WRITING IN ACADEME; WRITING AT WORK: USING VISUAL RHETORIC TO BRIDGE THE GAP

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Stephen A. Bernhardt in "Seeing the Text," [*CCC*, February, 1986] discusses an issue largely ignored in teaching composition: "Though classroom teaching often assumes essay organization as the norm, outside the classroom visually informative prose is pervasive" (67). Bernhardt argues that writing outside academe, routine writing in science, law, advertising, and technical fields—the kind of writing most of our students will be doing once they complete their academic studies—is not at all like the essay which has long been sacred to composition instruction. Bernhardt recommends that teachers become more aware of visual design in "discourse forms which have evolved outside the classroom" and concludes that "Classroom practice which ignores the increasingly visual, localized qualities of information exchange can only become increasingly irrelevant" (77). Many college composition instructors are aware that the Document Design Center has recorded a number of victories for "plain English." Funded by the Carnegie Institute, the DDC was established to encourage, conduct, and report research in "plain English" and has applied research in linguistics, reading, and psychology to the redesign of regulations, forms, and training materials to make them verbally concise and visually accessible. However, Bernhardt's article is perhaps the first to state that traditional composition study should be questioned because it ignores the visual features that characterize a large portion of non-academic writing.

My purpose is to support Bernhardt's conclusions from another perspective—teaching writing to employees in three large business organizations. Based on the experience, which I hope will invite formal research into this issue, I wish to make three observations: (1) Lack of knowledge about the value and importance of visual rhetoric may be a major reason for much of the "bad" writing that employees currently generate on the job. (2) Teaching employee-writers techniques of visual rhetoric can dramatically improve their writing and eliminate a number of problems in awkwardness, conciseness, coherence, and unity. (3) Basic composition may still be the main source of writing instruction on which many people in the work force rely. For that reason, composition faculties need to consider ways, such as instruction in visual design, to make composition instruction more relevant to these students after they graduate and begin writing on the job.

USING PRINCIPLES OF VISUAL RHETORIC AND ORGANIZATION TO TEACH WRITING

In the past four years I have developed in-house writing instruction for mid-level managers in three corporations. I have taught 162 employees in 11 separate workshops: five for one company and three each for the other two. Of 162 participants, 154 were college graduates. Of this number, 36 held master's degrees. Of those who had attended college or who were college graduates 143 had taken one or two freshman composition courses. Only 28 had taken any kind of course in professional writing. The participants had been out of college from 3-13 years.

SHORT COURSE DESIGN

During the planning sessions with upper-level managers, several common complaints surfaced: Managers do not get their message across clearly; they are too wordy; their writing is so disorganized that a busy reader has to read everything several times to try to find essential information. While several managers noted problems in usage, punctuation, and spelling, lack of conciseness and clarity were the main concerns. During discussions with participants, most said their writing was "bad" because they had difficulty getting others to read what they had written.

The short courses included four sessions scheduled one afternoon a week for four weeks. The goal of each workshop was to help participants redesign unsuccessful writing by helping them understand principles of design necessary to achieve clarity, ease of reading, and conciseness. Before the class began, participants had been told by their supervisors to bring to class three examples—short memoranda—that they had written. The samples were to be ones that the employees had been told were "unacceptable" or poorly written. Using techniques for effective visual presentation and organization, participants were asked to revise the samples they had brought. In submitting each original sample and the revision for my evaluation, participants were asked to answer the following questions:

(1) What was the purpose of this document?
(2) Who was the audience?
(3) What was the response you received from this document?
(4) What were you told was unacceptable about this document?
(5) Why did you write the original as you did?

WRITING SAMPLES–ORIGINALS AND REVISIONS

The following example was typical of writing that employees brought:

Figure 1: original version

TO:	SWMTR II DEPARTMENTAL COORDINATORS AND TIME REPORTERS
FROM:	SWMTR SYSTEM ADMINISTRATOR
SUBJECT:	DELETION OF SECURITY CODES

This memorandum reminds time reporters to delete their security codes when they are no longer reporting payroll time data, informs new time reporters to establish unique security codes, and emphasizes the importance of using innovative passwords.

Security codes should be deleted when a time reporter leaves a group or is not longer responsible for inputting payroll. When new time reporters are assigned, they must obtain new security codes. The security code of a prior time reporter should not be used by the new time reporter. These security code procedures are documented in the Time Reporter Training Manual, Section IV.

Security codes may be added or deleted by sending a completed SW4570 form (Security Code Request) to the SWMTR Administrator at One Palm Center, 17-A-2, St. Louis Missouri 63101. Payroll numbers that are to be added or deleted to a security code must also be included on the SW4570. Also submit a SW4570 if you are not receiving your verification reports. Include your current security code, check the "Add Payroll Number" Box, and list all payroll numbers for which you are responsible under "New Payroll Numbers."

The last five positions of the security code are referred to as the "password." In SWMTR Memorandum 860721, dated March 4, 1985, it was stated that passwords should be made up of completely random numbers. For security purposes, you should not use a sequence of consecutive digits or the same digit repeated five times. The inputters database shows that approximately 22% of the time reporters are using this type of password. Passwords should be made more discreet so that the number schemes are not easily broken.

Additional information or questions should be referred to your local SWMTR II departmental Coordinator or your local payroll office.

In answering question 3 and 4—What was the response you received from this document? and What were you told was unacceptable about this document?—the writer of Figure 1 stated that apparently no one read this memorandum, as codes were neither deleted or added. He also commented that "most of what I write is not read." Several participants, in discussing the memo during peer review of the original and the revision, indicated that the first paragraph did not make the memo seem compelling and that the next three paragraphs were "hard to follow." Consequently, participants indicated that they were not inclined to read it. Most participants stated that they "skimmed" routine procedures, directives, and short reports because they had too much material to read each item carefully.

In revising Figure 1, the writer used deductive organization—placing the "new" first—and visual display strategies to improve accessibility of content. During peer review, participants admitted that they were now willing to read the revision because the procedure was easy to see and follow. As one employee remarked, "You could pull this memo out of your file and know in a few seconds what to do and why."

Figure 2: revision

TO:	SWMTR II Departmental Coordinators & Time Reporters
FROM:	SWMTR System Administrator
SUBJECT:	Required Security Code Procedures in SWMTR

DELETION AND ADDITION OF CODES

Security codes must be deleted when a time reporter leaves a group or is no longer responsible for inputting payroll. New security codes must be added for all new time reporters. (See Time Reporter Training Manual, Section IV, for documentation.)

SW4570 FORM (SECURITY CODE REQUEST)

Use this form to

1. Add or delete a security code.
2. Add or delete payroll numbers of security codes.
3. Receive your verification reports.

Be sure to include

1. Your social security number.
2. All payroll numbers under "New Payroll Numbers."
3. A check mark in "Add Payroll Number" box.

Send complete 4570 forms to

SWMTR Administrator
One Palm center
17-A-Z
St. Louis, Missouri 63101

SECURITY OF PASSWORDS

To maintain security passwords—the last five positions of the security code—should be made of random numbers. (See SWMTR Memoranda 85095 for March 3, 1985.)

If you have any questions about this mandatory procedure, contact your local SWMTR II Departmental Coordinator or your local payroll office.

Figure 3 exemplifies an even more common problem reported by participants. The Assistant-Manager for Payrolls reported that he wrote numerous payroll procedures, but that he believed he had writing problems because too many errors occurred in response to his directives. He said he knew people didn't understand how to do the payroll changes because he received numerous calls asking for clarification. He submitted the following directive for the class to examine because many of the payroll changes were made incorrectly. He stated that he believed the instructions were "clear enough" and did not have "mistakes in grammar." Therefore he was curious about why his instructions were being misread.

Figure 3: original version

Management Merit Increase
Payroll Change List
Effective April 1, 1986

Attached are blanket Payroll Changes Lists (PCLs), effective April 1, 1986, to be used to authorize Merit Salary Increased for management employees. These changes are covered in the letter dated January 16, 1986, file number 450.0701 from the Vice-President-Personnel.

Three copies of the PCL are attached. Reflected on the PCL is any payroll change activity which has been entered to the Payroll System prior to March 18, 1986 and effective through April 1, 1986. The performance code changes effective March 1, 1986 are reflected on the PCL. The Change Amount and Proposed Rate of Pay have been left blank and should be completed by your organization. Enter "XXXX" in these columns if no money amount is to be entered. All entries should be made in ink.

Of any of the preprinted information is incorrect, line the employee off the list and submit an individual Payroll Change Report (PCR). If an employee has other payroll change activity effective April 1, 1986, the entry should be lined off of the PCL and the PCR submitted showing all proposed information applicable for that date. Names should not be added to the list.

Any employee on disability or leave of absence may not receive a change in their basic rate of pay until he/she returns to an active management assignment. Please return to Joint Practice 74 for special procedures to be followed.

The authorized original and first copy of the PCL should be forwarded so as to be received in the Houston Payroll Office no later than 10:00 A.M., April 2, 1986. A copy of this list will be forwarded to the Vice President-Personnel for review.

Any questions concerning the calculation of the new salary rates on the Management Salary Plan should be referred to your segment personnel representatives.

Questions regarding the PCL should be referred to me at 126.

In his revision (Figure 4), the writer has used visual display techniques to establish hierarchies of information. Thus, specific instructions are easy to see and process. He has also used a memorandum heading, with a sharply-phrased subject line, to signal important information to the reader. During peer review, the writer admitted that grouping information into categories, then ordering these categories, and highlighting each category of instructions with headings had shown him that paragraphs in his original directive did not proceed as logically as he thought. Individual sentences were clear, but the instructions were haphazardly embedded within the paragraphs. His revision reveals specific, ordered instructions:

Figure 4: revision

TO:	All Division Managers
SUBJECT:	Preparation of 4-1-86 Management Merit Increase Payroll Change List.
	Due Date: April 1, 1986
Ref:	Joint Peractive No. 74 - Payroll Change Reports

Please refer to the Vice President-Personnel's letter—file number 450.0701 for April 1, 1976—and use the following guidelines to complete the attached blanket payroll change lists. **Payroll Activity Reflected on Payroll Change Reports**

All payroll change activity effective April 1, 1986 which has been entered into the payroll system before March 18, 1986 is reflected. This includes March 1, 1986 performance code changes.

Procedures for Complete Blanket Payroll Changes

1. Make all changes in RED INK.
2. Examine the change amount and proposed rate of pay.
   * Complete the amount.
   * Enter XXXX in these colums if no money is to be entered.
   * If you are uncertain about salary rates, contact your segment coordinator.
3. Line employees off the lists and prepare individual PCRs if
   * The pre-printed information is incorrect.
   * The employee has other payroll activity effective 4-1-86.
   * The employee is on disability or leave of absence. (Refer to Joint Practice 74 for procedures.)
4. Do not add names to the lists.

Return completed PCL's:
   * Return authorized original and first copy to the payroll office.
   * **Return list by 10:00 A.M. on April 2, 1986.**

Payroll will forward a copy to the Vice-President for review. If you have questions about the PCL's, please call me at 126.

Assistant Manager-Payrolls

Here's another directive memorandum that would be read and used for reference. As did the writer of the first original procedure memo (Figure 1), this writer reported that his instructions were not being followed. He has received numerous calls which indicated to him that people were not reading his directives. He stated that his inability to write clearly so that people would understand what he wrote was his biggest problem. Yet he did not see why people had difficulty understanding "even the simplest memo."

Figure 5: original version

MANAGER - ORN CONSTRUCTION - Central
MANAGER - ORN CONSTRUCTION - North

MANAGER - ORN CONSTRUCTION - Southwest
MANAGER - ORN CONSTRUCTION - West

This letter is being written as a reminder to each of you and your first line supervisors of the procedure necessary to insure proper posting of an employee's absence record, from TX-9113.

When an employee is absent due to sickness, EA time, UA time, EAR time, or tardy, it is necessary to complete form TX-6994 and forward it to the personnel office for posting to the employee's absence record. The records maintained in our personel office act as the Company's official file. If you have been keeping your own records in the field and not using form TX-9113 to document incidents of absence time or tardies, you need to go back and complete these forms and forward them as soon as possible so the official record will be current.

Maintaining our official absence records poses no hardship on anyone when the necessary forms are completed promptly when an employee returns fron an absence or when an incident of tardiness occurs.

If you have any questions about completing these forms, please call me on 5956.

Division Manager Construction

As the previous writer did (Figure 4), this writer, in revising the memorandum, develops a precise subject line. The arrangement of information and the visually effective formatting used make the instructions easy to follow:

Figure 6: revision

TO: All Managers—ORP Construction
FROM: Division Manager-Construction
SUBJECT: Procedures to follow for Report of Absence Forms

The following procedure should be used as a guideline in maintaining accurate employee absence records, form TX 9113.

<u>When an employee is absent due to:</u>

1) EA Time
2) EAR Time
3) UA Time
4) Sickness

5) Tardiness

His/her line supervisor should:

1) Prepare form TX-6994 (Report of Absence) the day the employee returns to work;
2) Forward form TX-6994 to the District Office, which will forward the form to the personel office after it is reviewed.

Official absence records are maintained in the personnel office and posted from the TX-6994's the first line supervisors prepared.

If you have any questions, please call me at 5946.

District Manager-Construction

ANALYSIS OF SAMPLES AND THEIR REVISIONS

The sample participants brought for analysis and revision revealed several common problems:

(1) In talking with each participant, I found that most emphasized careful information selection and mechanical correctness. They also attempted to make each sentence "as clear as possible." But in each instance, the writer admitted that he/she had not carefully considered how the reader would react to the whole document or what the reader's perspective would be in approaching the document the first time. Not one writer had considered ease of reading a factor in writing the document. Very few of the participants understood why their writing had not achieved its goal. Most participants assumed that their writing would be read and did not understand why their writing was, in many cases, not read. Lack of careful analysis of reader needs was a consistent problem.

(2) Fewer than 15% of the writers had attempted to begin with the most important information. Most samples began with an introduction paragraph and ended with a standard conclusion required by most organizations: "if you have questions, please call . . . ."

(3) Over 90% (304 of our 334 total original submissions) showed no effort by the writer to make information visually appealing and accessible.

(4) The majority of examples (Figures 1, 2, and 3 were typical) began like essays. That is, the writer began with an

introductory paragraph that states the idea to be discussed, used several paragraphs to develop the idea, and ended with a concluding paragraph. Figure 2, like many samples submitted, has a title centered on the page. Figures 1 and 3 were typical responses because the writers had not used clearly-worded subject lines. The fact that many of the samples submitted for analysis and revision read like essays made sense when I examined the answers to Question 5—Why did you write the original document the way you did? I was able to classify the answers into the following four categories:

(1) In college no one ever mentioned ways of making writing easy to read by using visual design techniques.

(2) In everything I ever wrote in school, we wrote in paragraph and essay style.

(3) That's the way we were taught to write in freshman English.

(4) I never heard the terms "reader-based" and "writer-based." We were taught in freshman English to begin with an introduction, support what we said in the introduction, and end with a concluding paragraph. That's the only way I was ever taught to write.

VISUAL ENGLISH AND CLARITY ON THE SENTENCE LEVEL

As the previous examples and their revisions indicate, the improvement in visual accessibility in each participant's writing was impressive. The fact that participants in all 11 groups responded positively to instruction in writing visually provides support for possibly including instruction in visual design in basic writing instruction. As the above revisions reveal, even short documents can become easier for readers to access and process if a writer uses three basic techniques for writing visually as described by Huckin, Faigley and Witte, and Felker of the Document Design Center: (1) use headings and segmented text to activate schemes and to establish and reveal hierarchies, (2) create levels within hierarchies so that important information is placed first, and (3) place topics of hierarchies in the subject position of supporting, lead-off sentences to aid readers in processing content under the heading. By "writing visually"—

organizing information about headings that establish hierarchies of information—participants also eliminated irrelevant information. In addition, "visual" revision improved clarity of individual sentences. Writers seemed to become sensitive to sentences that were too long and visually cumbersome. Designing sentences, lists, and paragraphs about specific headings (segmenting the text) helped them spot information that did not contribute to the main idea. For example, here are two paragraphs and their revisions:

Original:

> The motor vehicle expenses (Section 702) are currently accumulated by the Motor Vehicle group only and at the disbursement accounting office level (out 5th level) only. This has resulted in field management feeling like they can't control their Motor Vehicle Costs. Our Motor Vehicle coordinates have indicated a new system is pending (ATRAC) which will allow tracking of MV expense down to each motor vehicle and accumulation of the actual cost by the RC assigned. This system is capable of driving our company books through BS/DOPAB, yet our Comptroller coordinates don't know about it. This is an excellent opportunity for a field Foreman to know about & pay for the actual cost to run his crew's motor vehicles.

Revised:

> MOTOR VEHICLES EXPENSES (Section 702)
>
> Our motor vehicle coordinates have indicated a new system (ATRAC) is pending. It will provide tracking by individual vehicles and accumulate actual costs by the RC to which that vehicle is assigned. Without these accounting procedures we won't be able to take advantage of any system to properly contorl our motor vehicles costs.

Original:

> All engineering work orders, routine and estimate proportion, where an interface and backbone distribution only are placed to overcome the effects of churn an LPIE2 study will not be required. LATIS report W02L, W07L or 40L will be a part of the work order. All engineering work orders, routine and estimate proportion, placing an interface and replacing plant due to deterioration will require the LATIS report 40L and LEPIE2 study as a part of the order.

Revised:

All engineering work orders, routine and estimate must meet the following requirements:

1. Where you will place only an interface and backbone distribution to correct the affects of churn,
   — an LPIE is not required;
   — include LATIS report S02L, W07L, or 40L as part of the work order.
2. When you place interface and replace plant due to deterioration,
   — include the LATIS report 40L and LPIE2 study as part of the work order.

ANALYSIS OF THE FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

Six months following each workshop I sent a questionnaire to workshop participants asking them to evaluate the instruction they had received. The one-page questionnaire asked four questions. Participants were asked to answer #1 and #2 on a 1-5 scale, where 1 is highest and 5 is lowest:

1. Have the techniques we learned been useful to you?
2. Do you believe your writing has improved as a result of the instruction you received?
3. What workshop activities have been most useful to you?
4. What activities have been least useful to you?

Of the 69% who responded 89% rated the workshop a "1" or a "2" on the first two questions. Responses to questions 3 and 4 varied, but the most common responses were exemplified in the following statements: "Learning to write with the news first and to use headings, listing, and short sentences has helped me cut my paperwork time. I have fewer problems with people not reading or understanding what I write"; and "Why didn't someone teach us visual techniques in college writing courses?" All seven managers stated that the writing they were receiving from workshop participants was clearer and more concise. One remarked that reports coming in by electronic mail or telex were much easier to read because of effective layout of information. Another manager's comment is typical of the concerns that were expressed throughout the workshops:

> When I was in school, over two decades ago, correctness was stressed. With each passing year I have more and

more to read. I can read only so much. I approach each report, memo, letter with one goal in mind—to find out what the writer has to say and what I am supposed to do. I still appreciate any letter that is error-free, but I am still impatient if I have to hunt for the main points.

Assessing the Results

Working with employee-writers in only three business organizations does not constitute a scientifically designed study from which to draw rigid conclusions, but it does suggest a need for further consideration and research to answer the following questions:

(1) To what extent is ineffective writing in non-academic contexts the result of employees' attempting to write in ways they were taught to write in academic contexts?

(2) To what extent can visual techniques, employed in basic composition classrooms, improve student writing?

(3) To what extent should basic composition prepare students for writing tasks after college?

First, as Rivers' survey indicates, technical communication courses and programs have expanded considerably in the past decade. However, my observations, based on these 11 workshops, suggest that freshman composition may be the main, if not the only, writing instruction many employees receive in college. Even the writing students do in courses within their major disciplines too often requires only the display of knowledge of a subject, written for a professor, an expert reader, who is committed to reading carefully and evaluating the student's response. This writing, done in essay or research paper form, thus provides students little, if any, preparation for both the writing context and the audience perspective they will have to confront in a job context. Yet students will bring to a writing context at work whatever methods they learned in school. In their study of "Writing at Exxon," Dobrin, Paradis, and Miller report:

> Many employees flatly stated that their college training did not prepare them to communicate in the R&D environment. Usually, this was not a complaint about college English or writing departments; it was more a reflection on modern

> science and technical education, which rarely teach students how writing and editing activities contribute to the industrial enterprise. Core engineering and science curricula, undergraduate or graduate, rarely feature writing and editing. . . . Moreover, instructors of engineering or science writing often don't know much about the [political] environments in which their students are going to work. (303).

While the desirable goal is to institute a required course in professional or technical writing for all students to help prepare them for communicating with readers in diverse technical and organizational contexts, this goal may not be realistic. Of the 162 employees I have worked with, only 17 stated that they were either required or strongly urged to take a technical or business writing course. Of the 28 who had taken a professional writing course, 13 of these had taken only a business communication course where the focus of the course was correspondence, oral presentations, and perhaps one or two short analytical reports. Examination of university affiliations of the 154 participants who reported having at least a bachelor's degree revealed 42 different colleges and universities. The fact that the majority of students still take basic composition but that they do not take a course in professional writing may indicate three things: (1) Many college departments still do not recognize the importance of communication skills to their students beyond college; (2) The prevailing philosophy in many universities is that basic composition is all that is needed to teach students to write; and (3) University faculties may perpetuate this philosophy because they may not clearly perceive the significant difference between writing in school and writing at work. Given the reality of overcrowded curricula, courses in professional writing may never be as accessible to students as they should be to ensure that students are prepared to write effectively in non-academic settings.

Issues in Teaching Basic Composition

The second and third questions yield four suggestions that should be considered.

(1) While basic composition cannot and should not be a substitute for professional writing instruction, strategies for "writ-

ing visually" could be introduced in basic composition. Students can learn how to use format, layout, headings, white space, tabulation, enumeration, and underlining to embody content so that it is revealed to the reader quickly, even within expository assignments. Word processing encourages students as well as employees to experiment with different visual forms. Students need to realize that outside the classroom readers are not committed to reading anything unless they must do so. In many cases how a message looks on paper will often determine whether or not it is read and if it is processed correctly. In addition, "writing visually" may offer an additional method for reducing common errors in unity, coherence, and verbage leading to dense sentences and paragraphs.

(2) Deductive, not just inductive, organization should be encouraged in writing assignments. Students should understand why deductive writing that begins with a summary of main ideas is often called "reader-based" writing. Teaching students how to write to meet the needs of a variety of readers by developing sensitivity to reader perspectives and contexts relates to an important aim of liberal arts—to help students develop an understanding of a wide range of human contexts and to master the Ciceronian heritage of developing rhetorical adaptability in any context. Introducing the concepts for developing reader-based prose can be an additional method of introducing freshman to their future role as communicators within many kinds of discourse communities, cultures, and social contexts.

(3) Freshman composition should be taught as an **introduction** to writing. As exemplified in *Four Worlds of Writing*, students can be introduced to the kinds of writing competencies they will need in college as well as after college. Students should understand that basic composition is the **first** step in preparing them to be good writers in school and then, ultimately, in a non-academic environment that presents a much broader, more diverse social context. Such a modification might help students approach required composition courses with more conviction about their long-term value.

Studies focusing on the social contexts of writing and the ethnography of writing suggest that writing instructors need to be sensitive and then to sensitize students to the ways that social and institutional contexts affect writers and readers. Studies such as those by Odell, Heath, and Szwed question the meaning of current writing instruction that does not complement students' social context. As John Szwed begins his study:

> And behind all this [literacy crisis] there are profound shifts appearing in the world's reading habits: in the U.S. for example, the reading (and publishing) of novels is in decline, while the reading of plays and poetry is at almost zero. Instead, the amorphous area usually called non-fiction is on the ascendancy. . . . The fact that many, perhaps most, English classes in the United States are geared toward fiction, drama and poetry makes this development all the more poignant. (13-14)

Much writing with which today's students are familiar includes transactional forms—instructions, brochures, advertising, regulations, warranties, and propaganda—that depend on visual presentation of content for their effectiveness. Discussing the characteristics of these kinds of writing and the kinds of discourse communities in which visually persuasive transactional writing occurs broadens the student's awareness of how writing functions in non-academic communities and why writing is important in these communities (not just to get grades).

(4) The paradigms for teaching both basic composition and technical writing could be integrated more closely. Currently, the paradigms used in teaching basic composition and in teaching professional writing are often divergent: professional writing focuses on writing on the job; basic composition focuses on writing in academe—expressive discourse, essays, journals that stress self-awareness and writing as inquiry. Yet, this divergence need not exist so markedly. Basic composition can still achieve these goals while at the same time broadening its paradigm.

For example, composition research has repeatedly focused on the importance of helping students deal with audience, the most basic concept of technical communication. Studies on audience, such as those by Park, Ede and Lunsford, and Kroll, and Roth, have increasingly come to terms with the need for students to write with the constraints of real audiences in mind. As Park states (480-483), analyzing the audience also requires understanding the context in which the audience exists. Writing to that audience requires the student to participate in that social context. Park then argues for teachers helping students understand the social situation in which audiences exist: "The most obvious way to define a situation for writing is to pose hypothetical cases—Imagine you are a resident assistant writing a report for the Dean of Students; write an article for *Sports Illustrated*." While Park recognizes that teachers may feel that specific writing robs students' writing "of all genuineness," he still believes that telling the student to "Be your own audience" "can leave many students with no way to understand their writing as being for anyone or any purpose at all" (487).

But what composition teachers such as Park, Ede, Roth, and Lunsford are advocating parallels the concepts that underpin the study of technical communication: sensitive analysis of audience; understanding of the context in which writing is generated, read, and used; careful delineation of the writer's purpose shaped to meet the constraints imposed by audience and the audience's context. From analysis of these concepts, the writer then makes decisions regarding organization, visual presentation, style, voice, and tone. Thus, while both kinds of writing instruction deal with basic issues of audience, context, and purpose, technical communication goes farther in helping students make additional decisions about other issues that determine the effectiveness of the written message.

In short, integrating the paradigms of composition and technical communication can achieve several goals: (1) the student's understanding of the function and techniques of writing in different discourse communities can be broadened; (2) experiences in writing for real readers in real contexts can be generated; (3) opportunities for students to develop insight into how meaning is generated can, as Robert Roth has explained, be stimulated by perceiving the dynamic relationship of self/writer, purpose, and audience:

> I would argue, then, that even when students are encouraged to define beforehand a real-world audience for an essay there is still reason for them to maintain a relatively flexible audience concept. After all, subject, purpose, and audience are mutually interdependent. . . . By thinking about their readers, such writers clarify their purposes and

> subjects to themselves. But by thinking about their subjects and purposes, they also engender new audience representation. By such processes is meaning made. (54)

Yet, stressing varying audiences, purposes, and contexts does not eliminate opportunities for the student to write with "self" as audience, where "inquiry" as purpose can still be emphasized.

Considering a New Approach to Basic Composition

The real issue, ultimately, is whether or not basic composition teachers should be concerned with the relevance of their instruction beyond academic writing. If further research on employee writing problems indicates employees are relying on basic composition approaches in writing at work—and studies of employee communication (such as that by Paradise et al) have not as yet asked this questions, particularly when employees express dissatisfaction with their writing skills—perhaps approaches to teaching writing could be broadened to have applicability in the classroom and later in a work context. The increasing number and variety of studies, such as those by Redish et al (152) and by Robert Conners, as well as major resources such as *The Technology of Texts*, *Writing in the Professions*, and *The Psychology of Written Communication*, suggest the tremendous importance of visual display of information in non-academic writing. This growing emphasis on visual design of writing argues for including visual writing techniques early in students' writing instruction. Introducing strategies for writing visually not only links classroom writing with writing at work, but also may provide a different method for helping students achieve clarity, coherence, unity, and conciseness—major concerns in any writing course.

Clearly, however, more research (such as that of Forsburg, O'Dell, and Goswami) needs to be done on the writing processes of writers in work settings. Can the writing processes we teach students in basic composition and in professional writing more closely approach the writing processes of writers in non-academic settings? In addition, what constitutes "good" writing in a non-academic setting? How do standards for good academic writing differ from standards for good non-academic writing? Is our classroom emphasis on mechanical correctness warranted? For example, my experience parallels results of a number of employee surveys [Steine and Sharzenski, Bataille, Barnum and Fischer, Golen and Inman, Davis, and Anderson], that the most desirable qualities of writing on the job are clarity and conciseness, easily achieved by visual means. Grammatical correctness is usually rated much lower than English teachers would like, an issue that further surfaces in studies by Davis, Hairston, Conners, and Harwood. One danger lies in the assumption, often made by students, that mechanically correct writing is good writing. In practice, however, if readers can look at a piece of writing and be able quickly to answer three questions—What is this? Why am I getting this? What am I supposed to do?—many will be forgiving of unobtrusive mechanics and usage blunders because they know what action is expected.

Ultimately, common sense suggests that teaching students writing strategies that have limited value outside the classroom should be avoided, particularly if writing instruction can be made applicable to the student beyond the academic experience and if this broadened emphasis is educationally sound and supported by thoughtful research. As teachers of language, we would do well to reflect on the conclusions of Bernhardt and Paradise et al—that much of what students learn in college may not be giving them adequate preparation for life outside the academy. We should consider Boyer's recent study of undergraduate education which refers to "a disturbing gap between the college and the larger world," the result of a "parochialism that seems to penetrate many higher learning institutions, an intellectual and social isolation that reduces the effectiveness of the college and limits the vision of the student" (6). As teachers of writing, we know that we can and often do make a difference in our students' lives. But keeping our instruction relevant to their changing needs will help ensure that we continue to make that important difference.

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