
STYLUS:

A JOURNAL OF FIRST- YEAR WRITING

VOLUME 2 | ISSUE 2 | FALL 2011

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The Journal of the First-Year
Writing Program at the
University of Central Florida



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From the Editor

It is no great insight to say that writing can often lead to self-discovery. Most of us, I think, know this. The act of writing is itself a concentrated form of thinking, and looking back on the writing we've produced is like looking back at ourselves from another time through another's eyes. This experience can be revealing, strange, and a little frightening all at the same time, even when the only audience is the writer herself. When the writer is but one of a community of writers, the effect is amplified.

At its best, this is what the first-year writing classroom can be. There are no generalized skills students need to be taught, no genres of writing students must acquire. When they leave their composition classes, students will be entering any number of other writing situations with varying conventions, expectations, and types of content, so our classes focus on preparing them to enter and understand those situations. What better way is there to do this than through inquiry into how the language and discourse around us functions, or into how students operate as writers and readers within those discourses?

This issue of *Stylus* tries to illustrate that ideal of self-inquiry as a means to furthering one's understanding of how writing actually works in the world. While their forms and subjects might vary—ranging from personal essay to scholarly article, from discourse analysis to self-study, from Disney princesses to Starcraft—all five of these essays were selected on the basis of their outstanding research into the complex relationships of language, authority, and identity of a type that encircle all of us.

We start with two very different explorations of the writing process. Thomas Osborne's "Late Nights, Last Rites and the Rain-Slick Road to Self-Destruction" provides an often humorous examination of the author's own difficulties completing this very essay. While that subject matter might seem mundane, through keen observation, careful reflection, and some clever figurative language, Osborne turns otherwise unremarkable material into something both evocative and highly enlightening. I suspect, too, that many readers will be able to relate to Osborne's writing struggles.

Next is Aubrey Marks' "Reconceiving: Using Combination and Repetition to Your Advantage." The approach is markedly different from Osborne's but results in work no less insightful. Marks builds off of the writing process studies of Sondra Perl and Carol Berkenkotter, two researchers some of you may have read in your own writing classes. Through a careful analysis of research into

her own process, Marks successfully joins their conversation and adds to the existing knowledge of how writing works. That's no small accomplishment, so pay close attention to what Marks discovers. You might find it helpful to compare what you learn about her process to Osborne's or your own.

The final three essays of this issue deal with questions of language and identity, albeit from very different angles. Krista Brancato, in "Disney Princess Series: More than Your Average Fairy Tales," examines popular children's literature to gauge how it may or may not shape the identities of its young readers. Rather than simply settling for presenting the results of her research, Brancato goes a step further by constructing two additional texts that use her research as a foundation. We think this is especially important, since, despite how it might sometimes feel in certain classes, research does not happen in a vacuum. Instead, it should be used to inform policy and decisions at any number of levels. That's what Brancato sets out to do with her work and we think she succeeds.

The last two essays offer close examinations of the language use in particular discourse communities. In "Discourse Communities and Onions," Channing Trainor examines the many levels of communication and interaction at work in a veterinary hospital. After conducting exhaustive research and analysis, Trainor is able to come to some compelling conclusions. We're impressed by what she does with her research here. Consider her findings in light of what you know about the discourse communities you belong to.

In the final essay of the issue, "Rhetorical Criticism of Online Discourse," Brandon Jones adds to the ongoing conversation about digital rhetoric. Noting a lack in the amount of existing rhetorical analyses of online spaces, Jones applies rhetorical theory to a Starcraft II community. Though by very different means, Jones, like Osborne and all of the authors in this issue, takes a subject that seems familiar and gives it new life through his inquiry and careful analysis.

To quote one of our authors, Krista Brancato, "Research needs to be incorporated into everyday life because each day is about discovery and making new conclusions about life." All five of the authors published in this issue live up to this statement. And the beautiful thing about writing is that writers, ultimately, do not have to write only for themselves or only for their own specific task or even only for their own time. We hope that, as you read these articles, you will be inspired to draw connections to your own experiences and lives and use these essays as springboards for your own inquiry into how writing works in the world.

-Matt Bryan