



a journal of first-year writing

Literacy in My Life

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Analysis of an Online Activity System

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An Evaluation of Factors Leading to

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**Overcoming Differences in Global Communication in Order
to Efficiently Complete Work in the Aerospace**

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From the Editor

It's probably no stunning revelation for you to hear that people in particular situations and communities develop ways of communicating that are specialized, often complex, and—for outsiders, at least some of time—potentially confusing. We've all had that experience of trying to listen in or join a conversation we don't quite understand. Maybe it was between two doctors you overheard down the hall in the hospital, your coworkers at a new job, users of an online message board you only recently discovered, or something else. Your writing teacher has probably already told you something along the lines of, "Good writing depends on context." One way of understanding how writing works, then, is to understand how people communicating in these different groups adapt writing to suit their needs and values.

Writing researchers have a number of terms and concepts they use to describe and explain such groups and the contexts in which they write: Discourses, discourse communities, and activity systems are three of these that are referenced in this issue of *Stylus*. The outstanding student projects collected in this issue vary considerably in subject and approach, but they are all linked in their authors' attempts to understand how a community's practices shape its members ways of thinking, writing, and researching. While you might never want to be an engineer or a hip hop producer, we think that seeing how individuals in these communities learn to communicate to get things done can help you think about what you should learn to succeed in the communities that do matter to you. Moreover, the methods employed by these authors offer possibilities for how you might conduct your own investigation into community-specific writing and research practices. So, as you read the work published in this issue of *Stylus*, look to see which questions they inspire in addition to which ones they answer.

The first piece in this issue is Cameron Gill's "Literacy in My Life." Gill uses a combination of images, text, and narration to tell the story of how he acquired literacy. Specifically, Gill focuses on the development of his reading and writing practices as he enculturated into particular Discourses. As you watch and listen to his presentation, consider how his experiences are similar to or different from your own. Consider, too, how the blend of text, image, and audio helps him tell this story.

Next up is James Buddendorff's "Analysis of an Online Activity System." Buddendorff's focus is the subreddit /r/MakingHipHop, of which he himself is an active member. Buddendorff's analysis and discussion demonstrate how the careful application of a particular theoretical framework—in this case, the notion of activity systems—can be used to look closely at the "how" and "why" of communication in particular settings.

The third article in this issue comes from Alex Coleman, and is titled, "An Evaluation of Factors Leading to Successful Research." Coleman, a Computer Science major, is interested in how researchers working in the field of Artificial Intelligence are ranked and compared. By examining two research indices and then developing one of his own, Coleman presents a close, interesting look at what sort of research gets valued in this particular discipline.

Fourth, Samuel (Ting-Jui) Chen's, "Overcoming Differences in Global Communication in Order to Efficiently Complete Work in the Aerospace Engineering Community," takes up the question of how engineers communicate across cultures and languages in an increasingly globalized workforce. He combines interviews and observations to learn more about what the work of an aerospace engineer actually looks like. Chen eventually comes to realize the importance of communication (through a variety of channels) to this work.

The final piece in this issue is Cameron McAllan's "Diagrams as an Instructional and Communicative Medium for Engineering Students." McAllan's work reminds us that definitions of "writing" should not be limited to alphabetic inscriptions, but should include texts like diagrams as well. Through a pair of case studies, McAllan illustrates how both reading and writing diagrams helps engineering students learn and construct knowledge.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Stylus* and find it to be helpful in your explorations of what writing and research can accomplish. We also hope that you'll consider submitting your own work for publication in the journal; at one time or another, all of the students published here were sitting in a composition class, just like you. To read about their experiences (and, sometimes, struggles) along the way from receiving an assignment to being published, be sure to take a look at the writer's statements accompanying each piece. If you're interested in submitting work to *Stylus*, simply ask your Composition I or II instructor to forward the piece you'd like to submit to the journal and we'll take care of the rest. If you have any questions about this process, please feel free to contact me at Matthew.Bryan@ucf.edu.

-Matt Bryan