors are saying, “Here is this lofty poetry you may have never even heard of, but don’t worry; we’re setting our sights much, much lower.” I want to argue with this entire passage: the assumption that craft and art are wholly separate, the idea that poetry and

professional writing have nothing to do with each other, the assumptions about the students using the textbook.¹³

When I saw the passage above, I immediately thought of Edward Harlan Webster's *English for Business* (1916), which also compares poetry and professional writing, but it does so with a more relevant point to make. Webster juxtaposes the poem "The Aeroplane" by Francis Medhurst with a detailed set of instructions for building a model plane (originally published in *Scientific American* in 1911). After he offers the two texts, Webster explains why they are different:

It need scarcely be said that the preceding poem would be of little practical value to a mechanic desirous of building an aeroplane. Although the poem presents a very definite picture of such a machine to the general reader, it furnishes none of that specific information which would guide him in its actual construction. And yet we do not say that the poem is worthless; on the contrary, because the author has accomplished his purpose—to stir the imagination, to make the mind feel the beauty, the delicate mechanism, the reserve power, the unlimited possibilities of this new invention. . . . On the other hand, suppose you wanted to find out how an aeroplane might be made. No longer would the poem be of value, because it would not serve your purpose. (381)

For Webster, the point is that writers choose a genre based on what the reader needs to do with a text. It is a worthwhile distinction to make, and he imagines that students may actually be interested in both types of writing. In 2007, a better course to take with students might be to focus on the differences between academic and professional writing, since they serve different

¹³ When I work with poets who are also studying professional writing, I point out that, as in poetry, every word in professional writing has to be there for a reason.

purposes have different audiences, and the writer may need to be proficient in both, at least while in college.

2.4.5. Grammar

In the earlier textbooks, at least the first half of the book might be given over to instruction in syntax and grammar.¹⁴ This material is still usually in business communication textbooks, but it is in an appendix, and it functions as a mini-handbook (since these textbooks often cost more than \$100, teachers might be reluctant to ask students to buy additional books for a course). The migration of the material on mechanics from the front of the book to the back is significant. It reflects, I think, the ways in which content specific to business writing was developed over time.

Many of the early books offer long lists of words to be memorized and pairs of words to learn to distinguish. Early on, there is significant anxiety about knowing the correct word for the context, and for knowing proper forms of address for persons. More recently, there is anxiety about representing yourself and your company in a positive way.

It is true that many readers of professional writing are far less tolerant of error than, say, students' college professors may have been, particularly if the errors are associated with certain dialects or lack of education. Most current professional writing textbooks don't spend much time exploring why that might be or helping students understand editing processes or how to identify and address one's own pattern of error, all of which seems more useful to students than simply demanding correctness.

¹⁴ Interestingly, in 1892, W.J. Musser wrote a progressive textbook called *Plain English* that argues against overly technical grammar instruction as being pointless and too concerned with concepts that operate in Latin. When Musser's textbook is set next to others of the period or even now, it seems like a striking departure.

2.4.6. Using Current Communication Technology

All of the textbooks also offered direct instruction in the use of writing technology. In addition to instruction on writing in a readable hand for business, early textbooks also taught students how to make copies of hand-written letters using carbon paper or machines. Later, when the technology of writing would be typewriter-based and later yet, when word-processors and computers would be used, business writing textbooks continue to include some instruction in the actual technology: how to strike typewriter keys with even pressure, how to use a dictation machine, or how to back up files on a computer, for example. Instruction in efficiently and effectively using the technology of writing tends to be seen as part of the work of a business writing textbook.

Material that addresses current communication needs beyond just writing appears and disappears from textbooks generation by generation. For example, textbooks can be expected to offer guidance in navigating the communication channels of the time (books of the late 19th century offer detailed advice on postage rates and classes), and non-writing communication such as speeches or presentations. In the early 20th century as in the early 21st century, diagrams show writers how to properly fold letters to put them in an envelope. A current textbook might offer chapters on web design, Power Point slides, or communicating with colleagues from other cultures, while an early 1900s textbook includes information about telegrams and assignments like this: “Do not exceed ten words in any of the following telegrams: Write a telegram ordering a small invoice of dry goods sent by American Express...” (Erskine 98). A textbook from 1910 offers tips on using the telephone: “Before making the call, *think just what you want to say*” (Marshall 110). Often, in these moments of helping students with new modes of communication, textbooks will go beyond instruction in writing or even communication issues and touch on how

the new communication will impact lives. For example, in the 2003 *Business Communication Today*, students are told, “Don't let incoming [e-]mail run your life....Don't overcheck your e-mail....Avoid checking e-mail while on vacation” (A55). A 1950s or 60s textbook has a chapter on dictation and offers advice that addresses the human interaction involved: “Don't habitually locate 'one more letter' that has to be dictated at 5 p.m. and mailed that day. Remember that she has a life of her own to lead” (Shurter 1957 419).

Changes in technology are speeding up, and technology advice that would have seemed useful just a few years ago is already outdated (for example, how quickly have USB drives displaced ZIP drives for backing up data and making it portable?). It is a mistake to get too caught up in the specifics of a particular technology. But the implications of technology are important to explore. This is one kind of work that would be responsible and productive to explore with students: what does instant communication mean for professional writers? What are the implications of electronic distribution of documents? In what ways do copyright and intellectual property issues have an impact on writers and designers? How can professional writers use or be used by new distribution systems and new media (current examples are YouTube, blogs, viral campaigns)?

2.4.7. Relevant Legal Issues

Textbooks often offer advice about legal issues as they have an impact on the wording of certain documents. For example, in Hammond's *Style-Book of Business English*, the authors use a bad document/good document comparison to teach students how to write a collections postcard that is permitted by law (see Figure 12).

Illustrating the Abuse and Use of the Postal Card

The following style would be punishable by law :

SMITH, INGALLS & CO.

61 Park Street

Boston, Mass., January 10, 1908.

Mr. L. A. Croton,
Beverly, Mass.

Dear Sir :

When are you going to pay the next instalment on your household goods? You are not keeping up to the terms of your contract. Unless back payments are made by the first of next month we shall take the furniture away.

Yours,

The following style would be mailable without offending the law :

Dear Sir :

Permit us to call attention to the unsatisfactory state of your account and to the fact that we have not received answers to our letters written you on the subject. Our agent will call on you in a few days to confer with you.

Respectfully yours.

1. Note that the reference in the first card to the purchase of household furniture on instalment payments and the threat to take it away would, upon being known to the public, be humiliating to the debtor, and is, therefore, unlawful.

2. Nearly all men owe. The mere statement, therefore, of the fact of the debt, devoid of humiliating details or of aspersions on the character of the debtor, is held by the courts to be proper.

Figure 12. A bad document/good document comparison of postcards features annotations that explain the language permitted by law, from Hammond's *Style-Book of Business English* (1910).

One source of change in the textbooks is change in the larger culture. The textbooks don't at all seem to question the culture or critique it, but they dutifully make changes to teaching

materials when required for legal reasons. Some of these examples dramatize in interesting ways just how much our culture has shifted. For example, in Hunsinger's 1960 textbook students are given this advice about resumes (called information sheets): “Most employers prefer that you list briefly your physical characteristics and health status and your physical handicaps (or a statement that you have none). You may also list your religious preference and your nationality and descent” (213). A current textbook will now explain just as carefully that it is illegal for employers to ask question about physical characteristics, health, disabilities, race, and religion.

Such changes don't happen overnight, without struggle, deliberation, public discussion, and intervention by the legal system. Professional writers live and work in societies that are also grappling with change, so it seems strange to erase all of that. Students could usefully think about how some of these changes came about—what were the pressures that led to the anti-discrimination laws that currently exist? In what ways do professional writers have to think about issues like liability and responsibility? Why is it important to address diversity as a writer? How do we learn to question our assumptions in useful ways?

2.4.8. Class-Appropriate Social Behavior

The use of language reflects the user's social position in all of the textbooks. In early business writing textbooks, there seems to be a lot of anxiety about word choice. In at least two textbooks—Erskine's *Modern Business Correspondence* (1907) and SoRelle's *Applied Business Correspondence* (1914)—much of the text consists of drills in which students distinguish between two similar words (“concur” and “agree” or “advantage” and “benefit,” for example). There is a lot of emphasis on being the kind of person who knows how to use words “properly,” the kind of person who knows the “right” word for a given context. In Cody's 1908 textbook,

“vulgar” is the most commonly used negative term used to evaluate errors in correspondence, and it is clearly a judgment against the person committing the error:

Many women have the idea that it is independent to sign initials (so that a stranger receiving a letter does not know whether it comes from a man or a woman), or else the simple given name without Miss or Mrs.; but the only courteous way is to relieve the stranger of the embarrassment of guessing whether you are married or single, and avoid the ridiculous blunders by writing Miss or Mrs. before the name in parentheses. Only vulgar people write it without the parentheses. (37)

The tone and intent of Cody’s disciplinary language can be found in many of the early textbooks, as authors guide students into socially acceptable language use.

In Marshall's 1910 textbook, for example, the author warns students not to use the terms “lady” and “gentleman” loosely, but rather to use “woman” and “man”: “The use of *lady* and *gentleman* to designate persons of either sex, is in very bad taste, as is also the practice of addressing a strange woman as 'lady' instead of 'madam.' We sometimes hear porters, car conductors, floorwalkers, and other public functionaries saying, 'This way, lady'; ...but well-bred persons say 'Madam'“ (40). Eventually, textbook writers will shift from the elitism of terms like “well-bred” to the personal prospects of the writer: what language will allow the student to advance through an organization, not embarrass the company, and maintain the good will of readers?

Students can also expect to receive support in the social conventions that maintain propriety in professional relationships. The early textbooks teach students how to navigate the sea of social convention surrounding visiting cards (for example, what it means when someone folds down the top-right corner as opposed to the bottom-left), and current textbooks offer advice on how not to

offend business colleagues from other cultures. All textbooks address strategies to avoid offending people while writing in a hierarchy that likely includes superiors and people supervised by the writer (or simply lower in status than the writer).

This is another place where it seems teachers would be better off overtly discussing what such moves are doing. If students are learning to write as professionals, they should have some opportunity to think about what “professional” means. Some professional schools go so far as to have etiquette experts come in and teach students how to eat at a fully set formal table, how to small talk, how to socialize at a cocktail party. Students often find such opportunities a relief from assumptions that everyone knows how to do such things. Class in America is very difficult to talk about, but it seems clear that “professionals” buy into a homogenous set of classed behaviors that do not match up with the home cultures of some students for a variety of reasons. Why not make this process more visible to students so that they can explore the impact of language use given all of those assumptions?

2.4.9. Ethics

The final point I would like to make in this section has to do with an aspect of writing that is largely (and significantly) absent from textbooks. Discussions of ethical issues, which would seem central to a course on professional communication, appear to be absent entirely from old textbooks and are marginalized in more recent textbooks. In *Business Communication Today*, for example, there is a sidebar on “Promoting Workplace Ethics,” a feature that appears in some chapters. This one takes up the subject of doublespeak with a jaunty tone: “But don't worry, if you're dehired, deselected, surplusd, or uninstalled, corporations will offer you a career change opportunity or vocational relocation.” The assignments based on this material invite students to

do work that doesn't seem to take up the subject with much rigor: “The president of one company just learned that some of his employees have been playing a popular game called 'buzzword bingo,'...Some managers are complaining that it's getting out of control,” with employees playing the game during meetings. The question for students? “What can managers do to avoid these silly games?” The task that students are asked to do seems not to engage with the issues of workplace ethics in ways that will lead to a more critical understanding.

In other moments, current textbooks will address ethics by posing ethical problems—some of them staggeringly important—but asking the students to simply write about or discuss the problems in class. The textbooks themselves don't indicate how students would go about addressing the problems or how they will know if they have achieved a satisfactory solution. Like a death scene in a Greek tragedy, the actual deliberation about ethics must occur off-stage. We might predict this kind of compromised work on ethics, given the close connections between business communication textbooks and corporate entities (which provide many of the case examples that are essential to such textbooks). By moving the discussion entirely to the classroom—where it is invisible to anyone not in the room—textbook authors and publishers can appear to engage with work on ethics while deflecting any negative responses from industry.

In fact, it's hard to imagine a textbook engaging with the ethics of professional writing in a serious way given the ties to corporate culture that have become powerful in the teaching of business communication. Perhaps these relationships were a natural extension of the business case method used in business schools at the graduate level. But it seems like a professional writing course offered by a college (rather than in-house at a company) is a kind of failure if it doesn't engage with some of the enormous ethical tensions inherent in, as Cody says, “using words so as to make people do things.”

2.5. Consensus About Strategies for Teaching

The examples I have brought forward to show the emergence of the canonical ideas of business writing textbooks also illustrate the most common strategies for teaching.

2.5.1. Bad Doc/Good Doc

Throughout the history of business/professional writing as a course, textbooks have included letters, both well written and problematic, that respond to many different particular rhetorical situations. In any textbook that I looked at, students were likely to be given model letters, bad letters set next to the improved versions, and assignments in which they are given a bad letter and are required to fix it. Figures 13 and 14 show examples of this teaching technique separated by nearly a century.

Figure 13 shows two pages from Cody's *How to Do Business by Letter*. Cody has paired and annotated the two documents. The revisions in Figure 13 are designed to correct errors in propriety, the unreasonable expectation of credit, and lack of specificity in items being ordered. The revision also suggests the letter will be more effective if the writer avoids repetition and gives each item she is ordering its own paragraph (in effect, bulleting out the items).

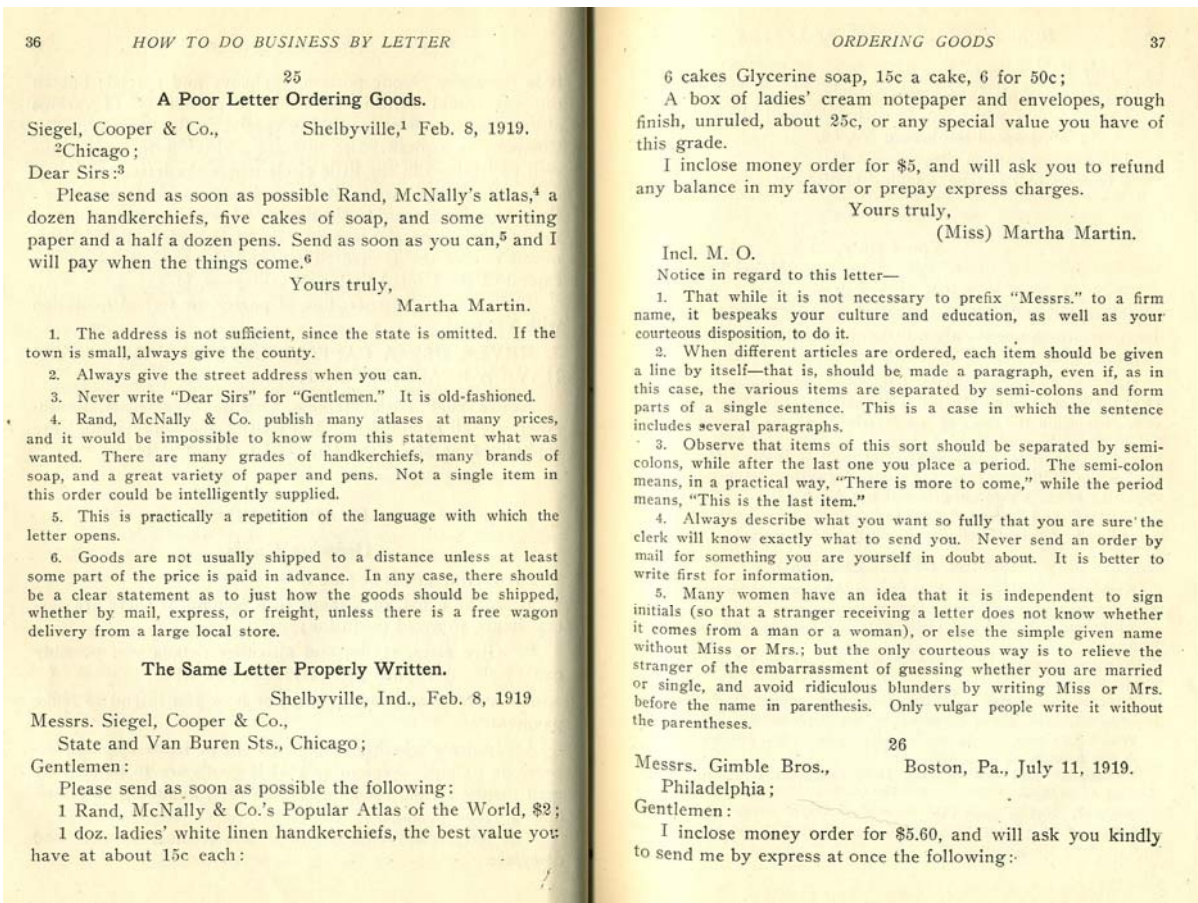


Figure 13. Sherwin Cody (1908) teaches readers by pairing a "poor letter" with a "properly written" revision. Note the annotations.

The letters Locker presents (see Figure 14) are supposed to illustrate possible approaches to a sample problem or mini-case provided in the textbook. She labels the letters shown in Figure 14 “unacceptable solution” and “good solution.” Her comments, like Cody’s, focus on correcting errors and asking for more specificity, but she also pays a lot of attention to the tone, how that tone will reflect on the company (which is the form that calls for propriety take in our current professional culture), and how it will affect the reader.

Need date

Dear Customer:

Relax. We got your check. Not necessarily true. Reread problem.

This explanation makes company look bad. There is always a time lag between the time payments come in and the time they are processed. While payments are waiting to be processed, the computer with super-human quickness is sending out past-due notices and (threats) of cancellation.

Need to present this positively Cancellation is not something you should worry about. No policy would be canceled without a legal notice to that effect giving a specific date for cancellation which would be at least 30 days after the date on the original premium notice. Too negative

If you want to buy more insurance, just contact your local Interstate Fidelity agent. We will be happy to help you.

Sincerely, This paragraph isn't specific enough to work as a reader benefit. It lacks you-attitude and positive emphasis.

Need date

Dear Customer: Better: use computer to personalize. Put in name and address of a specific reader

Your auto insurance is still in effect. Good #1. True for all readers

Good to treat notice as information, tell reader what to do if it arrives Past-due notices are mailed out if the payment has not been processed within three days after the due date. This may happen if a check is delayed in the mail or arrives without a signature or account number. When your check arrives with all the necessary information, it is promptly credited to your account. Good you-attitude

Even if a check is lost in the mail and never reaches us, you still have a 30-day grace period. If you do get a second notice, you'll know that we still have not received your check. To keep your insurance in force, just stop payment on the first check and send a second one.

Benefits of using computers Computer processing of your account guarantees that you get any discounts you're eligible for: multicar, accident-free record, good student. If you have a claim, your agent uses computer tracking to find matching parts quickly, whatever car you drive. You get a check quickly—usually within 3 working days—without having to visit dealer after dealer for time-consuming estimates. Better to put in agent's name, phone number

Need to add benefits of insuring with IFI Today, your home and possessions are worth more than ever. You can protect them with Interstate Fidelity's homeowners' and renters' policies. Let your local agent show you how easy it is to give yourself full protection. If you need a special rider to insure a personal computer, a coin or gun collection, or a fine antique, you can get that from IFI, too. Good specifics

Whatever your insurance needs—auto, home, life, or health—one call to IFI can do it all. Acceptable ending

Sincerely,

Figure 14. A bad example letter paired with its improved version, from Locker (2003).

As I will argue later, there are uses for example documents in the teaching of professional writing. There's a way in which this pattern of presenting paired before and after documents is a pedagogical improvement over the earlier trend to simply present letters as exemplars. But there is limited use in simply showing students the paired documents. How do students learn how to do it for themselves? Documents can serve more usefully as artifacts of writers' choices, and a discussion in class can allow students to think through some of those choices—some of which may have gone wrong, some of which may not hold up to scrutiny, and some of which may simply be unavailable to readers of the text. This is most useful when students are actually discussing examples from their own class.

2.5.2. The Annotated Document

As we have seen in the preceding section, even very early business writing textbooks offer example letters with annotations that invite readers to notice particular features, strategies, or faults. Figures 13 and 14 offer examples of how printing technology has gradually made this process easier, so that current annotations can even use different colors. Locker's textbook uses red to indicate negative comments (or "problem spots") and blue to indicate positive observations ("strong points"). Thus, the letter at the top of Figure 14 has only red comments, while the bottom letter has almost the same number of red and blue comments.

If the annotations evoke a teacher's comments written around the margins of a student document, it is also likely that they suggest to teachers the kinds of comments to actually make on student work.

2.5.3. Role Play

Inviting students to imagine that they are a person in a particular rhetorical context, and asking them to then write a document that deals with all of the provided details is an old technique. Some of the earliest business writing textbooks I studied rely on these moves, and they persist throughout all eras represented in my study.

For example, here is one of many student exercises from *Modern Business Correspondence* (1903), in which the student is told to write as if an employee at Marshall & Hammond, a dry goods operation:

Marshall & Hammond received yesterday a large order from Hess & Palmer, Albany, N.Y., dated three days ago. The goods were shipped via New York City freight this morning.

Write to Hess & Palmer. Tell them when the order was received; thank them for it; tell when and how goods were shipped; that invoice is enclosed. Express the hope that the goods will prove satisfactory and that further orders may be received. (36-37)

In this example, the student's responsibility for invention is limited. The situation is given to the student and the student is asked to give very specific responses. There isn't a lot of room for experimentation. The exercises in this textbook have a narrative thread: over the course of the book, the student starts out at Marshall & Hammond, gains experience, is invited by a friend to go into a new business as partner (with the responsibility for handling all the writing for the company), and then encounters many challenging writing situations in the new line of work.

Shurter's 1957 *Written Communication in Business* offers dozens of such assignments. Here is one from the chapter on collection letters:

As a business manager for a correspondence school, write a letter to a student who signed up for a course in electronics and made his first payment of 25 percent of the cost. When he did not make his second payment of \$15, you cut off the instruction. Write to collect the amount due and attempt to induce him to complete the course. (248)

The assignments assume that students will be able to pretend to be an employee—or even a specific person—in a meaningful way in a business he or she may know little about and that a teacher who likely also knows little about that business will be able to evaluate the student's performance in a meaningful way. And the textbooks assume that the students will transfer what they learn in this exercise to their eventual real jobs. This is an established part of professional writing pedagogy; the assumptions that support it need to be explored.

Current textbooks offer many profiles of writers solving communications dilemmas at Hallmark, FedEx, Campbell's Soups, and so on. (In fact, modern textbooks may include a separate index just for companies that have been mentioned in the book.) And they also provide assignments that ask students to imagine that they are one of these corporate employees. These are VERY specific. This example is drawn from a unit on communicating interculturally:

Imagine that you're the lead negotiator for a company that's trying to buy a factory in Prague, capital of the Czech Republic. Your parents grew up near Prague, so you understand and speak the language fairly well. However, you wonder about the advantages and disadvantages of using a translator anyway. For example, you might have more time to think if you wait for an intermediary to translate the other side's position. Decide whether to hire a translator, and then write a brief

(two- or three-paragraph) explanation of your decision. (Bové, Thill, Schatzman 76)

This technique of telling students who they are and what they think as a teaching technique seems odd to me—it's us telling them their minds, forcing them to take positions, telling them that thinking through an issue on their own terms and with points of reference in their own worlds of experience, in their own personas—is not real work in a class. It also misses an important point. While professional writers may indeed need to write in the persona of someone else, doing so effectively requires more than just the details surrounding the creation of a document. It would actually be useful to teach someone what makes a document sound like the work of a particular individual, but I have never seen a textbook invite students to do that kind of work.

2.5.4. Checklists

While checklists *as* checklists start showing up in the 1950s and 1960s, the listing strategy is certainly present in the earlier textbooks, to remind writers of the many issues to consider in the creation of business correspondence.

Checklists can be found in at least every chapter of a business communication text from the late 1950s on. Bleich, discussing the summary and bulleting he found in writing textbooks, is suspicious of this device, which he finds both mercantile and simplifying (34).

William Covino uses the term “coercive incantations” to critique articles that promise you a better marriage, career, health, and so on if you take 10 easy steps. He argues that these articles reinforce the class positions of readers by asserting that 10 magical steps—rather than action that they could imagine and carry out—are the keys to improving their lives. Greg Wilson uses

Covino's term to name the lists offered in textbooks that suggest for students magical possibilities of coherence and efficacy. Wilson, I think very rightly, suggests that such lists for writing disempower students "as partners in the articulation and interpretation" of writing and situate them as those who perform functions that are beyond their understanding.

Like the approaches to instruction in grammar and in form already discussed in this chapter, the checklists included in professional writing textbooks seem pedagogically limited and assume more consistency in professional writing than tends to be the case.

2.6. Conclusion

Textbooks published after World War II were shifting their claims to authority. The early textbooks had authority because of their packaging as textbooks and by including quotations from famous men of previous generations. Sometimes, authors also claimed knowledge of the actual business world as that which set their textbook apart from others. But deeper into the 20th century, references to research become the dominant form of authorization, and now, textbooks contain pages and pages of citations. In spite of all that research and citation, there is a core of material and teaching practices that remain consistent over a period of at least 100 years. What has been added over time is material drawn from communications theory, writing process theory, and management theory, which enter the textbooks in about that order. The pedagogical core of these books remains limited in the work imagined for students and for the scope imagined for the teaching of professional writing.

In a classic essay, "In Case of Fire, Throw In (What to Do with Textbooks Once You Switch to Sourcebooks)," David Bleich studies composition textbooks and finds that many textbooks "do not ask students to relate their own knowledge, experience, hopes, and wishes to

the writing process. They tell students what to do, assuming that students come to college naïve and without understanding of this subject, other subjects, and the terms of existence” (32). Bleich articulates my frustrations with most textbooks I looked at during my research. I think this is one of the most problematic assumptions about students that can shape a textbook.

But I also found that the textbooks did not invite critical thinking about what it means to write professionally. The materials of professional writing pedagogy hold both the potential for conservative tendencies (the perpetuation of the professional as the functionary of power) and for opening up the practices of professionalism to scrutiny. Such courses can make entrance to the professional class—with its advantages and benefits—possible through mastering the language, rhetorical moves, and technical knowledge of the professional. Why is none of that typically seen as being part of the work of the course?

Context has a lot to do with this. What I would feel comfortable teaching at a corporate on-site class or in a graduate school of business is different from what I would want to teach in an undergraduate course in the humanities. Different agendas are at work, different allegiances, different projects.

In her history of professional writing, Katherine Adams finds that great, often sudden needs in corporate culture have led to corresponding developments of professional writing programs. While such shifts may open up new sources of crucial funding to English departments, it seems as though we should be more eager to create a space in our professional writing classrooms in which students are not only able to learn how to produce effective professional prose in forms that are particular to specific fields, but they are also invited to engage with their own processes, to examine the implications of their choices about the words

they put (or don't put) on a page, and to understand their roles in power structures that open up possibilities to them or close doors.

Studying the emergence of the business and technical communication textbooks has allowed me to articulate some of the possibilities and limitations in teaching professional writing. Certainly, the textbooks—their assumptions, appearance, and pedagogy—contribute directly to the ways that the teaching of professional writing can be marginalized within English studies and even composition studies. Ever since the 1980s, when professional societies and journals for business and technical writing came into being, teachers have argued about how such writing courses should be taught. The next chapter explores the complexities of these arguments in order to identify alternative ways of locating the teaching of professional writing.

3. **THE ANXIETIES OF SERVICE: PROFESSIONALIZED COMPOSITION AND THE TEACHING OF PROFESSIONAL WRITING IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

English departments must remember that technical writing has drawn its popularity from the mandate given by business and industry—to succeed, to be promoted, one must speak and write well. While freshman composition is a step in the process of developing writing skills, technical writing is not primarily a course in the theory of composition. Its purpose is to familiarize students with the various kinds of writing done in the industrial and corporate world. Therefore the point of view of the business and industrial world of which the student will become is the only criterion which should be used to plan and teach the course. (Tebeaux “Ruin” 823)

Two distinctions that concern me most are whether we treat writing as a basic skill or as an intellectual discipline and, in consequence, whether we treat students as technicians or as professionals. I don’t think that either of these issues has much to do with whether technical writing instructors are employed by English departments or by technical divisions in a university. In my experience there is a tendency on the part of both English faculty and engineering and science faculty to think of all writing courses as being somehow remedial, as totally lacking in content, and as concerned only with correct style. A freshman composition course that attempts no more than this creates problems but a writing course for college juniors and seniors that goes no further is a disgrace. (Miller “Response” 826)

3.1. Service as Pressure Point: A Case Example

The quotations at the beginning of this chapter are from a conversation that appeared in *College English* in 1982. They map out a particular set of tensions that pressure both professional writing and composition. At stake is who gets to determine the content of the course and what it is that gets taught. The presence or absence of the word “skills” in these quotations signals the writers’ affiliations with opposing sets of traditions, scholarship, and resistances. Because the terms of this set of tensions have not changed significantly since the publication of this argument, and because these tensions can limit the possibilities for professional writing as a course in an English department, it is important to understand what Tebeaux and Miller are arguing about.

Long-time technical writing teacher Elizabeth Tebeaux¹⁵ published a comment in *College English* that responded to *CE* articles by Carolyn Miller and Elizabeth Harris, articles that were trying to theorize the place of technical writing in an English department. Tebeaux's title put all her cards on the table: "Let's Not Ruin Technical Writing, Too." The way this title functions is intriguing: the key words in the title to attend to here are "ruin" and "too." What else has been ruined? And how? The title clearly assumes that readers will understand the essay as a kind of line in the sand: "Thus far, but no further." It's the kind of thing people say when they feel they have been quiet long enough or perhaps too long. When the "us" of the title gets figured in, the title suggests this sense: let's not ruin technical writing the way we (or does she mean "they"?) have ruined composition. It is interesting that Tebeaux doesn't seem to feel the need to discuss the "ruin" of composition in her essay—the "too" of the title remains accusatory but unexplored. Perhaps the "too" is self-evident from her perspective.

It's not hard to imagine what Tebeaux sees as already ruined in composition. The popular critique of teaching practices in composition and English over the past few decades has followed a predictable line. The view of composition courses from some perspectives is that they should be—in the simplest sense—preparation for every other college course and the working world (which is too often labeled the "real world"). They should provide a set of skills, make sure that Johnny can write (regardless of who is defining what writing is). Students who "fail" to conform to a teacher's or parent's idea of what good writing is in, say, a history class, may be offered as evidence of the failure of the first-year composition class, the composition teacher, and the English department. These ideas get circulated, for example, in the complaints

¹⁵ Tebeaux was teaching in the University of Houston's College of Technology when she wrote the response discussed here. She is currently Director of Distance Education and Professor of English at Texas A&M University. She has been a leader in the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing and has published articles as well as *Emergence of a Tradition: Technical Writing in the English Renaissance, 1475–1640*. She is a co-author of the textbook *Reporting Technical Communication*, now in its 11th edition (as of June 2005).

of teachers who say (with varying degrees of hostility), “What are you people doing in English? Students can hardly write when they get to my class, and I’m supposed to teach them about _____, not writing.” Any efforts to make the first-year writing class about intellectual engagement on its own terms can be seen as taking away the time and energy that “should” be going toward fixing students’ writing.

Though Tebeaux does not argue her right to establish the real and practical preparation for the technical writing course, her critique of Miller reveals her sense that the demands of business primarily determine the appropriate work of the technical writing course.

Tebeaux writes:

Professor Miller says little about the primary goal of the basic technical writing course—to teach students to document information clearly, correctly, and economically. The position that technical writing should be taught against a background of communality and enculturation makes technical writing just another English course and ignores the reason students need to take the course—to prepare for the writing they will have to do in business and industry.

(822)

What do students do in the context that Tebeaux imagines as the main focus of the technical writing classroom? The class sounds like what is still a common way of configuring the professional/business/technical class:

. . .the point of view of the business and industrial world of which the student will become a part is the only criterion which should be used to plan and teach the course. Real situations, quasi-real situations, or simulated situations should be used as report subjects. The industrial environment, in fact, cannot be effectively

simulated by trying to make technical writing a course in either rhetorical or humanistic theory of communication. Trying to give the course . . . ethical dimensions, as Professor Miller wants to do, makes less sense than telling students their paychecks are going to suffer if they can't write well. (823)

Tebeaux's pedagogy not only shapes the course to reflect the future working life of students in business and industry, but it takes as its *raison d'être* the needs of employers, making it a service course in a pure sense:

The point is this: what an English professor thinks should be included in technical writing is *not* important. The requirements of the real world and the department whose students take the course should determine what is taught. Basically, technical writing, unlike traditional courses in composition, is dynamic, because its existence, its reason for being in the curriculum, is not humanistic but pragmatic. (824)

Tebeaux issues a warning to English departments that resist the pragmatic, "real world," service course: they may lose the opportunity to teach the course since "many departments whose students take technical writing are not convinced that English departments should be teaching the course at all."

Tebeaux's argument is tautological: technical writing should meet the demands of the business world since the business world's demands are those that should determine what gets taught in technical writing. While writing in response to Carolyn Miller's much-cited¹⁶ 1979 *College English* essay titled, "A Humanistic Rationale for Technical Writing," Tebeaux's critique doesn't engage with Miller's attempt to think about precisely how certain definitions of

¹⁶ Miller's article was declared the most cited article in technical writing between 1988–1992 by Elizabeth Overman Smith, "Points of Reference in Technical Communication Scholarship." *Technical Communication Quarterly* 9:4 (2000): 427–453.

the real and the practical have determined the treatment of technical writing and how important it is to examine such definitions in the context of English studies. Miller¹⁷ began her essay with a story about a conversation in her department: should their technical writing course be allowed to satisfy a humanities requirement? The literature teachers in the department believed that students shouldn't be able to satisfy an English or humanities requirement with a technical writing class and that to prevent students from doing so, the course should be given a literature prerequisite. The teachers of the technical writing class believed otherwise. Ultimately, the English department discovered that the university curriculum committee had already decided that the course could not be counted as a humanities course. But in the meantime, Miller was already exploring the revelations of this conversation: that the English department considered one of its own courses to be outside its own project and that, rather than addressing or amending the situation, intended to let it remain so.

For Miller, at stake are different ways of understanding the world. The typical view of technical writing emerged from a positivist view of science, she says:

Such a view of science presupposes a mechanistic and materialistic reality. The goal of human knowledge is direct apprehension of that reality. Facts are self-evident entities existing out there in the real world—we have only to learn how to see them accurately or derive them logically. . . . In this epistemology, language, based as it is in personal psychology, is largely a distraction for science; and

¹⁷ Miller went on to publish widely in the technical communication field, particularly in areas of rhetoric. She is the SAS Institute Distinguished Professor of Rhetoric and Technical Communication at North Carolina State University, where she teaches digital rhetoric, rhetoric of science and technology, rhetorical theory, and technical writing and communication. She is also the founding director of NCSU's doctoral program in Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media. Interestingly, Miller's website explains that she actually worked as a technical writer before she wrote the *CE* article cited here: "I worked as a technical writer and editor for about four years—for a textbook publisher on Long Island (Barron's Educational Series); for a technical consulting firm (Volt), a scientific publisher (American Physiological Society), and a medical newspaper (International Medical News Service), all in suburban Washington, DC; and then for a federally funded higher education consulting firm in Durham, NC."

rhetoric is just irrelevant, because conclusions follow necessarily from the data of observation and the procedure of logic. (612-13)

For Miller, there are several problems with this view of reality—and the understanding of writing that it promotes: it emphasizes form and style at the expense of invention; it insists that writers should be objective, unemotional, and impersonal—demands that are burdens and lead to graceless style in English syntax; and it leads to a reductive understanding of “the reader” by focusing too much on just vocabulary and “reading level.”

Miller argues that science itself is shifting to embrace new epistemological frameworks:

This new epistemology makes human knowledge thoroughly relative and science fundamentally rhetorical. . . . it holds that whatever we know of reality is created by individual action and by communal assent. Reality cannot be separated from our knowledge of it; knowledge cannot be separated from the knower; the knower cannot be separated from a community. Facts do not exist independently, waiting to be found and collected and systematized; facts are human constructions which presuppose theories. (615)

Given the context that Miller is arguing here, she recommends that technical writing teachers re-see their work, so that good technical writing isn't governed by the fantasy of an absolute reality but “a persuasive version of experience” because to pass off writing as objective means that “we have passed off a particular political ideology as privileged truth.”

The solution for Miller comes in the next-to-last paragraph of her short essay:

We can teach technical or scientific writing, not as a set of techniques for accommodating slippery words to intractable things, but as an understanding of how to belong to a community. To write, to engage in any communication, is to

participate in a community; to write well is to understand the conditions of one's own participation—the concepts, values, traditions, and style which permit identification with that community and determine the success or failure of communication. (617)

While this exchange may be more than twenty years old, it should still seem very familiar as the *détente* that reigns in English studies between those who believe in and believe they own the “practical” and those who, by the same token, believe that the work that gets done under the aegis of the “practical” is work that is necessarily untheorized, uncritical, and complacent in terms of the status quo. Whatever may be sympathetic in Miller's examination of the positivist hegemony, she does not offer any idea of the kinds of actual work that should be done (as opposed to the appropriate premise that should be found) in a technical writing course. She also does not seem to imagine how any and every English course must negotiate between theoretical premises and curricular demands.

The exchange between Miller and Tebeaux should not be read as an exchange between equals. The fact is that Miller's article was chosen for its own value by the editorial board of an academic journal, while Tebeaux's was written in response or in reaction to, Miller's piece. The relative power situation is likewise visible in their respective arguments. Miller's argument is one that does not need to demonstrate its value in terms of the “practical” in the most basic sense of classroom “practices.” The situation would be different if Miller was writing her piece for a journal and in the context of an academy that was governed by the very notions of the practical that Tebeaux seems to be espousing. Tebeaux, meanwhile, reflects the relative power situation of technical writing in so far as she is content to defend the non-English-studies practices of the

technical writing class, content, that is, to remain marginal in relationship to English studies even to the point of threatening secession. Again, this is *détente*.

Tebeaux's critique articulates profound frustration with those teachers who do not see writing as the transparent transcription of the work of the mind. When teachers try to reshape the professional writing course in order to focus on more than format and "clarity," they may be met with such resistance and suspicion. Their efforts may be seen as an unwelcome intrusion to those teachers who are satisfied with their pedagogical approach, and they may be accused of serving their own professional needs, rather than those of the students and their future employers. The terms of the critique should also sound familiar to those who have been criticized for going beyond form and mechanics in their teaching of courses for underprepared writers or for first-year composition to teach complex and demanding texts or to invite students to design and carry out more challenging intellectual projects.

The terminology and assumptions embedded in the Miller/Tebeaux exchange are still alive: I have heard similar thoughts expressed in articles and at professional conferences and staff meetings. For example, several years ago, at a staff meeting where some faculty members were discussing a shift in the teaching of a professional writing course, one long-time teacher of the course said, "There is no way anyone can make this course sexy. Its purpose is to get students to write transparent prose for the workplace." Note the assumption that trying to make a professional writing class more responsible to the projects of English studies is an exercise in making it "sexy" (which seems like a way of dismissing the validity and significance of the work). And then note the idea of transparent prose. This teacher was in a way reproducing the moves of Tebeaux's argument: the intellectual project of English/composition is represented reductively, and an opposing, "common sense" version of writing is offered with an appeal to the

standards and needs of the workplace. At the time, I read this as a teacher's resistance to rethinking a very familiar course. I also thought that it was possible that the professional writing class was a way for this instructor to teach in the composition program without engaging in the larger conversation taking place in composition in the department and in the larger field.

I am quoting the exchange between Tebeaux and Miller because it makes visible a couple of important tensions that determine the current possibilities for professional writing. By reinscribing the debate about the point of professional writing as a recapitulation of the debate about the point of composition, I want to leverage the field's sense of its own meaning and mission in order to energize the teaching of professional writing.

3.2. Service and the Marginalization of Composition and Professional Writing

English departments teach professional writing courses, but often on the borders of the curriculum and with either little interest or with pedagogical approaches in serious tension with current composition and pedagogical theory. There are several ways of accounting for professional writing's marginalization within English departments and within composition.

Again, teachers of professional writing (even those teaching professional writing as only part of what they do in an English department) may teach as though the course is just about form: students learn memo, letter, and report format and a clear and concise style. In this anomalous class, in contrast to the assumptions of many interests currently represented in English departments (cultural and critical studies, discourse theory, work on persona, and more), "transparency" of language is not only seen as possible, but it is often held up as the primary pedagogical goal—even though teaching students that their workplace writing needs to be transparent naively ignores the daily practices of many professionals who write and for whom,

for better or worse, obfuscation, spin, and skillful misdirection are often the primary task at hand. The methodology of the form-driven course claims to be based on the case method developed in business schools (though I have argued that its roots are older) and draws its points of reference from the corporate world. Kate Ronald, herself a professional writing teacher, articulates her own frustration with this model of professional writing pedagogy: “It is tempting to revert completely to audience analysis, following the guidelines left for us by memos, sales presentations, and quarterly reports. No wonder professional writing isn’t popular with the English faculty—there doesn’t seem to be anything there worth knowing” (Ronald “Politics” 186).

When teachers argue for this common version of the professional writing course, they invoke the "real world," as in "students need to know what is expected of them in the real world." It seems as though the "real world" here functions as a device that shields this pedagogy from further inquiry. It's meant to close down a conversation, not open one up. This set of factors only marginalizes professional writing in contexts where the teaching of writing is taken seriously as an intellectual process, not just a set of steps.

The political space that the course inhabits is further complicated by the motivations of different sets of stakeholders in the teaching of professional writing. Students, faculty, departments, and the wider discipline all have complex and often competing investments in the course, but there doesn’t seem to be much room for addressing what students want from the course of study. Students want the professional writing course; for those students who complain that the general education requirements of their colleges are irrelevant, professional writing courses hold the promise of relevance and their first steps into presenting themselves, into thinking of themselves, as professionals in the world. For students who may be the first generation of their families to attend college, the stakes are even higher. They don't take

"becoming a professional" for granted—it's a project that is fraught with possibility and danger. A course in professional writing offers a certain kind of power, or at least protection from the shame of not knowing how something is done. "I don't want to make a fool of myself when I get my first real job," one student told me when we were talking about why she was taking the course.

Composition teachers spend a significant amount of time trying to engage the interest of first-year composition students in writing, yet when students want to pursue the study of professional writing for their own purposes, teachers may be inclined to ignore or dismiss their interest as being driven only by the desire to acquire knowledge and skills as commodities. Yet, it is possible to teach classes that inform students' work in college or after college without abandoning the agendas of the humanities. Students can be invited to engage with an intellectual project, to think in critical ways about writing and about the courses. As Lisa Ede has asked about composition more generally:

What is a scholar like Geoffrey Sirc assuming when he argues that teachers of writing "can allow students the seduction of texts in a carnival classroom, or we can train them to create writing that can be used in the production and marketing of bombs"? (*English Composition* 225). Sirc's dichotomous claim is admittedly extreme—but he is hardly the only scholar in composition to leave students' own goals out of the equation when talking about the teaching of writing or to assume that students will learn, and experience our writing classes, on our terms, rather than on their own. To what extent have scholars been obsessed with directing and controlling students' learning in writing classes? How can we differentiate between the reasonable desire to set goals for our teaching and the desire to

control aspects of students' learning that might best be left to students to determine? (222)

Ede's questions are helpful to engage with, whether the class at stake is a first-year composition classroom or a professional writing classroom. The process of answering the questions is crucial, even though the answers cannot be quantified: at least if the questions get asked there is space for the students' goals in the classroom.

While some academics may not be interested in what students want out of a class, they are likelier to be very clear about their opposition to serving the needs of corporations despite Tebeaux's assumptions about the point of professional writing instruction. If professional writing classes are identified in a department as merely workplace preparation, the classes and their teachers and students are more likely to be marginalized. Many academics find that their work leads them to critiques of the corporate community. The influences and traces of American business interests on current business communication courses are undeniable, and though they are often unexamined by those who teach professional writing, the traces are evident enough to make professional writing classes seem anomalous in many departments or programs. I agree with many others that composition has a role in helping students to develop their critical and analytical abilities, whether the class is a first-year composition class or a professional writing class. How that happens in a professional writing classroom I'll discuss later. For now, I want to focus on how the perception that it *doesn't* happen could play into the marginalization of professional writing in English departments and even in composition.

The service focus of professional writing is overdetermined: What might be a responsible pedagogical understanding of how service intersects with the teaching of professional writing? In order to answer this question, we need to sort out the resistance to service in composition as a

field. This set of tensions about the mission of English and of composition studies and the perceived mission of professional writing offers rich possibilities for re-imagining the work of professional writing courses.

The work defined for composition has been forged by both pressures toward disciplinary status and the demand for relevance. When it comes to professional writing, the opposition of the service course versus theoretically informed work recapitulates some formative and generative debates that drove composition studies into being. The form this debate has now taken is interesting at this cultural moment because it poses in stark terms the dilemma facing English departments in an increasingly corporatized university.

A quotation like this one from Frederic Bishop, Dean of the University of Pittsburgh's School of Engineering (early-20th century),¹⁸ would raise the hackles of many humanities teachers, including compositionists:

An educational institution resembles, in some respects, a manufacturing concern. The goods produced must be of such design, finish, material, etc. as to satisfy its patrons. Likewise, the graduates of educational institutions must meet the requirements of the concerns which are to employ them.

This kind of expectation, this way of defining the work of the university as an assembly line for workers, represents an attitude that threatens academic freedom, the professional identity of professors, and the project of the humanities. "Service" tends to be objectionable to academics for all of these reasons. Part of being a professional academic is self-directedness, expertise, and engagement with discipline-specific theory, all of which is neutered when someone simply takes orders from non-expert outsiders like another discipline or a vague corporate future employer of

¹⁸ Canadian social science professor David Noble quoted Bishop in a talk at the University of Pittsburgh in 2002 (Steele). According to the University of Pittsburgh Archives Service Center, Bishop was a professor of physics who served as dean of the School of Engineering from 1910 to 1927.

the students. On the other hand, it can be easier to secure funding for programs and teachers if ties can be made between what many will call “real world” needs and the work going on in the classroom. In first-year composition classes and in professional writing classes, this is a particularly tempting possibility, since people outside English are so eager to make these connections.

Service is a sensitive point in composition. Put a little pressure on that point, and dramatic things start to happen: people suggest that there is no purpose to the whole field of composition, they propose giving up the entire tenure system, they argue for abolishing first-year composition, and more. Because service is such a sensitive point for composition as a field, and because the teaching of professional writing is inscribed directly on that point, it’s crucial to unpack some of these associations in order to better understand the impact they have on the teaching of professional writing.

Many scholars have written about composition’s lack of status in the academic hierarchy, which comes from the fact that composition’s most notable business is the teaching of first-year students. And from the fact that these students are largely being taught to write academic prose in service to their college careers. In this line of thinking, many people can teach composition—there is no special training required, just common sense and a good memory of one’s own college composition class. And in this way of thinking about composition, no one has a disciplinary interest in composition—they teach it because there are a lot of jobs in the area or they teach it because they lack the expertise or drive to teach a legitimate academic area.

Since a required first-year composition course mandates enough faculty to teach all of those sections, and since, in many schools, there aren’t enough tenured and tenure stream faculty to teach them, the idea of composition as a service course is closely connected with discussions

of labor and staffing issues in the field, including the prevalence of adjunct faculty and women teaching the courses.

James Sledd functions as a prophet for composition studies, not in the sense of predicting the future, but in the Old Testament sense of someone who offers an unsettling and painful reading of reality to a population while urging them toward radical action. Sledd argues that compositionists have worked hard to create an academic specialty that focuses on something other than first-year writing instruction. He uses the notion of “boss compositionists” to undermine the legitimacy of composition as a field, arguing that “upward mobility for a minority of lower managers has been mistaken for deep change” (1). In his article “Return to Service,” Sledd calls for compositionists to look to what “the tax-paying public” will pay for and what those who require composition want from the course: “clarity of statement, intelligible organization, reasonably justified assertions, mechanical and grammatical correctness” (10). This set of very modest goals for the teaching of writing may echo what Tebeaux wants to claim for technical writing, though Sledd will not even go so far as to suggest that composition should teach workplace writing, which he sees as better left in the hands of employers.

Paired with this return to service, Sledd calls for the abolition of tenure and the system of academic ranks in favor of a more cooperative and unionized system. It’s interesting that Sledd is willing to jettison the work of composition scholars as scholars—he is particularly dismissive of composition research, arguing that such research is fragmented, chaotic, and entirely suspect from an intellectual position:

The success of the compositionists to date seems to me to lie primarily in guaranteeing their own continued employment. With every possible good intention and in the sincere conviction of their own righteousness, they have been

complicit in the wider society's division into bosses and bossed, and they have been so conditioned that they enact the values of the wider society even as they denounce them. Their best defense would be to moderate their claims and join in the universal confession that we all, like sheep, have gone astray. (9)

The religious allusions here are tongue-in-cheek, perhaps, but not a mistake, since Sledd is operating in a version of reality that is polarized: the sinful status quo is opposed to the renunciation of a way of being. The sin that is being committed by composition is the systematic exploitation of labor and perpetuation of inequality in the workforce.

Sledd represents one end of a spectrum of possibility: abandon scholarship and the tenure system that supports it and return to service as a way of resolving the very real problems of labor that haunt composition as a field. Others look at the same situation and wish to instead eliminate service.

Sharon Crowley is one compositionist who has argued that the required first-year composition course has outlived its usefulness. From Crowley's perspective, the required composition class serves purposes that have little to do with what compositionists claim for their work:

The continuing function of the required composition course has been to insure the academic community that its entering members are taught the discursive behaviors and traits of character that qualify them to join the community. The course is meant to shape students to behave, think, write, and speak as students rather than as the people they are, people who have differing histories and traditions and languages and ideologies. (9)

For Crowley, this function of the first-year composition course guarantees the continued low status of composition studies as a field.

Despite its pedagogical innovations and its ambitions toward curricular expansion, ...because of the universally required course and its unique function within the academic imaginary, composition studies is still associated with composition's earliest and most familiar pedagogy: the pedagogy of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and formal fluency. Because of this association, composition is regarded as instrumental or remedial work. (256)

Crowley argues that as long as composition teachers are positioned as "servants of student need" by institutions, the field of composition studies will be hobbled. She urges compositionists to abandon this way of justifying the first-year composition course and to explore other possibilities.

Given the pressure from and expectations of college administrators, parents, teachers in other fields, and students themselves, the elimination of the first-year composition requirement would be likely to work, I suspect, in populations where undergraduate students are prepared for college, where the composition faculty have attained success and recognition as scholars, and where graduate programs are small enough or well endowed enough that large numbers of teaching assistantships are not required to support graduate study. Take away any of those factors, and the abolition argument becomes elusive.

Both Sledd and Crowley illuminate the unique position of composition in the academy and its fraught relationship with its own historical function.

For Bruce Horner, the tension between composition-as-discipline and composition-as-first-year-writing never goes away:

Work in composition is recognized for, or defined as, the production of economic capital in the form of the commodified literacy skills to meet “society’s” demands (including the “demands” of other academic disciplines). Indeed, Compositionists have sometimes exploited this recognition to make greater claims for material support from society in order to address the constant laments of a “literacy crisis.” ... The bargain Composition thus makes of selling its labor to others continues to overlook the full materiality of writing as social practice rather than reified textual object or isolated skill. Moreover, it also makes explicit the material conditions of intellectual work that the academy remains loath to acknowledge. This provides yet another reason for the academy to keep Composition on the margins, and reinforces its subordination to both the academy and “society.” And finally, this bargain condemns those in Composition to further relinquishing control over their labor practices: accepting the challenge to produce “outcomes” invites public scrutiny of the work of composition teachers to which college and university literature teachers have never been subject but with which those in K–12 education are all too familiar. (*Terms of Work* 16–17)

For Horner, the stakes in this discussion are high and the choices are difficult and dangerous: whether compositionists locate their purpose in serving the literacy needs of society or whether they distance themselves from that service in order to establish their academic professionalism, composition becomes subordinated and marginalized, with its teachers exploited and alienated from their labor. Horner urges the field to focus on the teaching of writing, especially as practices that are located within a particular history and culture.

While I would not want to dismiss the innovative scholarship being done by compositionists in the rhetorical and intellectual space carved out by those who have pursued composition's interests outside of the writing classroom, I agree with Horner that the work of teachers and students on writing is a central concern of composition studies. I would go further and say that pedagogy is a particular concern of contemporary composition scholarship: what sets current practices apart from the practices of composition teachers 50 or 60 years ago is the work done on what allows teachers to teach students how to write. I'll take this up more in the next section.

Before I move to that section, however, I would like to draw on Horner's work with the scholarship of sociologist Ken Kusterer. In his article "Traditions and Professionalization: Reconceiving Work in Composition," Horner uses Kusterer to argue for a rethinking of the work of composition teachers.

Kusterer's project in *Know-How on the Job* is primarily concerned with the knowledge of workers typically thought of as unskilled. He interviewed line workers in a package manufacturing plant, tellers at a bank, meat cutters, truck drivers, welders, mail room clerks, and others. Kusterer finds that, in contrast to the perceptions of managers who describe workers of certain jobs as "unskilled," the knowledge required to work such jobs is complex:

In order to do their jobs successfully, all workers must acquire a stock of working knowledge. Every job requires the worker who holds it to act in the workplace, and to act effectively the worker must acquire a stock of working knowledge about that workplace. This working knowledge forms a holistic paradigm which each worker uses to structure her perception of the work environment and to interpret the various phenomena that occur within it. (177)

An example of such working knowledge is drawn from a manufacturing line for paper cones (used to serve food and drink). Good operators on the line develop a detailed sense of quality standards and how defects in the products are caused by the process. Both workers and managers refer to workers who develop this working knowledge as having “an eye for cones” (55).

Kusterer offers detailed accounts of the work done on the job, with in-depth studies of employees in two work environments and brief explorations of several other jobs. He argues for a new and more complex understanding of workers’ relationships with their work, complicating ideas about the alienation of unskilled workers. In contrast to some assumptions of Marxist theory, Kusterer argues that working knowledge ameliorates feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, self-estrangement, and social isolation (181–182). He also argues that working knowledge allows workers to have some control over their work environments. Kusterer contends that “unskilled” workers can be both invested in their jobs and in the working knowledge they have struggled to gain, while at the same time they are alienated from management and its profit-maximizing objectives, causing a fundamental ambivalence.

Horner uses Kusterer’s idea of working knowledge to illuminate debates about teaching writing skills. He identifies one thread of debate as being focused on “writing skills” for their economic exchange value in the labor market and as therefore “complicit with exploitative, alienating social relations” (373). Another thread, which emerged in response to the first, instead frames the teaching of writing as art or process. “But,” Horner argues, “this de-emphasis of the use value of writing through its effective aestheticization simply substitutes for the economic capitalization of writing skills the production of *cultural* capital and *its* exchange value, and so is no less complicit in the commodification of writing: in place of writing ‘skills,’ we have the

production of works of ‘art,’ say, or, more recently, the production of politically leftist attitudes.” Horner sees this tendency in composition as leading ultimately to the devaluation of working knowledge for the sake of professional knowledge:

Within this discourse, then, tacit, or working, knowledge is no knowledge at all, nor is “common knowledge” of the sort shared by the (lay) public. Professional knowledge is reified: knowing becomes the known, removed from immediate social, material contingencies through a discursive rendering which is then identified as and with knowledge and owned by the specialist writer, who is thought to have produced it. (375)

For Horner, then, this is a way of accounting for both the professionalization of composition and for the tendency in composition to see the traditional as something to be rejected. Using this same material from Horner and Kusterer, it is possible to see, again, why the teaching of professional writing gets constructed as outside the concerns of composition. In the next chapter, I’ll talk more about the “working knowledge” of professional writing, particularly as a staffing issue.

I think it is a mistake to imagine that the service question can be entirely resolved. But I think that it is also a mistake to simply buy into the terms imposed on the debate by others. While Horner’s work is useful and provocative, his tendency to identify two opposite possibilities for the field is a limitation. There is certainly work in composition that takes seriously what we may call working knowledge of writing, while there are also material conditions that can make it hard for academics to advance in their professional lives if they don’t engage in scholarship that makes sense to colleagues and administrators outside their field. It seems as though composition’s uniqueness in the academy can be tied to the need for its

specialists to be willing to be on the margins, to explore from that vantage point, to use that position to contact and draw upon other fields, and to create an intellectual life that is invested in a kind of bricolage.

Paul Kameen has argued for a different understanding of the marginalization of composition:

That composition is systematically marginalized in all of the ways we immediately recognize—money, status, prestige, workload—seems to me to go without saying. But while margins are, from one point of view, almost off the page, they are from another point of view, almost on another page. And that is the way in which many of us in composition have chosen lately to perceive our prescribed off-centeredness, our *ec*-centricity, in English studies. We are, that is, in certain key respects, not only in the outskirts of our own province, but at the *borderlines* between that province and its outside clients, patrons, neighbors, competitors, where we are called upon to negotiate the terms of those relationships, at least as they pertain to matters of “literacy,” at a very fine level of detail—sometimes in discourses that seem alien, even inappropriate, to our departmental colleagues. (37)

There is a way in which the pain and marginalization of composition has been reinscribed on professional writing, putting it on the margins of the margins. This marginalization has kept some of the most powerful aspects of composition scholarship out of professional writing classrooms, unfortunately. It is time to identify the possibilities inherent in that position.

In spite of the last thirty years of rich scholarship, one thread of the conversation in composition studies is still existential: “What is the point of teaching composition?” The

question still gets asked not because there's a lack of provocative and interesting scholarship exploring answers to the question, but because of the institutional position of composition as both the source and user of highly competitive resources. In other words, it is a question that has to be answered continuously because part of the conversation of composition always includes stakeholders who are not invested in the same way in the project (literature professors, for example, or deans, or provosts, or grad students or adjunct faculty assigned to teach composition classes though their investments are elsewhere, or even policymakers who have a hand in major funding decisions). In this sense, the same struggle for disciplinary legitimacy can be seen in professional writing scholarship, writing center scholarship, and, I suspect, in other emerging fields of inquiry that are still dependent on and connected to larger, more established fields. There is a way in which the answers to the big question (Why teach composition?) constitute the field rather than simply describing it. The fact that some answers to the question hinge on composition's teaching of writing to first-year college students as a way to prepare them for the rest of their college careers or even for work after college creates an enormous amount of tension for compositionists.

3.3. Turning Toward Public Service

Since I have spent most of this chapter pressuring the word "service" in order to uncover some of the biases against professional writing courses, I would be remiss not to discuss another sense of the word "service" that operates in interesting ways in discussions related to composition and professional writing.

The first part of this chapter focused on "service" as a way of designating courses that serve non-majors. In this sense, the word "service" has both the negative associations I have

already discussed as well as a simply neutral descriptive sense (some universities label their service courses as such so that they are easy for non-majors to find). Academics also use the term “service” to refer to the committee or mentoring work that they are expected to do as part of their work. Such work is not tied to specific number of hours per term, but is expected both as part of the job and as part of the community of a department or school. “Service” in this sense can have both positive senses (some people find such work to be an important and satisfying part of their professional life) and negative senses (often connected with imbalances in how much service individual faculty members do in comparison to others or the extent to which the expectation of service interferes with time that could be spent on activities that more directly lead to promotion and professional recognition).

Another sense of “service” has become more prominent in composition studies in the last two decades. Among the many associations of the word “service” for some compositionists, the sense that functions in the constructions “public service” and “service-learning” tends to be perceived in positive ways.¹⁹ Schools are establishing courses that have either a focus on public rhetoric or a focus on service-learning. These kinds of classes offer interesting possibilities to compositionists, who may find the idea of serving the community palatable while the idea of serving corporate needs is not.

A growing group of textbooks invite students to explore writing for the public interest in some sense. Textbooks like *Professional and Public Writing: A Rhetoric and Reader for Advanced Composition* (Linda S. Coleman and Robert Funk), *Compose, Design, Advocate: A Rhetoric for Integrating Written, Visual, and Oral Communication* (Anne Frances Wysocki and Dennis A. Lynch), *Composing a Civic Life: A Rhetoric and Readings for Inquiry and Action*

¹⁹ One association of the term “community service” tends to be forgotten: that is the association with the justice system and people who are punished by being required to do labor in lieu of jail time.

(Michael Berndt and Amy Muse), and *Writing and Community Action: A Service-Learning Rhetoric and Readings* (Thomas Deans) articulate a mission connected to writing that allows students to explore issues related to civic participation and social marketing. Much of this work invites students to read journalism, literary nonfiction, and even academic essays on public issues. For example, in *Writing and Community Action: A Service-Learning Rhetoric and Readings*, students will find essays by Paulo Friere, Audre Lorde, Tracy Kidder, Alexis de Tocqueville, Sharon Olds, Barbara Ehrenreich, Robert Coles, and others. There is certainly a lot of nonfiction that illuminates public issues and that can provide rich material for composition students to write in response to. Such work can also contextualize the teaching of professional writing as it supports nonprofits and public agencies. Most of these textbooks, so far, have their roots in classical rhetoric, perhaps because classical rhetoric has built into it ways of talking about civic participation that are a good fit for secular academic life.

Paula Mathieu attributes what she calls the “public turn” in composition studies in part to accommodate universities’ growing desire to connect with communities. The public turn in composition has found a natural fit with the service-learning movement. Service-learning in its original form is not connected with any one discipline, but is focused on forming university-community partnerships and inviting students to reflect on what they experience as they volunteer. There are key pedagogical principles that get discussed with somewhat surprising consensus in the literature: “Service-learning is a method by which students learn through active participation in thoughtfully organized service; is conducted in, and meets the needs of the community; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum; includes structured time for reflection and helps foster civic responsibility” (Huckin 50). There is a large body of

published work on service-learning in general, and the key words in that literature are consistently “service,” “community needs,” “reflection,” and “civic responsibility.”

In the late 90s and early 00s, composition teachers seized upon service-learning as an opportunity to allow students to write “real” texts for “real world” audiences. In fact, service-learning has been especially interesting to teachers of professional writing, perhaps because of the promise such projects hold of opening the discursive field beyond what is perceived as simply preparing students for professional life. A number of articles suggest ways of engaging students with this work, such as Huckin’s “Technical Writing and Community Service” and Scott’s “Rearticulating Civic Engagement Through Cultural Studies and Service-Learning.” A typical approach is to match teams of students to specific nonprofits. The students act as professional writers and the nonprofits function as clients with a need. The classroom then becomes a site for facilitating the work and offering students opportunities for reflecting on the experience.

An interesting textbook offering teachers and students a complete service-learning approach was published in 2003. Melody Bowdon and J. Blake Scott’s *Service-Learning in Technical and Professional Writing* offers students an overview of service-learning; a “rhetorical toolbox” of principals and strategies for writing; and support in choosing, managing, and completing a project. Along the way, students learn, in the context of carrying out their project, about writing letters, resumes, proposals, document design, reports, pamphlets, web sites, and more. This textbook formalizes the process of partnering with a nonprofit to create written documents that serve a need and offers examples and support materials. While the book is interesting and is thoughtfully done, it is, sadly, out of print.

This kind of approach is interesting and exciting for many compositionists because it opens up “the real world” and suggests that writing has stakes. It also opens up an area of concern that many academics are personally invested in. It seems like a win-win situation. But actually, in many cases, this type of project obscures what can happen in the transaction between university and community.

Several years ago, I had an experience that made me wary of easy assumptions about students’ usefulness to nonprofits. A teacher of WPC wanted to try out a service-learning component as part of the class and asked several units in the University to be the nonprofit partners of the student teams. I agreed to be the Writing Center contact for such a collaboration. I met with the team of four students to discuss needs that they could address, and we decided that they would work on some promotional materials (some posters and bookmarks) to raise student awareness of the Writing Center and its new location in Thaw Hall.

For the next several weeks, the team scheduled meetings with me, cancelled them, and rescheduled. After that initial meeting, only one team member consistently met with me, and it soon became clear that he was the only one doing the work.

When we met, by now more than halfway through the term, for him to show me the first draft of the posters, I found that the posters relied on images of writing, students, and the Writing Center that were not usable. All of the images used were of white men. One image was of a tormented-looking man practically buried under piles and piles of paper. I explained that we needed racial and gender diversity in the images we use, that we couldn’t just use any image we found online (we would need to have permission to use images), and that the Writing Center didn’t want to perpetuate angst-ridden images of writing and writers. In addition, the materials were created in a software program that the Writing Center did not have, so even if we wanted to

use the materials, we would not be able to update them or even print out new copies later. The actual copy was full of mechanical and factual errors.

This was ultimately an instructive experience for me (as a writing teacher interested in teaching students about writing in the nonprofit sector). I ended up treating our meetings like Writing Center sessions in which I taught the student team representative about writing via the materials he brought me. But it occurred to me that a staff member of local nonprofits like Phipps Conservatory, Venture Outdoors, or Bike Pittsburgh would probably not have the time, resources, or motivation to work with students in this way. It would likely become an irritating demand that offered nothing back for all the trouble. As it was, I didn't get final versions of the materials the team created.

There is now a growing body of scholarship that critiques the earliest implementations of service-learning in composition for the problematic relationships that can be created between organizations and students. Others have noted how race and class can function in such transactions as well, with students having a colonial or missionary attitude toward organizations' service recipients. Paula Mathieu's thoughtful book, *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition*, about the complications and possibilities of engaging composition students in service to communities suggests many ways that composition students and their teachers can go wrong in their desire to render service. For example, they can make unreasonable, time consuming demands of organizations and not offer anything useful in return; promise labor or products (such as documents or videos) that they fail to deliver; create products without learning anything about the organization or even asking staff members what is needed; evaluate written assignments ostensibly created for an organization without ever asking the organization

members' opinions; and objectify recipients of the organizations services and make unwarranted assumptions about them (100–106).

The “public turn” in composition studies holds promise and makes sense, especially in the teaching of professional writing, since a lot of professional writing happens in service to the public interest, whether for government or for nonprofits. But the field needs to be careful about how such impulses are enacted. It isn't helpful to send groups of students with mixed skill levels and varying degrees of motivation and engagement to work on a writing project that the nonprofit has to drum up on the spot, particularly if there isn't room in the class to engage with the discursive particularities of the organization—their key messages, distinct language choices, stylistic preferences, and so on. Teachers and programs should not burden nonprofits (which are often understaffed to begin with). Such relationships aren't partnerships as much as they are ways of exploiting the nonprofit sector in a bid for the appearance and feeling of greater relevance.

That is not to say that students and nonprofits can't productively mix. Most nonprofits are happy to have conversations with students (who represent, after all, a population that can provide future employees, financial support, volunteer labor, and perhaps even board-level direction for the organization). We are more equal partners with nonprofits when we can provide well-prepared, motivated, and supported interns to work for a term in the organization. We do justice to the impulse toward the public when we teach students the working knowledge of writing in the public interest: what kinds of documents do nonprofits or public agencies regularly create? How do they function? Who are their audiences? What are their processes for developing, writing, editing, and producing materials? What are their methods of distribution? What are the (extremely variable) material conditions under which such writing happens?

Given the fraught relationship composition studies has with service, and given the complexities of “the public turn” in composition, I turn in the last section of this chapter to scholarship in composition that can productively inform the teaching of professional writing: the pedagogy that has guided some work in composition (particularly in work for underprepared readers and writers) and recent calls for relevance in composition studies.

3.4. Situating Professional Writing as Advanced Composition

The theory/practice divide is especially fraught for compositionists because of the element of service. This is not a trivial issue: leaders in the field of composition are competing with other academics (who generally have a more clearly defined discipline and a clearer path for advancement in their fields) for resources, publication, tenure, and promotion. As some compositionists reflect on the professionalization of composition, they focus on articulating the theory/practice relationship in different ways. Some compositionists have distanced themselves from reflecting on classroom practice and have instead focused (in ways that are controversial for some of their colleagues) on prose more generally or on rhetoric, or on other related areas of intellectual investment. Some of them are doing compelling work, and, regardless of any Sledd-like call for compositionists to “return to service,” such work will only grow and change as scholars develop their own investments in the field. All of this makes composition hard to talk about as a field.

Lisa Ede, in *Situating Composition: Composition Studies and the Politics of Location*, argues for an understanding of composition that allows for its multiplicity and complication:

A politics of location could seem to suggest a limited notion of subjectivity, one that assumes that location determines or reflects identity—as in “I was born in

Ohio, but I now consider myself an Oregonian.” With [Caren] Kaplan, I view location instead as “discontinuous, multiply constituted, and traversed by diverse social formations” (Questions 182). In this sense, location is not fixed, and its interests, subjects, social formations, and purposes are sometimes in harmony, sometimes in tension, and sometimes in conflict. Any location, in other words, is multiply constituted and cannot helpfully be characterized as a single place or identity. As a result, issues of power and authority are key to understanding the politics of location, and there is. . . no “place,” no location, that is without potential dangers as well as benefits. (28)

In suggesting this particular metaphor of location, Ede offers a way of imagining composition—of seeing its competing agendas, its tensions, its affiliations and projects—that takes into account the complex possibilities for thinking about the field. I’d like to take from Ede this idea of the politics of location to help me situate the teaching of professional writing in composition. Currently, for many people working in composition, professional writing is located *outside*. It is outside pedagogically, outside intellectually, and even outside administratively. It is too often situated as an anomalous, alien course with affiliations to business that are suspect at worst and uninteresting at best. And while professional writing instruction is already an industry in its own right, with scholars rooted in communications and in business pursuing their own research and teaching agendas, I believe that situating professional writing in composition can invigorate both the teaching of professional writing and composition studies.

The teaching of professional writing reflects how disciplinary boundaries in composition studies have often been drawn and shows how they can be productively challenged. Many assume that composition is just about first-year composition, but powerful work focusing on the

teaching of underprepared readers and writers suggests some key ideas that can inform the teaching of professional writing. And more recent composition scholarship that expands the scope of composition suggest the ways in which professional writing instruction is a good fit for composition in the 21st century.

The work done at the University of Pittsburgh articulated around the teaching of underprepared readers and writers and then also worked out in relation to first-year composition can claim a number of pedagogical values. This work is represented in Bartholomae and Petrosky's *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts* and in *Ways of Reading*, though I would say that these pedagogical values go beyond the textbooks to the larger shared conversation at Pitt that occurs around the preparation of teaching assistants and fellows and the teaching of first-year composition. These are projects that involve faculty, graduate students, and nontenure stream faculty and administrators in a program where many people are invested not just in composition, but in literature and writing as well.

I would summarize some of these key pedagogical values in this way:

- respect for student writing, the discussion of which is seen as central to work in classrooms
- space for students to do real intellectual work rather than scaled back or atomized versions of the work
- engagement with other voices
- relevance of writing for the writer
- writing and revision as ways of creating knowledge, not just transmitting it
- an interest in the power circulating through language.

The teaching of professional writing can be usefully revised and energized by these values. Advanced composition courses in public and professional writing should be intellectually engaging and challenging in some of the same ways that faculty at the University of Pittsburgh sees first-year composition as intellectually engaging and challenging.

While composition has been closely connected with the teaching of first-year students, there are a growing number of advanced composition classes being offered in American colleges. The focus of these classes depends on some extent to the history and culture of particular departments, with some advanced composition classes offering instruction in creative writing. But, on the whole, the growing trend toward advanced composition tends to be focused on professional writing, rhetoric, or teacher preparation. A corresponding body of scholarly work is documenting and advancing this work. Simply referring to professional writing as “advanced composition” does not necessarily mean that the courses are considered part of the intellectual projects of composition. Still, some of this work can likely offer ways of leveraging the position of professional writing more firmly into composition.

Some composition scholars are pursuing theoretical projects that can usefully inform professional writing pedagogy. How can we fruitfully locate professional writing in the context of these recent attempts to identify the scope and purpose of composition studies?

If the professional conversation of composition in the 1990s focused on class issues related to composition’s position within the academy and in competition with long established areas like literature, the conversation of the first decade of the new millennium is focusing on relevance. These calls for relevance may sound like an echo of the earlier demands that composition be meaningful, but in the 1970s, the expectation was that writing would be personally relevant. Some current work—in the wake of unprecedented access to instantaneous

information about events like Columbine, 9/11, the Tsunami, Katrina, the Virginia Tech shootings, and so on—is much more about writing’s relevance in an unsafe and troubling world.

Richard Miller, in *Writing at the End of the World*, both questions the relevance of writing and traces what it can and can’t offer in the face of disaster and pain experienced within a person’s life, or his family’s, or within society more generally. In many ways the book is about the responsibilities and challenges of witnessing trauma. Miller’s book continually troubles any easy ideas about writing and about the teaching of writing. The last section of the book begins with the image of Miller working in his office, writing, solving problems, most of which, he says, require a kind of thinking that “sees possibility where others see only disaster, one that tries to work every angle so as to provide multidimensional responses to the multidimensional conundrums the world ceaselessly provides” (196).

This kind of thinking, which Miller sees as the “lifeblood of the humanities,” is also what informs his work as a teacher of writing:

I work at getting the students to use this writing not just as a tool for making arguments, but also as a lens for exploring complexity and a vehicle for arriving at nuanced understandings of a lived reality that is inescapably characterized by ambiguities, shades of meaning, contradictions, and gaps. That’s a long way to try to take undergraduates in one course in one semester, but this is what I believe the function of a secular public education should be: to provide training in the arts of solving the problems of this world, training that recognizes that people, who never leave behind their embodied histories and their cherished beliefs, can’t be revised the way papers can. (196–197)

Interestingly, the final example Miller leaves his readers with is not of a writing project but of a performance described by Anne Fadiman in *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. Living in a refugee camp in Thailand in the 1980s, the Hmong people did not trust doctors and Western medicine. Dwight Conquergood, an ethnographer living and working in the camp, was charged with creating an environmental health program, the first part of which was a rabies inoculation clinic for dogs. The first attempt at such a program had been a complete failure. Conquergood, who knew about Hmong customs and folklore and who himself had been successfully treated by their medicine, devised a new program (and here I'm going back to Fadiman rather than Miller's summary):

He decided on a Rabies Parade, a procession led by three important characters from Hmong folktales—a tiger, a chicken, and a *dab*—dressed in homemade costumes. The cast, like its audience, was one hundred percent Hmong. As the parade snaked through the camp, the tiger danced and played the *qeej*, the *dab* sang, and the chicken (chosen for this crucial role because of its traditional powers of augury) explained the etiology of rabies through a bullhorn. (36–37)

This campaign was wildly successful with the Hmong, as were Conquergood's other public health campaigns during the five months he worked in the camp.

For Miller, this story suggests the power in learning “how to speak in ways that others can hear, in finding a way to move and be in more than one world at once” (198). For me, this anecdote also suggests the best of what writing can do, what it can accomplish. The problem that Conquergood was working on is the kind of problem professional writers deal with every day: persuading a particular audience to take a particular action. In this case, and in the case of much writing that serves the public interest, an effective message can save lives. Why wouldn't

compositionists want to carve out pedagogical space to devote to the challenges of this kind of writing for the public? What is the working knowledge of those writers who plan and carry out this kind of social marketing? Why wouldn't we want to explore the social and ethical dimensions of writing or planning or scripting campaigns designed to change minds?

In his essay "Education for Irrelevance," Kurt Spellmeyer argues that composition is in danger of making itself irrelevant:

I suggest that we all could benefit from asking how written knowledge actually gets made or fails to get made, how it circulates or fails to circulate, and how it enables or disables in all of the venues where writing takes place, from the newsroom and screenplay conference to the preparation of accident reports. The truth is that there is no central site of cultural production that holds the key to the whole system, as literature was once imagined to. Instead, we need to study writing in its endlessly varied manifestations as a form of social action. People educated in English departments have a terror of what the Frankfurt school call *instrumentalism*, but the truth is that except for literary art, all writing—and indeed all communication—is inescapably instrumentalist. . . .If we can fashion a knowledge that makes visible the ways and means of writing, together with its contexts and consequences, then we can offer something of genuine worth to people in many walks of life. (83)

I like this passage for its specificity and for the ways it allows me to end this chapter by broadening the focus to include many types of professional writing. My own investment is in writing for the public interest, and I love working with students who are also invested in learning more about that kind of work—they are engaged with their intellectual lives and invested in

social justice, often they are politically active, and they want to make change. But I also believe that a professional writing pedagogy that is informed by work in composition and situated as advanced composition in a program can also do a richer and more responsible job of teaching students the working knowledge of writing in for-profit settings. Offering instruction in writing that serves all sectors of American life—for-profit, nonprofit, and government—suggests to students we all move among all of the sectors all of the time in various aspects of our lives.

In an English department, the teaching of professional writing dances along the tensions of service. If we accept that the intellectual projects of the university are valuable and that professional writing can actually be an appropriate focus of a department's energy, then it is crucial that thought be given to establishing and maintaining the ways in which these projects can legitimately connect. In other words, as with composition, professional writing must continually be asserted as part of the intellectual project of the university. Professional writing as it is represented in business communication textbooks is not a good fit for many composition programs or English departments. But it should be possible to imagine classes, methodologies, and trajectories through a program that could allow undergraduate students to learn the working knowledge of writing and practice the critical and analytical abilities valued in the humanities. In such cases, advocates who are fluent in both “languages”—in the terms, concerns, and issues of both sides, need to be able to provide support both within and outside the department.

The next chapter explores what it means—pedagogically and administratively—to take up this set of commitments.

4. **WORKING KNOWLEDGE: TEACHING PROFESSIONAL WRITING, ADMINISTERING A PROFESSIONAL WRITING PROGRAM**

Fortunately, most of you require no convincing about the importance of a clear and readable style, especially if you have to waste a large part of your day struggling through the prose of those who have never learned to write well. Unfortunately, the advice that most of us recall about writing well probably doesn't help us correct even our own bad writing. If what we remember is typical of most such advice, it probably consists of banalities such as "Be clear, be concise," or of useless minutiae such as "Don't begin sentences with *and* or end them with prepositions." (Williams *Style*)

In this final chapter, we approach style in its broader meaning: style in the sense of what is distinguished and distinguishing. Here we leave solid ground. Who can say what ignites a certain combination of words, causing them to explode in the mind? Who knows why certain notes in music are capable of stirring the listener deeply, though the same notes slightly rearranged are impotent? These are high mysteries, and this chapter is a mystery story, thinly disguised. There is no satisfactory explanation of style, no infallible guide to good writing, no assurance that a person who thinks clearly will be able to write clearly, no key that unlocks the door, no inflexible rule by which the young writer may shape his course. He will often find himself steering by stars that are disturbingly in motion. (Strunk and White 66)

4.1. **Style and the Working Writer: Teaching Writing at the Sentence-Level**

These are passages from Joseph Williams's *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace* and Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*. I am putting them next to each other in order to show just how different they are in approach.

This language from *The Elements* appears in all four editions of the book, though the fourth edition adjusts the language to use more inclusive generic pronouns and antecedents (the fourth edition also consistently refers to the "writer" rather than the "young writer"). It is hard

not to be moved by White's language and imagery in this passage, yet the passage also shows the limitations of *The Elements*: White, here and elsewhere, imagines an inner circle of "young writers" that many people who are invested in writing will want to belong to (I know I did when I found *The Elements* in high school), but he also constructs style as something that requires a mysterious set of abilities and knowledge. Many compositionists will agree with White's rejection of certain ways of thinking about writing (the "infallible guide" suggests something of the three-step process of Thill, Bovée, and Schatzman), but White doesn't really construct writing as a teachable subject.

I discovered a long time ago in my teaching that *The Elements of Style* is of limited use to writers who are not already heavily invested in their writing. *The Elements* is tailored to the "young writer" who is so frequently mentioned throughout earlier editions of the book. When I first read the book in high school, I felt a stirring of recognition: the headings of the style section, such as "Choose a suitable design and hold to it," and "Avoid a succession of loose sentences," made sense to me and offered me a way to work with my language, to craft it (to use language that I learned later). This work on sentences seemed to me to be what writers do, part of what we sign on for when we call ourselves writers. In this sense, the lure of *The Elements* wasn't just about a particular way of working on language, but of joining a club.

The point of writing here is not seen in some mundane purpose—clearly conveying information, for example—but as causing words to explode in a reader's mind. And the range of evocative metaphors offered in this passage is remarkable: the young writer is steering a ship by the stars, reading a mystery story; writing is like composing music, like confronting a locked door. These are all images of agency, of potency, of adventure. And the writer is seen as having the resources and capacity to address the challenges ahead in this enterprise.

The *Elements of Style* works well for people who are invested in their writing, who identify themselves as writers, who enjoy a certain respect for the role of the author. For some, White's advice to young writers was perhaps the first time they felt addressed AS writers, so it's easy to have a soft spot for the book and see it as almost talismanic (it is surprising how often people giving advice to writers say things like "Buy a copy of *The Elements of Style* and keep it next to you at all times": if you Google the name of the book and read the results, you'll see this advice for writers of all kinds). It is, however, not a very accessible text for students who may not have experienced much pleasure or success in writing, and it is somewhat opaque if you haven't already spent a good chunk of time thinking about your writing and what makes it tick.

Read in relation to more conventional style guides like the beloved *The Elements of Style*, Williams's approach complicates the notion of style in useful ways. In fact, *Style* is written in conversation with the *Elements*, though perhaps mostly as a way for Williams to say what he is not doing. For example, early on he makes a point of defending (through an appeal to historical usage by good writers) the use of words like *finalize*, which Strunk heaps scorn upon. Williams also says that he isn't beginning his book with arcane rules (famously, after White's introduction, the *Elements* begins with the rules for adding *s* to words that end in *s*).

Williams offers both a critique of professional writing and a methodology for teaching writers how to write more effectively. While both White and Williams have working knowledge of writing, Williams actually sets out to teach others this working knowledge.

Williams was a professor emeritus of the University of Chicago. His best-known text is *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, which has been published in nine editions and several versions since 1981²⁰. Williams was also one of the founders of the Little Red Schoolhouse

²⁰ *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace* has been published in nine editions: 1981, 1985, 1989, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2003, 2005, and 2007. The ninth edition is titled *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. According to a talk Williams

(LRS), the academic and professional writing course of the University of Chicago's Writing Program.²¹ Williams's approach to style grew from his background in linguistics, his research on reading from a cognitive psychology perspective, and his experience working with professional writing in several fields including law, medicine, and business.

Williams's Little Red Schoolhouse is particularly interesting for the purposes of my dissertation in that it is named as a course in academic *and* professional writing, erasing the boundaries commonly drawn between these genres. In teaching professional writing, the LRS eschews the form-based structure that shapes most professional writing textbooks: there isn't a chapter on memos, followed by a chapter on letters, followed by one on reports, and so on. The 13 lessons that now constitute the LRS course take up issues like actions, character, problems, and argument.

The preface of *Style* is addressed "To Those Who Write on the Job." Williams extends his audience beyond those writers, but it is significant that he starts there. In a telephone interview with me in May 2005, Williams explained that the methodology enacted by *Style* was developed when he created workshops for professional writers, initially physicians and lawyers. After being hired to work with physicians to help them improve their writing, Williams studied many published examples of medical writing, noting where he felt that he understood what the writer was saying and where he felt lost. "I asked myself how I would teach this as a foreign language," he explained. "I had to keep the vocabulary, so all I could work on was the syntax." He "translated" hundreds of sentences to help him figure out what it was about those particular

gave at Carnegie Mellon University in 2006, the title change allowed him to integrate new material that had, for several editions, been relegated to the appendices in order to preserve the shape of the book as 10 lessons. Williams adapted the book for a broader audience (removing the exercises, for example) in *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace* (1990 and 1995), and Longman has published a brief version as *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace* (2003).

²¹ Greg Colomb collaborated with Williams on writing and consulting projects, including at various moments, *Style* and the Little Red Schoolhouse.

sentences that was giving him trouble. He noticed that indirect, dense sentences tended to have abstract nouns—nominalizations—as subjects. Through this work, Williams developed his method, which was for the most part fully formed before the first edition of *Style*. For his workshops, he would present both direct and indirect sentences to participants and work with them to identify what was causing them to prefer some sentences over others. In effect, he supported participants so that they could replicate the experience he had with published texts in their field. This convinced them that there was something to what he was going to teach them. It made them want to know more. According to Williams, the challenge he faced through editions and versions of this material was tweaking his way of presenting it so that it would work when he wasn't in the room.²²

Style has undergone sweeping changes between its first edition and ninth. Material comes and goes, gets completely rearranged and subordinated under new titles, language and explanations change, appendices appear. According to Williams, this aggressive revision history was partly due to the editorial practices of his publishers and their desire to publish a new edition every two years. But another way of reading it is to think of the ways the revision history of the book reflect his own dedication to meeting readers' needs:

What we write always seems clearer to us than it does to our readers, because we can read into it what we want them to get out of it. And so instead of revising our writing to meet their needs, we send it off the moment it meets ours. (9th edition 8)

If the figure of the writer is important to Strunk and White, this passage demonstrates how the figure of the reader is crucial to Williams.

²² Right up until his recent death, Williams still conducted workshops for professionals through the consulting company Clearlines. Companies are especially interested now in workshops that teach employees how to use PowerPoint effectively, so Williams and his partners developed a set of materials on that set of issues.

Williams invites writers to work on their language by using strategies that are different from those of more conventional style handbooks. Rather than simply offering advice that only makes sense to people who are already good writers, Williams is specific about what on the page makes language readable. This is not to say that his strategies are simplistic; Williams's methods honor the complexity of creating sentences and paragraphs that will affect readers. Look at the first seven or eight words in your sentence, he says in lesson three. Do you have abstract nouns as simple subjects? Do you have seven or more words before you get to a verb? If so, your audience may find that sentence hard to read. Decide who your main characters are in the sentence, and look for the actions those characters perform. Then re-write the sentence: if the actions are nominalizations, make them verbs, and make characters the subjects of those verbs (9th edition 40–41).

One of Williams's assumptions is that people more often than not have reasons for the ways they write. For example, stylists may point to the redundancy of pairing words like *full* and *complete* or *hopes* and *desires*, but Williams explains that these pairings have come into our language because English speakers early on liked to pair a native English word with a higher status Latinate or French word. This practice legitimized the speaker's use of the common tongue at the same time it made it possible for less educated people to understand what was being said (9th edition 113).

Williams consistently marks for readers the ways in which writers tend to use language in obfuscating ways because of anxieties about status and power (and Williams would use “we” here to include himself in this tendency). This set of considerations forms his tone and the vision he has of those who will use his book. For example, he says about a particularly dense piece of prose, “We can deplore the choice and urge the writer to find a simpler word. But we ought to

think twice before we ridicule him. It's a natural impulse that, given the right circumstances, any of us will yield to" (1st edition 38). For Williams, *any* writer struggling to articulate ideas or feeling one-down in a relationship with a reader may write dense and indirect sentences that will eventually need to be re-worked. He offers writers a way to think about doing that rather than offering one-time advice to avoid indirect style.

Williams created an accessible (but not reductive and formulaic) approach to the teaching of style. He is respectful of the student writers he imagines as his readers. He isn't scornful of their abilities, but talks about how "we" sometimes write things that are indirect and hard for readers to follow. Williams makes space for "outsiders" to think like and become "insiders." Instead of lamenting indirect style, he helps us understand why writers resort to it. He even explores the ethics of stylistic choices.

Williams offers very useful ways of thinking about professional writing pedagogy. While I want to address other issues and problems in my teaching of professional writing—to teach other kinds of working knowledge—there is a lot in Williams that I admire. He makes style a teachable subject by drawing on what actual professional writers do as they write and by making that working knowledge available to less experienced writers.

4.2. Working Knowledge: Pedagogical Moves in the Professional Writing Classroom

Williams's effectiveness is rooted in the working knowledge of writers. While Williams keeps his focus on style, an effective scope for the teaching of professional writing would move out from Williams to draw further on the working knowledge of professional writing, to offer a course that allows writers to engage with the issues at stake in writing as a professional. Such work requires the insight of working writers, which raises a number of programmatic issues, as

I'll discuss later in this chapter. But before I move to the problems and possibilities of staffing and other programmatic issues, I want to suggest some of the moves that a professional writing course might make to engage students in a responsible way.

4.2.1. Differences Between Academic and Professional Writing

When I teach first-year composition, I teach with the understanding that students need to learn academic discourse and that they can enter into academic conversations in meaningful ways. When I teach professional writing, I am similarly helping students to engage with professional discourse of different kinds. Since most college students have mostly written for school, it is helpful to begin a professional writing class by talking about how these two types of writing are different. This is a conversation that students can work through, with the help of a teacher, but if they don't have the opportunity to think about such matters, they are likely to write little essays rather than professional documents that appeal to particular readers.

Rather than giving students a list that compares academic and professional writing, it is more effective to work with them to identify differences, allowing them to generate their own comparisons by drawing on their own assumptions and experiences.²³ As one of the first conversations students have together, this conversation sets the tone for the class, offers a way of establishing some of the key terms of the class, and begins the work of creating standards for the writing that students will do. Given the opportunity, a group of college students can identify

²³ Of course, "academic writing" can refer to either the writing that students do in school or the writing that academics do for each other. In the latter sense, academic writing is a specialized form of professional writing. I usually make sure that we talk about this, and depending on who is in the class, we may come back to it as an issue from time to time. For example, I recently had an engineering student in my Written Professional Communication class. He was about to graduate from college and start graduate school. He already knew what project he would be working on as a graduate student; for the final project for our class, he defined a project that would allow him to learn about the journal he hoped to publish in soon and to write a short version of his senior project in the form of a journal article. But for many of my students, "academic writing" is something they won't do again after they graduate.

some of the key differences between academic and professional writing. While such conversations don't play out the same way twice, they are still important to the students' learning.

Drawing on their own experiences of professional writing, students are likely to mention the differences in appearance between academic and professional writing, with professional writing being much more varied in its appearance, using images, bullets, color, and design. They are also likely to talk about differences in audience, with the academic audience consisting of a professor and maybe some classmates, depending on the class, while professional writing may be written for a tiny audience of one, for millions, for layers of primary and secondary readers, or for some combination. And we discuss what that means for their writing. They are also likely to talk about the differences in production and presentation, since writing academically usually means turning in a hard or electronic copy of a paper, while professional writing may involve a variety of publication platforms, all of which have their own constraints that have an impact on writing (for example, writers who are creating copy for the web need to consider how many screens it will take for someone to read it; those who are writing something that will demand color images need to realize that the printing costs will rise astronomically; writers planning a publication should realize that six pages of text can be almost as expensive to produce as eight, given the costs of special paper, processes, and trimming; if something is meant to be referred to often, it might work better as a poster than as a booklet, and so on). All of these factors have an impact on planning, research, writing, and design.

By working through what everyone in the class can bring forward on the topic of differences between academic and professional writing, it's possible to get a lot on the table. The conversation establishes the sense that this is the students' class, that they can and will

contribute to the discussion, and it brings forward some of the key ideas about professional writing that the community of the class will need to work with. The discussion allows students to talk about what they know; often several students are already writing some professional documents already or they are invested in learning more in order to expand their work scope or get a promotion. These voices are important to have early in the conversation because they identify what is at stake for some writers. The discussion may also often spin off questions and assignments for other class sessions, with students later bringing in particular examples of professional writing that advance our investigation of what is specific to professional writing.

4.2.2. Significance of the Form of Professional Writing as It Has Evolved

Form is tremendously variable in professional writing. Professional writers produce press releases, letters, memos, reports, brochures, newsletters, email, websites, blogs, wikis, user manuals, resumes, journal articles, liner notes, warnings, packaging, press packets, newspaper articles, op eds, summaries, and so on. For most professional writing classes, the basic forms that are taught are letters, memo, reports, and resumes. Since students can do a lot if they know about these forms, these are good choices. But rather than teaching students the forms as forms that they need to memorize and reproduce, it is more helpful to teach them the conventions as they have evolved. For example, letters have evolved to handle external communication, while memos evolved to handle internal communication. Their forms are designed to fit these functions, so why not have students look at a letter and a memo and talk about why they are designed the ways they are.

This approach suggests to students that there are reasons for form, which is useful since, depending on the areas they work in, they may spend most of their time working in some

completely different form. They should have reasons for the choices they make, whether those choices have to do with form, sentences, paragraphs, design, or packaging.

If a program can develop classes that take up specific contexts and occasions for professional writing, when teachers are planning classes, it can be helpful to imagine the ways that different forms can function in the class and how students can experience the possible variations. This is a good reason to collect actual example documents that are used in the settings being discussed and allow students to analyze the choices that the writers made.

4.2.3. How Change Happens

As I mentioned in chapter two, one of the oldest pedagogical techniques in the teaching of business writing is role play: students will be given the name of the person they are writing as and a bit of the rhetorical context, and then they will be asked to write in response to that prompt. This is an empty gesture toward real work that has to be done by professional writers. Writers need to be able to write in order to get a particular audience to take a particular action, but the problem is figuring out who that audience is, what they want, what will move them, and so on. Over the past 100 years, gallons of ink have been spilled on advice to students about analyzing their audience, but as far as I have seen, most of that advice boils down to imagining the audience and answering a series of questions based on that imaginary construct. For some students, this approach may work, simply because of what they already know, not because this approach in itself is effective.

A more pointed line of discussion is how change gets made in a particular context. For example, if a student wants to write a proposal arguing that the requirements of her major should be changed in order to allow a group of students to take advantage of a newly emerging area of

specialization, such as geographic information systems, for example, she needs to know who makes decisions and how those decisions get made. And she needs to know how to figure that out. Similarly, a student who wants to get funding for a business he wants to launch after college needs to learn how such funding is acquired, who makes decisions, what those decisions are based on, and what are the conventional forms for documents related to such decisions. A student looking to sell a product needs to know how to figure out what will appeal to the market—which is how market research and focus groups function. Real professional writers don't just imagine their audience on the basis of a few personal details—they do research that guides their choices as writers.

How can a college class accomplish this kind of work? Overcoming a pattern of passivity is the first step. Students have to learn how to use the internet, use the phone, ask people for information, be persistent, network, and so on. Creating a good conversation in the classroom can be very helpful since students are usually very willing to help each other. The teacher needs to be able to point to a range of resources and be willing to spend some class time helping students plan their research and deal with the logistics.

I also share my experiences as a professional writer with students. For example, if I am writing a brief for policymakers in order to get them to support a particular type of policy change, I interview experts in the field who are constrained by current policies, and I ask, “What do policymakers need to know about this topic? Can you tell me a story that captures a sense of why this is so important? Who else do I need to talk to? Are there any books, reports or documents I should read? What do you want policymakers to know about this policy?”

4.2.4. Doing Real Work

As some of the examples of student projects I have discussed so far suggest, it is possible to set professional writing classes up in such a way as to allow students to do real work rather than role playing scenarios that only offer them a limited sense of the rhetorical context. Students can define a professional writing project that connects with a real situation in their lives (whether for a job they have or have had, a volunteer experience, something related to their civic or political life, or to life after college). Class discussion and low-stakes journal writing in response to specific prompts can facilitate their research and a proposal assignment can help them define the position from which they are writing, an audience, what they want to accomplish, and how the project will look, sound, and be packaged. Since proposing is an important and common professional writing task, it is helpful to spend time in class talking about the work of proposals and discussing the approaches that writers in the class took. Then students can produce the final project, usually, in a couple of drafts, with opportunity for feedback during the process.

This approach can be challenging, since students will produce different kinds of documents and there will not be consistency of form across the class. But the discussion of their work in class is tremendously helpful and allows many opportunities to explore the diversity of professional writing. It is helpful for students to be invested in their projects and to evaluate them for themselves in terms of their growing knowledge of the rhetorical context.

4.2.5. Identity and Collaboration

Writing as a professional is different from writing as an individual. The writer is often at the intersection of the employers' needs and the readers' needs. The writer is typically not writing in order to satisfy a personal desire for expression, but to accomplish a goal. And the writing from

beginning to end is driven by the extent to which it serves its various purposes. Professional writing often goes uncredited or is credited to someone other than the person who wrote it. This can be simple, ephemeral writing like a memo written by one person for a superior's signature, or it can be higher stakes writing, like an op-ed for an organization's executive director or a preface for an edited collection of essays (I have been hired to do both of these for people who simply didn't have the time to quickly pull together a sustained piece of writing on a particular issue or collection of essays).

Professional writers may have to learn how to sound like the person whose name will be associated with the document. There may be a huge gap between writer and "writer" in this case: the actual writer may be a twenty-something employee in a first job, writing for the signature of a fifty-something employer, and there will probably be significant differences in word choice, style, allusions, and approach.

A related problem has to do with collaboration. In many work situations, documents are produced collaboratively, whether that collaboration is formally recognized or not. Such collaboration may be as simple as a writer creating a draft that is handed off to someone else who finishes and polishes it, or it can be as complex as a team of people working together to plan, research, write, and produce a long and complex document. Because such work is so common in workplaces, students who are studying professional writing need to have space to think about what all of this means for their writing.

One way of approaching this can be through discussing the persona presenting their documents. We discuss why in most of their final projects, an "I" speaking is not really appropriate. This is because researched and developed professional documents tend to be produced by a corporate entity. It may be appropriate to have a letter from a president or director

in such documents, but the rest tends to assume a corporate identity behind the writing. For example, if a student wants to create a guide for patients newly diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, she is likely to write it as if the document were being produced by a specific organization such as the Multiple Sclerosis Society. There aren't that many occasions when an individual produces such a document.

This is not to say that professional writing students don't use "I"—certainly in everyday correspondence, in their civic lives, and in documents in which they represent their professional experiences and career aspirations, for example, professional writers use the singular personal pronoun. But it would be a mistake not to help students think through the ways in which writing professionally often means representing the perspectives and interests of a corporate identity whose goals, language, and persona may be different from those of the individual writer.

An additional method for exploring this issue is to allow students to analyze the ways that actual documents do this work. Carolyn Matalene, in an essay that addresses this issue among others, suggests that a team of writers collaborating on a document should have a conversation about the persona they want the document to have—if the document were a person, what would it sound like? The process of discussing this issue at length and in detail can allow all of the writers on the team to write their sections with this persona in mind, so all the pieces fit together in tone as well as substance ("Of the People" 52). It can be very useful for students to study documents in terms of this issue: where and how do they see the writers establishing a consistent tone and persona?

4.2.6. Analyzing and Critiquing Documents

Rather than confining class discussion to example documents presented in a textbook, it makes more sense to ask students to identify actual documents—ones that they find successful or not—for critique. Such documents are easily found on the Internet, and students can even find documents that connect with the projects that they are interested in. All economic sectors of professional life have published documents online, so whether students want to look at sales materials, educational materials, government reports, or anything else, it is easy to locate materials online. To start discussions, students can answer questions: Who wrote this? Who is it written for? How do you know? What do you think the writers hoped to accomplish with this document, and again, what makes you give the answer you do? What features stand out to you as you read the document? How do you account for these features? Where does the authority in the piece come from? And so on.

Such discussions allow the class to have useful discussions about a variety of topics related to professional writing, and they also allow students ways of talking about their own work for the class.

4.3. Administering a Program: Facilitating the Work of Teachers and Students

At the University of Pittsburgh, rather than having one professional writing class that is packed with non-majors, we have a coherent program that offers students from across the University (both inside and outside of English) an introduction to professional writing and allows others to take a series of classes in which they can learn about specialized professional writing. The program that supports the teaching of professional writing is important since it provides the

conditions under which teaching and learning happens, so I would like to take the rest of this chapter to discuss some of the key features, problems, and innovations.

The Public and Professional Writing Program is nearly five years old. The program offers an 18-credit undergraduate certificate that has attracted motivated students who are interested in writing in a range of professional contexts. Since most of the teaching being done in the program is being done by nontenure stream faculty, the program that supports the classroom teaching is especially important, since it provides for continuity and coherence and supports experiential learning (crucial since part-time faculty can't be academic sponsors for internships or independent studies). Because of this, the program structure is more important than it might be for a certificate program based on classes taught by mostly tenured/tenure-stream faculty, and it is important to articulate some of the reasoning behind programmatic issues. My interest in these programmatic issues is rooted in my belief that thinking about program administration—creating the material conditions that are most conducive to students' learning—means thinking about pedagogy.

4.3.1. Defining the Character and Shape of the Program

Professional writing takes place across all sectors of American life—in the private, nonprofit, and public sectors. The program at the University of Pittsburgh defines itself as being invested in public and professional writing, which allows students to learn about writing as it functions in those different sectors and across a variety of professional contexts. This is an important feature, since it opens up to exploration a variety of rhetorical situations.

The students who take our classes come from a variety of schools and majors within the University. Since classes have a diverse mix of students, the program focuses on helping

students learn how to learn what they will need in particular fields. A writing class offered within a school of engineering would be able to tighten the focus more on particular genres of writing, while our teachers are better off teaching students moves that will apply in a range of genres and letting them do research that allows them to investigate discipline-specific genres and try out the moves they have learned in class in those specific genres. This means that teachers need to be willing to keep learning about writing as it occurs in specific fields.

Since our classes are mostly taught by part-time faculty, full-time nontenure-stream faculty, and graduate students, the administration of the program has evolved to provide the community that holds everything together. Since most of the teachers in the program do not have contracts that pay them to engage in activities like supervising independent studies or supporting internships, the directors of the program invest a significant amount of time in extra-curricular activities and experiential learning. In a program taught primarily by tenured or tenure-stream faculty, these responsibilities could be distributed across the entire faculty.

4.3.2. Staffing Issues

Staffing issues have a critical impact on teaching the working knowledge of professional writing: in a professional writing program, most of the faculty are likely to be faculty with past or ongoing experience with professional writing. They are also likely to be part-time faculty or nontenure stream faculty. This leads to several issues that need to be addressed programmatically.

While such faculty will have a vital understanding of the working knowledge of professional writing in different rhetorical contexts, they may be less familiar with the habits of mind of the academy. Their approaches to teaching writing may therefore be rooted in ideas

about teaching that replicate their own experience as writing students in college or that approach the class as if it were a workshop that will offer a few insights and give students practice. Since some of these teachers will rely on a textbook to give some structure to the class, they may also create a class that reproduces the typical business communication class. Just as an effective composition program invests in the pedagogical development of graduate students who will be teaching first-year composition, an effective professional writing program must find ways of nurturing the teaching of professional writing faculty so that they don't have to re-invent the wheel.

This is not an easy task: while the teaching of composition generally necessitates some reliance on part-time faculty, that reliance is not seen by administrations as a good thing. Consequently, something very much like denial operates in most departments and universities: part-time faculty teach, but they are often kept invisible, not offered professional development opportunities, not offered resources like clerical support or adequate office space to meet with students. Since part-time faculty are typically hired term-to-term, most institutions don't invest much in their preparation and support: the teacher can leave at any time, taking that investment with them. While all of this makes sense from the perspective of allocation of resources in a hierarchical system, it is not the best way of ensuring that the students in the classes of those teachers actually have a good learning experience.

Still, it can be difficult for part-time faculty to engage in professional development opportunities, given the economic realities of their situation. Teachers of professional writing may have full-time jobs in their field or they may have consulting practices. In any case, scheduling group meetings for part-time faculty can be difficult. Ideally, there would be a way

to pay part-time faculty for learning more about writing pedagogy. In the absence of that opportunity, other, less expensive options can be implemented.

At the University of Pittsburgh, in addition to offering higher pay per course than nearly any other college in the area, we are fortunate to be able to offer health benefits to part-time faculty. This makes teaching especially attractive to consultants who write professionally, since they would otherwise have to pay for their own health plans. We have also taken a number of steps to support part-time faculty and do more to ensure that they are happy teaching in the Public and Professional Writing program so that they are willing to invest in learning the pedagogy of the institution and work for us for several years.

For example, we have created a password-protected website that offers teachers a range of sample materials for various classes and that offers them ways of thinking through teaching strategies like planning the various activities that students can pursue in a class in order to learn more about professional writing or ways of using student papers in class. The medium of the website is crucial in that it allows teachers to access materials when it is convenient for them rather than when the department or University is open. The website also offers resources like a page of links to electronic journals that may be relevant to teachers' thinking about their classes, which suggests that teachers should be interested in professional conversations about the teaching of professional writing and, indeed, about professional writing in general. The links are set up to make it very easy for teachers to access the library's somewhat labyrinthine e-journal system.

We have also worked with part-time faculty to develop course offerings that allow them to teach their working knowledge of public and professional writing. This obviously benefits students as well, since they get to learn from experts about their particular professional

affiliations and commitments. For example, a teacher who has worked for many years as a technical writer was invited to develop a class in “the Language of Science and Technology”; while the title of the class had been on the books for a long time, no one had taught the class for at least a decade. The teacher has been able to bring in to her class her expertise with, for example, database management and other specific tools and features of the technical writing context.

In order to get new teachers up to speed and to ensure some consistency across different sections of our classes, we have had to meet one-on-one or in very small groups with teachers. This has been an effective technique, but is labor and time intensive. As a technique, it also tends to generate much more email and phone contact to answer questions that come up on a day-to-day basis. Again, this is good, but it takes time and resources to support such interactions.

In the interests of creating a reflective community of practice, this academic year we were able to put most of the faculty teaching professional writing in a cluster of offices where they could talk to each other, help each other, access teaching resources and sample student papers, and feel a sense of community and camaraderie. It also gave students a sense of the program as bigger than a single teacher. This move was very helpful and took a bit of the heat off of the director and associate director, but it was difficult to arrange given the pressures of finding adequate office space for all of the department’s faculty members.

Having office space available for teachers is crucial. As someone who has taught part-time in several institutions, I know that the small hassles add up: having to give students a home phone number because the voicemail on the office phone doesn’t work, having to take

everything home all of the time because of lack of storage space, being in a space that feels unsafe at night, having no space to meet with students.

Ideally, it would be helpful to have a room arranged as a communal space, with lockers where teachers would be able to store coats and other personal belongings, a lockable file drawer for each teacher to store materials and texts, some supplies, tables for teachers to conference with students, a computer or two along with a printer, phones with a voicemail system that would be nimble enough to allow for easy changes from term to term, some teaching resources, and a drop box where teachers could leave materials for an intern or work-study student to duplicate for their classes. Such a space would be flexible, ideal for the use of many part-time faculty, and would facilitate an investment in their teaching; it would ensure that students would have access to their teachers; and it would ensure that teachers feel like valued professionals rather than interlopers. But, again, such a facility would require a significant initial investment and an investment in ongoing maintenance, which is difficult when space is such a precious commodity.

Also ideally, it would be very helpful to have a system for one-on-one mentoring and observation similar to what happens for teaching assistants and fellows in the department. Such a system would allow teachers the opportunity to develop a responsible and thoughtful pedagogy for the teaching of professional writing.

There is some risk in all of this—investing in part-time faculty can be expensive if the turnover rates are high. But there is no reason to imagine that treating part-time faculty as if they are disposable will result in anything other than them acting like they are disposable. Investing in faculty and then retaining those who are willing to engage with their teaching and students is crucial to the stability of a program in professional writing, which relies on students' access to the working knowledge of writers.

As a program, there is still room for us to improve on the preparation and development of our part-time faculty teachers. Students still tend to have inconsistent experiences across sections of classes and across classes in the program.

4.3.3. Technology

Any program in professional writing should also offer students instruction in the tools of the trade and the opportunity to see how writing is affected by the pressures and possibilities of technology. Students should be able to claim facility with word processing software, desktop publishing software, and web publishing software. They should know how to find information online and in databases. They should also have experience in making decisions about the relationship between writing and the implementation of technological interfaces.

This kind of work poses two challenges: one challenge is simply having access to the resources—hardware and software—required for this work, and the other is the ongoing challenge of incorporating instruction in technology along with instruction in writing.

The resources could be dealt with by having ready access to computer-equipped classrooms and the appropriate software. But such a resource is expensive initially and even more expensive to maintain in the long term. Since the University of Pittsburgh offers instructors up to 12 hours per term in a computer classroom, so far we have functioned by booking some hours in computer classrooms and working in a traditional classroom for the rest of the time.²⁴ The drawback is that there are a limited number of computer classrooms on

²⁴ In the Integrating Writing and Design class, I call the classes in the computer classroom “studio sessions,” which seems to resonate with students’ desire to experience their creativity while they are working on projects that include both writing and design. We use studio sessions for learning more about the software (Adobe InDesign, Photoshop, and Illustrator), troubleshooting issues, and workshopping class projects (the computers allow us to work with color versions of the projects instead of black and white, cheaply produced versions that obscure a lot of detail).

campus, and at some class meeting times, it can be hard to book any time at all in one of them. Also, even 12 hours a term may not be enough for certain classes.

The challenge of integrating writing instruction and support for learning technology is even bigger, in some ways, than ensuring access to hardware and software. It is very easy to be sidetracked by helping students with learning the software program rather than teaching them about writing in the context of the software program. This is another place where the program needs to be able to work with teachers to establish a balance for such classes and to offer strategies for planning class sessions that will ensure that adequate time is dedicated to writing instruction.

All of these challenges are worthwhile. If a program is going to be responsibly teach professional writing, students need to have practice and instruction in writing in a technologically driven environment.

4.3.4. Experiential Learning

Since students are learning about professional writing, it is essential that they have opportunities to write in particular workplaces and to learn how writing and writers function in different settings. Not all of our students avail themselves of this opportunity, but most of them do, and some of them make sure that they get to serve internships in both for-profit and nonprofit settings so that they can make more informed decisions about where they apply for jobs after graduation. We have established two different types of experiential learning: writing internships and service learning.

Students earn three credits for writing internships. The internship experience includes a weekly class in which students meet with other interns and with the associate director of the

program. The class allows interns to discuss issues that come up on the job, to reflect on differences among workplaces, and to get support from others when they run into problems. In the internship class, students also spend time articulating their career goals, working on their portfolios, and thinking about how they want to represent themselves on the job market.²⁵ This is especially valuable since students typically do internships in their last two years of college.

As a program, we have established with internship sites the expectation that our students will spend at least half of their time on the site actually writing. This expectation sets students up to have productive and meaningful learning experiences that help them produce several portfolio pieces that they can show to potential employers. Our model for internships is different from many of the internships that students complete elsewhere, since we try to make sure that students don't just make copies, stuff envelopes, and do errands (we have actually removed from our list of possible internship sites a couple of sites that did not give students enough writing experience or enough supervision).

At the end of the term, we ask each intern to talk to other PPW students and the faculty about their experiences, what they have made of those experiences, and what they learned about writing during their internships. These talks happen at the end-of-term party we have each term and often feature examples of the students' writing. These events have become an important part of our community building as a program, since they allow us to celebrate what students have

²⁵ Pam O'Brien, as associate director of the PPW program, teaches the internship class. She has identified three different sets of materials to use for the class so that students who take the class more than once don't have exactly the same experience. Pam works hard to ensure that students have the resources they need in order to satisfy the needs of their internships. Her investment in students' learning experience is powerful and transforming for many of our students. It's not unusual for our students' internships to turn into full-time jobs after graduation.

learned in internships, hear from students who have designed independent studies, and say goodbye to students who are graduating.²⁶

Our other biggest investment in experiential learning is the Service Learning in PPW seminar, which is designed as a one-credit add-on course for any student in any PPW class. Students agree to volunteer for at least three hours a week at a nonprofit organization of their choice, and they attend a weekly class that allows them to learn about the nonprofit sector and reflect on how writing functions in nonprofits. Students are not required to write on site as part of their volunteer work (though some of them do), but they are required to pay attention to the texts that their nonprofit produces and to bring in samples for class discussion. This allows us to look at mission statements, brochures, recruiting and training materials for volunteers, ads, advocacy materials, newsletters, and more. Students complete a journal (some of which is written in response to specific prompts, and some of which is written in response to incidents that happen on site), and they write a story based on an interview of someone who works for the organization, volunteers for it, or receives services from it. We also ask them to write a couple of reflective pieces during the term and to do a presentation at the end for faculty and other students.

The Service Learning in PPW program developed out of the sense that students (like many other Americans) really didn't know much about the nonprofit sector. Initially the class followed the more established model of service learning work, in which students spend a lot of time reflecting on themselves in the context of their service. Eventually, the class evolved to be an opportunity for students to reflect on their nonprofit, the nonprofit sector more broadly, the

²⁶ Thanks to Jean Ferguson Carr for suggesting that as a program we would need to work to ensure that students would have a significant experience at their internship sites and for suggesting that interns present on their work at a gathering of students and faculty. These are ideas that she spoke about even before the program officially existed, and they have been tremendously important to our students.

ways that nonprofits function in American society, and how writing serves nonprofit organizations. The nonprofit sector constitutes an enormous part of American life and economic activity. For example, according to researcher Lester Salamon, “This sector constitutes half of the nation’s hospitals, one-third of its health clinics, over a quarter of its nursing homes, nearly half (46 percent) of its higher education institutions, four-fifths (80 percent) of its individual and family services agencies, 70 percent of its vocational rehabilitation facilities, 30 percent of its daycare centers, over 90 percent of its orchestras and operas, the delivery vehicles for 70 percent of its foreign disaster assistance” (9–10). Most Americans will have some contact with a nonprofit—they will receive services from one, volunteer for one, give money to one, or serve on the board of one, for example, yet most people don’t know about them. Many people don’t even know what the word “nonprofit” really means.

Since much of my freelance work has taken academic research on nonprofit administration and operation and identified the implications for nonprofit leaders and staff, I draw upon my sense of some of the issues in the sector. We begin by talking about what a nonprofit is, what a 501(c)(3) is (since most of the students are volunteering for this type of nonprofit), and how nonprofits get funding. We also discuss some of the common characteristics of nonprofits and how those characteristics have an impact on writing. For the other weeks, we either discuss example documents that students bring in from their sites, or we reflect on what they have learned at the sites, particularly in the context of our discussion of articles from the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*. An example discussion might begin with a short article about how foundations are hiring storytellers to keep on staff and then move to how students have seen their sites using (or not using) narratives to make a case, raise funds, teach, or define their missions.

For students, the service-learning program has been useful. First of all, the students who register for the opportunity appreciate the chance to volunteer and they enjoy being off campus and helping others. But students have also found it useful to think about writing in this context. Many of them have, in their primary PPW class, created projects that serve needs in their volunteer sites. These were in situations where the nonprofit saw in student volunteers the opportunity to create a specific type of document, and the nonprofits were willing to work with the volunteer to define and carry out the project. For example, an art student who was volunteering at the Hillman Cancer Center was spending time supporting an art therapy program for patients undergoing chemotherapy. Since these patients were confined to one place for a significant portion of time, creating art was one way of passing some time. For her Written Professional Communication class, the student planned, wrote, and designed a take-away piece for patients that explained how they could use artistic expression at home, too. Another student volunteered for a new youth mentoring/tutoring program and discovered that they were ill-equipped to train volunteers. For her Written Professional Communication project, she interviewed the staff and volunteers at her site and wrote a training manual that they could use in the future to represent the program, prepare new volunteer mentors, and offer resources for their tutoring. The Make-A-Wish Foundation is set up to make good use of student volunteers who want to write, since they need a written “wish story” for every child whose wish has been granted. Make-A-Wish has set up a kind of formula and note-taking system that allows volunteers to write the stories, and those writers who show notable ability are asked to work on the higher profile wish stories that see wider publication.

Beyond learning about writing in the nonprofit sector, some of our students have learned enough about working in nonprofits that they have felt more confident about which sector they

want to work in; they don't always want to work in the nonprofit sector (some find that it really does not suit their desires for their working life), but most say that they plan to volunteer somewhere throughout their lives and most also are glad to know more about what charitable donations are actually supporting. Some students have seen the service-learning experience as a good networking opportunity and have moved from volunteering during one term to completing full-blown internships the next term, and then to working as staff members at their sites after graduation.²⁷

4.3.5. Developing Classes and Paths Through the Curriculum

A program offers teachers and students the luxury of exploring professional writing beyond the most general basics explored in most single professional writing class. There are considerable administrative challenges to balance as courses are developed: student interest has to be balanced with the goals of the program, faculty need to be available or be developed, the course has to be offered at the right moment to get enough students to register so that the class doesn't get cancelled for low enrollment, and the course needs to fit into the sequence of other courses (so that students can logically come from one course and move into another).

All of this requires extensive communication in all directions, among administrators, faculty, and students. For example, if we know that a teacher consistently gets many requests from students for permission to enter a closed class, that's a good indication that another section of the course could be filled. If students are asking administrators for a class with a particular focus, that's a time when we need to find out why this demand is growing and whether we can responsibly meet that demand. We need to keep in mind the working knowledge of faculty

²⁷ Christopher Boettcher worked with me on our model of service-learning and in the first several years of the program, shared the teaching of the weekly class with me. His patience and integrity and all our conversations enabled the development of our current program.

members so that we can draw upon it to develop appropriate classes. Feedback from alums of the program can help us know when we are getting things right and where there are gaps that we need to address.

4.3.6. Student Involvement and Self Representation

Self representation is an important task in professional life. As a program, we have created a number of ways for students to represent their work in the program, in internships, and in college. Students tend to take these opportunities seriously and to use them as a way to participate in a community that has grown important to them.

When our students are in their last term as college students, we ask them to write a bio that represents their experience at the University of Pittsburgh. We publish these in our program newsletter, *Write Now*. While a few of the students complete these bios in a way that seems perfunctory, many of the students ask for feedback and give me multiple drafts. And later in the term, when they accept a job, they email me to see if there is time to add this information to the bio. It can be an important moment, this gesture toward publicly summarizing one phase of life and announcing the next step. In a large university, this may be one of the few chances students have to reflect in writing on what college has meant to them and how it connects with the lives they plan to lead.

We also create an opportunity for students to represent their experiences when they complete an internship. We ask them to answer a series of questions about their experiences and then have our own intern write a profile about them that we post on our PPW Community website. Most of the time, we feature a photo of the student, too. These profiles give students a

way to establish a presence in the program and online, and they allow incoming interns to learn about the experiences that specific sites have provided.

We have a newsletter that features writing and photography by our students. Some of the articles are proposed and carried out by students, while other articles are commissioned by me as I become aware of trends or events. For example, I realized that a very determined and vocal group of our students wanted to pursue careers in event planning, which I didn't know much about. So I asked a student to interview several of those students, a professional in the field, and one of our alums in order to write a newsletter article about this sub-area of public relations work. Each term, we have at least one public event proposed by one of our teachers, offered during his or her class time, and planned by our PPW intern. I usually invite a student to "cover" the event for our newsletter. The first time I did this, I expected the student to do it as a favor to me. I thought the request would be seen as yet more school work. But the response of students is consistently to be honored that they have been asked, to take the work seriously, and to take pride in the work, even listing it in the bios and on their resumes.

Such gestures may seem at first glance to be trivial, to be luxuries rather than necessities, but on the whole, I have found them crucial to establishing the community of PPW. The community is part of the draw for students, but it is also part of the power, and part of what has made our alums successful as professional writers.

4.4. Centering on Students: Professional Writing as a Teachable Subject

At this moment, I'd like to return to Joseph Williams, with whose work I began this chapter. For me, the strength of Williams's pedagogy is that he roots his teaching in students' experiences

of language. The usefulness of this move is not limited to work on style, but extends to any conversation teachers have with students about the working knowledge of writers.

In the Public and Professional Writing program, inspired by both Williams's pedagogical moves and by the values articulated in our composition program, we have created a student-centered and writing-centered program. This, I think, is the heart of the rationale for locating professional writing in a composition program. This is why our program belongs in composition.

In most classrooms, there is a tension between what students want and the larger collective purpose of the course. In a first-year composition class, the student's desire may be to pass the class, fulfill a requirement, become a better writer, while the purpose of the course may often be to prepare students to engage in meaningful ways with academic discourse. In many professional writing classrooms, the tension is between student desires and motivations and those of the larger field that the student hopes to enter. Unfortunately, in many classes that are informed by the business communication model of the course, there is hardly any room for the experiences and work of the students. All the space is given to role play, cases, and a kind of socialization into professional behavior.

The power of focusing on teaching students the working knowledge of professional writing also opens up the possibility of classes that go beyond simply providing an introduction to business communication and offer students the opportunity to engage with a broad, diverse range of writing, to allow students to explore the ways that writing gets produced, as well as its contexts and consequences.

5. CODA

When I looked at AAU English departments to see which ones offered instruction in any kind of professional writing (see Appendix A), I found that many of the websites persuade undergraduate students to major in English by invoking a set of professional writing skills that will somehow emerge from their study in English. This persuasion often appears on a webpage titled something like “Why English?” or “What Will I Get Out of Being an English Major?” English departments may feel the need to justify the study of English because of the current political climate in which institutions that receive public funding are being pressured to think about outcomes assessment. Departments are experiencing new pressures to define what it is that classes or a course of study should be doing for students within their university education and perhaps after graduation. While in some ways these pressures can be seen as an imposition—a demand made by outsiders—in other ways they offer departments opportunities to think through what is at stake in the teaching of courses in a department, to define terms for effective teaching in a subject, to come to some coherent agreement about why students should take the classes that are offered, and to establish paths through the curriculum.

Of course, English departments also need to demonstrate the value of an English degree to students who may not have a compelling interest in sustained literary study. In certain professional areas—such as law and medicine—there may not be a specific undergraduate course of study to take, since the post-baccalaureate experience is seen as central to the formation of the professional. English departments attempt to claim some of those undergraduates by arguing, implicitly or explicitly, that critical work with literature will in some sense help them later.

Here is an example from Stanford's Department of English website. The page is titled "Why English?":

A bachelor's degree in English provides you with skills for a variety of positions. English majors very often seek out careers in publishing, public relations, advertising, media, or teaching. Occupations to be considered are copywriter, columnist, commentator, critic, editor, production assistant, public relations representative, reporter, correspondent, technical writer or writer/author.

By listing all of these jobs, the website of the Stanford English Department is suggesting, perhaps, that students should pursue sustained study in English because many jobs require careful and thoughtful work with language. As far as a reader can tell from the course titles listed on the website, however, Stanford's English department does not appear to offer students much sustained instruction in these types of writing.²⁸ The assumption is that simply doing careful work as a student of literary study will translate into an ability to do careful work with language in a completely different site, with different discursive communities, different demands, different products, and different relationships to research, collaboration, and production. While many people do make this transition, English departments seem to be missing

²⁸ Stanford's English department does have a Program in Writing and Rhetoric (PWR), which offers writing classes for students at the first-year and sophomore levels (Students fulfill the third-level requirement in their major.). The list of classes that the PWR offers are rich and interesting, including (for Spring 2008) courses such as Speaking with Things: The Rhetoric of Display; The Rhetoric of the Lost Cause; and The Elephant, the Tiger, and the Cellphone: The Rhetoric of India and Indian Film. A course called Constitutional Legal Discourse and the Rhetorics of Terror could potentially offer students insight into writing legal discourse. The PWR also offers a couple of classes per term that are designated as Community Writing Project classes. For example, The Elephant, the Tiger, and the Cellphone: The Rhetoric of India and Indian Film was designated as a Community Writing Project class. As part of the work of the course, students write at least one project for a local community service agency—"a grant proposal, pamphlet, news article, profile, or website" ("Spring 2008 PWR 1 Courses"). So some students taking classes taught by English faculty are getting to learn something about professional writing, but not within the number of classes and diverse possibilities offered in other areas of the department's curriculum. And such work does not appear to be a significant part of the scope of the department's major or minor.

a real opportunity to draw stronger connections between the work that students do in school and the work they do after graduation.

This approach to promoting a major in English—cataloging a variety of jobs that require careful work with language—is fairly common on English department websites. Rice University goes beyond cataloging writing jobs to make particular products of writing on the job the first of several reasons to study English²⁹:

Legal briefs, research reports, grant proposals, marketing strategies, mission statements, ads, investment brochures, patient narratives, letters of acceptance and rejection, and absolutely everything you will send via email. These are all reasons to make sure your writing skills are what they should be. After five years into the profession of your choice, what you have learned in college will be far less important than what you have learned at work. But no one there is going to teach you how to write.

Interestingly, and again going by the courses described on the department's website, the English department of Rice University, like Stanford, doesn't appear to offer students much specific instruction in these types of writing. The assumption is that reading literature and writing about it in critical ways is adequate preparation for, say, writing a successful grant proposal or a compelling narrative to secure health plan coverage for a patient's treatment plan. How much more effective is this line of reasoning when English departments also offer students the opportunity to think through some issues more closely related to writing in the community they will be entering?

²⁹ Other reasons for studying English that are offered on this web page include learning to read critically, deepening imagination and one's ability to experience life, feeling pleasure in reading literature, and enjoying good teachers and innovative seminars.

The impulse to justify the study of English by citing professional writing tasks is intriguing for its assumptions about what it means to write. English majors who are studying literature take many courses in which they learn about literary analysis, critical writing, different theoretical apparatuses, and so on. They learn about the moves that professionals in the field make, the working knowledge of literary criticism. Yet somehow, when it comes to professional writing, the work is imagined as so transparent, so self evident, that students will easily pick it up on the job as long as they have a strong liberal arts education.

Many professional writers do learn on the job. I didn't take classes in any of the professional writing I actually do in the consulting part of my life, but I also know that I didn't just pick it up. I studied, I failed, I learned from my failures, I made connections between what I was doing in one place and what I was doing in another, I learned from readers, I learned from others who were doing the same kind of work. In order to be able to do what I do as a professional writer, I had to pursue a course of study. My ability to critique literature was not the biggest factor in my ability to do that work. What played the biggest role in my ability to learn how to write professionally was what I had already learned as a teacher of composition, as someone who had invested a significant amount of time thinking about what makes writing teachable. That gave me the critical and analytical ability to learn the discursive moves that would be effective for the communities I was now writing within.

How does composition as a field of study function in the equation of English departments drawing a too simple line between advanced study in literature and the acquisition of professional writing "skills" (as if writing simply involves a generic set of tools that can be picked up and used in any site at will)?

Composition scholars are looking beyond first-year composition to explore other areas of teaching and scholarship. In some universities, this development has meant that composition programs in English departments create courses and offer students some degree of specialization in professional writing. For example, the University of Texas at Austin offers English students a major in Rhetoric and Writing that includes courses like Professional and Technical Writing for Liberal Arts Majors, Advanced Studies in Computers and Writing, Proposal Writing, Writing for Nonprofits, Editing for Publication, Article Writing, Multimedia Writing, and Rhetoric of Cyberculture. Other schools offer students the opportunity to complete a minor or certificate in professional writing or take some relevant classes in professional writing while they major in literature.

It is important to note that in some universities the composition program has split off from English. When I looked at AAU institutions, I found that professional writing was often taught in a freestanding composition or writing program. This situation can put English departments in a difficult rhetorical position if they want to cite professional writing ability as a reason for pursuing an English major: they are trying to recruit students by promising them preparation for careers when students have the option of completing a different major that actually addresses the working knowledge of the careers in question. For example, Michigan State University has both a department of English and a department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures. Here is a passage from the English department's "What Do You Do With an English Major?" page:

It's not always easy being an English major. Even Garrison Keillor gently makes fun of us on *A Prairie Home Companion* ("brought to you by the Professional Organization of English majors...").

But, of course, he is one of us (B.A. in English, University of Minnesota), and he's done alright for himself. Hasn't he?

The study of literature and language provides a context for developing the communication skills necessary to be successful in many different career fields, including broadcasting. English majors learn how to analyze language, to appreciate and understand complex and sophisticated texts, to solve rhetorical and logical problems. . . .

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree,” Abraham Lincoln said, “and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.”

English majors are sharpening their axes. They're becoming smarter, more skilled, wiser. When it comes time to cut down the tree—to perform the work of a technical writer, magazine editor, press secretary, director of a non-profit foundation, public relations manager, or whatever—English majors are ready to go to work.

When somebody asks our students, “What are you going to do with a degree in English?” they will have answers ready:

- “Whatever I want.”
- “I don't know yet. But when I get there, I'll be ready.”
- “Do with it? I'm going to live with it.”
- “I'm going to chop some wood...with a sharp axe...”

These potential answers that students might give seem vague at best. There are powerful cases to be made for studying literature, but the writers of this page don't make them. In fact, based on this page, it would be difficult to see how the English major in question is actually

focused on the study of literature. If someone substituted “psychology” for each instance of “English” (leaving aside the factuality of the Keillor reference), would the passage be any more or less effective? If, instead, someone substituted “college graduate” for “English major” would it make a difference? This argument also relies on the “communication skills necessary to be successful” construction that seems as generic and unsituated here as it does in a business communication textbook.

Compare this language to the explanation of the professional writing major offered by the department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures, also at the University of Michigan:

The major prepares students for careers in professional editing and publishing, technical writing, information development, and web authoring. It also prepares students for graduate work in rhetoric, writing, technical writing, the teaching of writing, and the study of culture.

These claims are supported by courses that offer students the opportunity to engage with the working knowledge of writing in a number of areas. Students can take classes in Technical Writing, Writing in the Public Interest, Writing Nature/Nature of Writing, Writing for Publication, Editing and Style, Advanced Web Authoring, Digital Rhetoric, Multimedia Writing, Writing in American Cultures, Rhetoric and Music, Coordinating Large-Scale Publications, Grant and Proposal Writing, Transcultural Perspectives, and more. Writing in this department is imagined as more than a “one size fits all” set of skills that someone can be expected to learn on the fly after college. There are reasonable connections here between what is claimed for students at the end of the program and the courses of study they can pursue while they are in the program.

My point in bringing forward the language of web sites is not simply to critique the ways that departments represent their programs online. I want to raise the issue of why the connection

between English and professional writing is so often made, even when departments don't want to teach professional writing. The fact that English departments so often appeal to students on the grounds that what they learn will prepare them for careers in professional writing suggests that English department administrators have a sense of the power of these claims for students and that they have a sense, too, that such work is or can be aligned with literary study, even if they don't offer classes that directly take up issues of professional writing.

As composition develops further as a field, it will be interesting to see how departments will be configured, where composition will maintain close relationships with literary study, and where scholars will feel the need to establish separate departments. I found that in AAU institutions where composition is established as a department separate from English, professional writing courses are often offered.³⁰

Composition studies is carving out for itself meaningful work at the advanced undergraduate level. The teaching of professional writing is one path toward defining and enacting the relevance of composition studies within and beyond the academy.

There is a culture of public and professional writing at the University of Pittsburgh that is not in opposition with literary study or any other program or agenda in the English department. It has its own culture; it has its own drive that comes from within it. As we graduate our fourth class of certificate students, we are a young program that has been powerful for undergraduates both inside and outside the English department, a program that has loyal alumni who are now, themselves, taking on interns from the program because they want to give something back. The next steps for the PPW program will take some resources. Students need to learn the technology

³⁰ Such stand-alone programs vary significantly in their naming and scope. Some focused mostly on professional writing and rhetoric, some on academic writing, some included creative writing, and some simply housed the first-year composition program for the university. Programs were called the Writing Program; College Writing Program; University Writing Program; Program for Writing and Rhetoric; Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing; Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures; Academic and Professional Writing; and more.

appropriate to the kinds of writing they are learning, and their teachers need to be able to integrate this type of instruction into all of the classes. The program needs access to technology-equipped classrooms and needs to be able to support teachers in acquiring and learning technology. Teacher development remains an issue. As the number of classes offered by the program grows, we need the resources, time, and people to ensure that new teachers are prepared for the classroom. New courses need to be developed to address gaps in our curriculum, and teachers with the working knowledge of those areas need to be identified and developed. I also feel strongly that teachers in our program need research resources so that they can engage with scholarship, have contact with scholars who are doing compatible work elsewhere, and advance our learning and thinking about the teaching of public and professional writing. There is interesting and important work to do in this area, both within the University of Pittsburgh and nationally.

APPENDIX A

English Departments Offering Instruction in Professional Writing in Association of American Universities Institutions

One way of gauging the attitudes of English department faculty and administrators is to look at where professional writing (PW) is taught, where there are programs, and how professional writing courses are named. This appendix offers a snapshot of professional writing in English departments at Association of American Universities. The information was collected from AAU institution websites between November 2007 and March 2008.

Institution	No PW Courses in English	Small group of PW courses, but no program	PW Program, Minor, Major	Notes
Brandeis	•			
Brown	•			
California Institute of Technology	•			
Carnegie Mellon			- BA in Professional Writing - BS in Technical Writing and Communication - MAPW	Courses include Writing for the Professions, Introduction to Professional and Technical Writing, Communication in the Global Marketplace, Multimedia Authoring I and II, Writing in the Public Interest, Document Design, Communication Revolution Technologies, Software Documentation, Corporate Communications and Marketing, Online Information Design
Case Western Reserve		•		Courses include Writing for the Health Professions, Professional Communication for Engineers
Columbia	•			
Cornell	•			
Duke	•			
Emory	•			
Harvard	•			
Indiana		•		Courses include Professional Writing Skills, Literary Editing and Publishing, Community Service Writing, and Advanced Technical Writing

Institution	No PW Courses in English	Small group of PW courses, but no program	PW Program, Minor, Major	Notes
Iowa State			- BA in English with emphasis in Rhetorical Studies - BS in Technical Communication - MA in Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Communication - PhD in Rhetoric and Professional Communication	Courses include Business Communication; Report and Proposal Writing, Writing for the World Wide Web; Technical Communication; Business and Professional Speaking; Technology, Rhetoric, and Professional Communication; Rhetoric in Organizational Culture; Writing Computer Documentation and Other Instructional Materials; Business and Technical Editing; Graphic Communication in Business and Technical Writing; Multimedia Content Management Systems; Production Processes for Technical Documents; Multimedia Design in Professional Communication
Johns Hopkins	•			
Massachusetts Institute of Technology				MIT does not have an “English” department. Their program in Writing and Humanistic Studies offers majors in Science Writing and Technical Communication, a minor in Writing, and an MS degree in Science Writing. Courses include Introduction to Scientific and Technical Communication, The Science Essay, Science Journalism, Writing About the Culture of Medicine
McGill	•			
Michigan State	•			In addition to their English Department, MSU has a Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures. That department offers a BA in Professional Writing.
New York	•			The separate Writing Program offers writing courses (mostly creative writing). But the course Writing as Social Action stood out as focusing on writing in nonprofit genres as well as on critical essays.
Northwestern	•			
Ohio State		•		The separate Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing offers a minor in professional writing that draws on courses from English and other departments.
Pennsylvania State			Minor in Technical Writing	Courses include Advanced Article Writing, The Editorial Process, Advanced Technical Writing, Advanced Business Writing, Writing for the Web, Communication Design for Writers
Princeton	•			
Purdue			Major in PW	Courses include Introduction to Research for Professional Writers, Introduction to Professional Writing, Computer-Aided Publishing, Multimedia Writing, Business Writing, Technical Writing, Writing for the Computer Industry, Advanced Professional Writing
Rice	•			
Rutgers			-Technical Writing Certificate - Professional Writing Certificate	Courses include Technical Writing Essentials, Business Writing Essentials, Scientific and Technical Writing, Writing for Business and Professions, and more.
Stanford	•			
Stony Brook	•			
Syracuse	•			The separate Writing Program offers a range of courses, a minor, and a major.

Institution	No PW Courses in English	Small group of PW courses, but no program	PW Program, Minor, Major	Notes
Texas A&M			PW certificate (required courses are all in English, electives include courses in Communication and Linguistics)	Courses include Scientific and Technical Writing, Technical Writing, Technical Editing and Writing, Rhetoric of Style, Special Topics in Technical Communication
Tulane	•			
University of Arizona		•		Business Writing, Technical Writing
SUNY Buffalo		•		Advanced Writing: Technical
UC Berkeley	•			The separate College Writing Program offers a couple of professional writing courses.
UC Davis	•			The separate University Writing Program offers courses for Writing in the Disciplines and Writing in the Professions. They are running an online petition to establish a minor. Their proposed minor was declined by the Letters and Sciences Committee on Educational Policy, who believe that students receive instruction in writing within their departments.
UC Irvine	•			
UC Los Angeles	•			The separate Writing Program offers some courses that “emphasize rhetorical values of major professional and research areas.”
UC San Diego	•			
UC Santa Barbara	•			The separate Writing Program offers a minor in Professional Writing.
University of Chicago	•			The Writing Program offers a course called “Academic and Professional Writing” (a.k.a The Little Red Schoolhouse) as well as courses in argument, rhetoric of law, and more.
University of Colorado at Boulder	•			The Program for Writing and Rhetoric offers courses like Writing in the Visual Arts, Writing on Science and Society, Technical Communication and Design, and Writing in Business and Society.
University of Florida			The English major allows students to chose an emphasis relating to professional writing.	The available emphases include Nonfiction Writing and Publishing (with courses in Biography, Advanced Exposition, Advanced Argumentative Writing, and Speechwriting) and Corporate and Managerial Writing (with courses in Professional Writing, Advanced Professional Writing, and Professional Editing).
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign		•		Courses include Principles of Business Writing, Technical and Scientific Communication, and Writing in the Disciplines and the Professions Topics.
University of Iowa		•		Courses include Writing for Business and Industry, Advanced Writing for Business
University of Kansas		•	They are currently trying to win university approval for a Technical Writing certificate.	Courses include Foundations of Technical Writing, Advanced Technical Writing I and II, and Advanced Technical Editing
University of Maryland, College Park		•		Courses include Scientific Writing, Legal Writing, Technical Writing, Business Writing, Writing for Health Professionals, Topics in Professional Writing, Advanced Composition
University of Michigan		•		Professional Writing, Community Writing and Public Culture

Institution	No PW Courses in English	Small group of PW courses, but no program	PW Program, Minor, Major	Notes
University of Minnesota, Twin Cities		•		Courses include Internet Communication: Tools and Issues, Technical and Professional Writing, Project Design and Development, Rhetorical Theory for Scientific and Technical Communication, Intersections of Scientific and Technical Communication and Law, Usability and Human Factors in Technical Communication, Editing and Style for Technical Communicators
University of Missouri-Columbia		•		Courses include Professional and Civic Writing in a Digital Context, Rhetorical Studies: The Rhetoric of Scientific Texts, Studies in Writing: Writing Web 2.0
University of Nebraska-Lincoln		•		Courses include Electronic Texts: Theory and Practice, Writing for Film and TV
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill		•		Courses include Advanced Expository Writing for Business, Advanced Expository Writing for Law
University of Oregon		•		Courses include Literary Editing, Scientific and Technical Writing, Business Communications
University of Pennsylvania	•			
University of Pittsburgh			Certificate in Public and Professional Writing	Courses include Written Professional Communication, Writing for the Legal Professions, Writing for the Public, Narratives of the Workplace, Persuasive Writing in Advertising and Fundraising, Integrating Writing and Design, Topics in Public and Professional Writing, Language of Business and Industry, Language of Science and Technology, Advanced Topics in Public and Professional Writing, Grant and Proposal Writing, Advanced Research and Documentary Writing, Service Learning in Public and Professional Writing, Independent Study in Public and Professional Writing
University of Rochester			Concentration in Language, Media, and Communication	Courses include Editing Practicum, Hypertext Writing, Multimedia Editing, Editorial Skills and Desk-Top Publishing
University of Southern California	•			USC has a Master of Arts in Professional Writing program, but most of the curriculum is focused on creative writing (nonfiction, poetry, fiction, and drama).
University of Texas at Austin			Major in Rhetoric and Writing	Courses include Professional and Technical Writing for Liberal Arts Majors, Advanced Studies in Computers and Writing, Proposal Writing, Writing for Nonprofits, Editing for Publication, Article Writing, Multimedia Writing, Rhetoric of Cyberculture
University of Toronto	•			
University of Virginia		•		The department's Academic and Professional Writing program manages the first-year writing courses, the graduate-level teaching course, and advanced courses in professional and academic writing. Examples include Topics in Academic and Professional Writing, Literary Editing and Desktop Publishing. They don't seem to offer a major or certificate. Gregory Colomb, who also helped shape Chicago's Academic and Professional Writing program, directs the program at UVA.

Institution	No PW Courses in English	Small group of PW courses, but no program	PW Program, Minor, Major	Notes
University of Washington		•		Composing for the Web
University of Wisconsin-Madison		•		Writing for the Marketplace
Vanderbilt	•			
Washington University in St. Louis	•			
Yale	•			

APPENDIX B

Business and Technical Writing Textbooks Studied (Chronological Order)

Fisher, George. *The American Instructor; or Young Man's Best Companion*. 12th ed. New York: H. Gaine, Bookseller, 1760.

The American Letter-Writer: Containing, a Variety of Letters on the Most Common Occasions in Life, viz Advice, Business, Amusement, Love, Marriage, Courtship, &c. with Forms of Message Cards. Philadelphia: John M'Culloch, 1793.

The Complete Letter-Writer: Containing Familiar Letters on the Most Common Occasions in Life. Boston: John W. Folsom, 1794.

A New Academy of Compliments; or the Lover's Secretary. Worcester, MA: Isaiah Thomas, Jr., 1795.

Chesterfield's Art of Letter-Writing Simplified: Being a Guide to Friendly, Affectionate, Polite and Business Correspondence. New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1857.

Simmonds, P.L. *The Commercial Letter Writer*. New York: Routledge & Sons, 1866.

Westlake, J. Willis. *How to Write Letters: A Manual of Correspondence Showing the Correct Structure, Composition, Punctuation, Formalities, and Uses of the Various Kinds of Letters, Notes, and Cards*. Philadelphia: Christopher Sower Company, 1876.

Locke, John S., *The Art of Correspondence*. DeWolfe, Fiske and Company, 1884.

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- Frost, Harwood. *Good Engineering Literature: What to Read and How to Write with Suggestive Information on Allied Topics*. Chicago: Chicago Book Company, 1911.
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- Buhlig, Rose. *Business English: A Practice Book*. Boston: D.C. Heath & Co., 1914.
- SoRelle, Rupert P. *Applied Business Correspondence*. New York: Gregg Publishing, 1914.
- Palmer, A.N. *The Palmer Method of Business Writing: A Series of Self-Teaching in Rapid, Plain, Unshaded, Coarse-Pen, Muscular Movement Writing*. New York: A.N. Palmer Company, 1915.
- Campbell, Benjamin J. and Bruce L. Vass. *Essentials of Business English and Business Letters How to Write Them*. Jackson, MI: Business English Publishing Company, 1915.
- Gardner, Edward Hall. *Effective Business Letters*. New York: The Ronald Press, 1915.
- Barrett, Charles R. *Business English and Correspondence*. Chicago: American Technical Society, 1916.
- Smart, Walter K. *How to Write Business Letters*. New York: A.W. Shaw, 1916.
- Smith, Carrie. *Modern Business English*. Chicago: Powers & Lyons, 1916.

- Thrift, Tim. *Business Letters, How to Write Them*. Jackson, MI: Business English Publishing, 1916.
- Webster, Edward H. *English for Business*. New York, Newson & Co., 1916.
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- Miller, Charles M. *New Business Speller*. Chicago: Lyons and Carnahan, 1924.
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- Hunsinger, Marjorie. *Business Correspondence for Colleges*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960.
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