



a journal of first-year writing

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From the Editor

Here's a phrase—or at least an idea—that I bet you've encountered at one time or another: "Context is key." The notion that solutions and processes are seldom "one-size-fits-all" is hardly news. This is something that is often especially on the minds of those who teach, talk about, and produce writing. What makes for successful writing is typically subjective and context-sensitive, which can be, depending on your perspective, either wonderful or frustrating. To some extent, we understand this instinctively. You probably, for instance, did not need someone to tell you to compose a text message to your parents differently than you would to your best friend. Rather, you learned what worked in a text message to your parents and to your best friend through a process involving some combination of trial and error, reading clues for how they responded, looking at what they wrote to you, and thinking about your relationships with these individuals. This probably didn't require extensive reflection or analysis on your part, but these practices also didn't develop arbitrarily. In other words, context matters.

People who research and think a lot about how writing works have come up with some different ways of describing and considering how communication is contextual. You may have already encountered some of these in your first-year composition class at UCF. These include concepts like "rhetorical situation," "discourse community," "activity system," and "genre." The terminology can sometimes sound a little confusing, but all of these ideas share at their heart the goal of helping us think about how the contexts around writing work and impact the production, distribution, and reception of particular texts ("text" here meaning, of course, a piece of writing broadly defined, everything from an email to a course syllabus to a menu to a book, and not just text messages you send on your phone). These concepts might emphasize different aspects of that context, but all of them can serve as tools for you and other researchers who want to think more carefully about why a piece of writing functions the way it does or how it came to be. They can also help writers be more mindful of the choices they make when writing.

But if navigating between different writing and communication contexts is something we do naturally anyway, why bother with all of these concepts? The short answer is that naming and coming up with ways of describing and analyzing these contexts can help us come to a better understanding than if we relied on intuition alone. This matters when, for instance, we're trying to enter a new situation for the first time, or when we're struggling with a particular kind of writing. Having some ways to think about how context impacts writing might not be the same as knowing how to write a particular kind of text successfully, but this understanding can help us know the questions to ask to get started.

That sense that context matters is what unites the six otherwise very distinct articles in this issue of *Stylus*. These authors all understand that writing contexts can be investigated and further defined in order to more carefully consider the factors that shape writing and writers. Their specific subjects and research methods could not be more varied, but we feel this is instructive: the contexts in which writing happens are also varied and there are different ways of thinking about those contexts depending on what we want to do or understand.

First up is Arielle Feldman's "Galaxy-Wide Writing Strategies Used by Official *Star Wars* Bloggers." Here, Feldman uses concepts that you might encounter in your first-year composition class—intertextuality, discourse community—to help account for the popularity and reach of particular posts on *StarWars.com*. This article should, of course, be of interest to any fans of George Lucas's galaxy far, far away, but we also think writers interested in learning about the strategies that lead to successful writing in online spaces should pay attention to Feldman's work.

Next is Jaydelle Celestine's "Did I Create the Process? Or Did the Process Create Me?" This thoughtful literacy narrative highlights several key moments that Celestine has identified in his development as a writer, ranging from a story he wrote in a Facebook post to his successful efforts to get the flag of his home country, Grenada, placed in the Student Union. These stories demonstrate the variety of writing that a single student might encounter. Celestine also considers both the rhetorical and physical contexts of his writing, spending some time thinking about how what's going on around him does or does not impact his ability to be successful.

The third article in this issue comes from Katy Gentry, and is called, "Changing Scenes: The Rise and Success of Diversity on Broadway." This piece continues a focus on musical theater started in our previous issue (see Priscilla Samayoa's [Writing Processes of Musical Theater Writers](#) in *Stylus* 8.1), but Gentry takes a very different approach. She looks to interrogate what "diversity" really means and considers a variety of means of increasing that diversity on Broadway. Her research reveals the ways that history and location can shape the way we think about writing, in this case a Broadway production.

Fourth, we have Leticia Lenkiu's "The Language Transition Process and Its Influence on Language Use." Lenkiu decided to investigate how people moving to the United States—specifically, individuals coming from Brazil and learning English as Portuguese speakers—adapt to the new speaking and writing demands of a university by participating in specific discourse communities. Her interviews are compelling, and her research as a whole portrays an aspect of international students' experiences at UCF that many of us might not know about.

The next article is "Liking in Group Messaging: Perception versus Meaning," by Chloé LaRochelle. When you first start reading LaRochelle's article, you might think that her research focus—how individuals understand a "like" in messaging apps—is rather narrow. However, as you keep reading, you'll see just how much texture there is to even such a seemingly straightforward form of communication. LaRochelle eventually concludes that "because meaning appears to be derived from the context of a given circumstance, the use for the like button widely varies in different situations."

Our final piece actually comes from a returning author, a first for *Stylus*. We're happy to be able to once again publish an article by Priscilla Samayoa, whose piece, "The Extent of Influence that Genre Conventions Have on TED Talks," tackles the genre of the TED talk. Samayoa seeks to

understand these talks and what makes them effective from a variety of angles, including considering interviews with TED founders and presenters, studying the guidelines presenters are asked to follow, and analyzing several talks herself. This makes for a fascinating look at a genre that many of us have encountered as TED has increased in popularity over the last decade. Even more than just understanding TED, Samayoa's research helps us to understand why certain genres develop the way they do over time.

We hope that you enjoy this issue of *Stylus*, and that the articles published here might inspire you as you begin your own writing and research. We also hope that you'll consider submitting your work for publication in the journal. At one time or another, all of the students published here were sitting in a first-year composition class at UCF, 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 the *Stylus* co-editors, Megan Lambert at Megan.Lambert@ucf.edu or me at Matthew.Bryan@ucf.edu.

-Matt Bryan
Stylus Co-Editor